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Sermon preached by Mr. F L Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton,
Lord's Day morning 6th October 1963

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me. Acts 26 v. 18

What an infinite mercy that God has been pleased to recover His people from the ruins of the fall! There was no obligation in God to do this. Adam was created in perfect innocence. He had reasoning faculties capable of receiving a law from God, for he was created under a law. "Of every tree in the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it" (Gen. 2 v. 16-7). He understood it. But that righteousness in which he was created was a losable righteousness; and he lost it.

The covenant under which man was created was a bilateral covenant made between God and man, and man broke his part of that covenant; and when Adam fell, sin rushed – flooded – into his soul, into his being, and

*"The dire contagion filled his veins
And spread its poison to the heart,"* (A. Steele; Gadsby's 977 slightly altered)

and his eyes were opened. He saw that he was naked – never knew it before! Oh, the beautiful innocence and holiness of Adam and Eve as they were created! The devil knew; he said 'You know good now; there is a tremendous lot beyond that to know: there is evil, and if you partake of that tree you will not only know good, you will know evil; you will be like God.' (Gen. 3 v. 5). But Adam knew that he was fallen, ruined, deformed, and he fled to hide himself "among the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3 v. 8), and had God left mankind there, never recovered him, He would have been just. But the voice of God was in that garden: Adam, "where art thou?" (Gen. 3 v. 9) And for substance that solemn voice reaches every sinner who is called by grace, and it is well to come to these clear points according to the Word of God, and look into our own case and experience. You may not have heard just those words, but, for substance, did the Lord ever stop you, and ever say to you, 'Adam, where art thou?' Oh, they were the first words of mercy!

Paul gives an account of how the Lord called him by grace. A blessed apostle was Paul! I feel so insignificant, and come so short; it is difficult to stand in a pulpit. Paul could tell you how he was made a sinner, and he could tell you how he was made a saint, and if you can't tell how you were made a sinner, I don't want to know anything about how you were made a saint. The Lord begins the work.

But Paul, as you know, was on the way to Damascus to hale men and women to prison, and the Lord stopped him - stood, as it were, in front of him - and said to him 'Thus far shalt thou go, but no further.' "Ye are not your own." Ye belong to Me. "Ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6 v. 19-20). These simple yet profound statements declare what a real beginning of God's work of grace is.

It is not everybody that has a 'Damascus experience,' one of the most powerful conversions recorded in the Word of God. The other extreme, perhaps, would be that of

Lydia. The Lord opened her heart (Acts 16 v. 14); but it was the same power. The conversion of Lydia was as powerful as that of the apostle Paul. But the Lord told Paul what His design was: "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee" (v. 16). Well then, you might say 'We are not ministers.' I can say this, that you need the same salvation, the same God; you need the same quickening of the Holy Spirit; you need the same anointing to hear as a man needs to preach. And not only so, but, as the Lord here tells Paul, the purpose of the ministry is to save them that believe. It is wonderful to trace the wisdom and love and grace of God in the methods of salvation. The plan was contrived in the covenant of grace; it was accomplished by the Lord Jesus in His condescension, and it is communicated and wrought out in experience by the Holy Ghost. The Trinity in the work of salvation is glorious. Yet, at the same time, there are means used, and *there* is something very powerful and attractive. For that purpose the Church was installed, the gathering together of the people. This gathering together of the people is spoken of even as early as Genesis: "Unto Him," the heavenly Shiloh, "shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49 v. 10).

It has been the purpose of God that there should be a gathering, and therefore there was instituted a Church state. Had it pleased God, He could have accomplished the work of salvation in the hearts of His people without the Church, to deal with them individually - all the election of grace. But He chose His people, and installed the Church state, Zion, where He dwells, where He communicates a "blessing, even life for evermore" (Ps. 133 v. 3); and He has been pleased "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1 v. 21).

Well, when you come to consider the whole of the sovereignty of God, in His general sovereignty which orders and permeates all things in the universe, *that* is glorious; but His divine sovereignty in salvation, the finished work of the Lord Jesus, and His work continued in heaven by the work of the Holy Ghost which unites the Lord's people in their providences and their movements, together with His purposes of grace, and so orders and disposes all events concerning them according to the covenant of grace that that great Scripture is brought to pass: "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6 v. 37). But they come, every one of them, without exception. The Lord has means to bring them, to draw them, to gather them. Well, there was no necessity in that method, but wisdom devised the plan, and there are many reasons for it - two reasons mainly. One is that there should be a united communion of the saints with the Lord Jesus in divine worship; and a secondary reason is the fellowship of saints between themselves. But oh, the beauty of the gathering! And that brings us really to the text.

"For I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister ... to open their eyes." It is a mercy if we belong to this "their" - "*their* eyes"! The Lord deals with His people. "This people have I formed for Myself; they shall shew forth My praise" (Is. 43 v. 21). In the 43rd Isaiah it is beautifully expressed, especially the new creation and the formation and the redemption of His people, concentrated in the first verse of that chapter. I knew of a dear woman in Tunbridge Wells Bethesda; she could only speak partially, having had a stroke. It was good to visit her, and the consolation of that first verse to her soul was

precious to her in her last days: "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine" (Is. 43 v. 1). Now that belongs to every individual child of God without exception. We are apt to overlook that blessed fact. We have mentioned it lately, and it needs to be impressed upon the hearts of the Lord's people that everything that is spoken concerning His people, throughout the Word of God, is spoken to and belongs to every individual, great or small.

"For this purpose have I appeared unto thee, to make thee a minister ... to open their eyes." This was the first thing. Paul, speaking from experience, writing to the Ephesians, says, to open "the eyes of your understanding" (Eph. 1 v. 18). Well, this is brought to pass at regeneration. It is not the natural eyes that are opened, but it is the eyes of faith in the new creature; and we do well to pause. Have we in any measure had our eyes opened, like the man whose eyes He touched, and the Lord asked him if he saw aught. He said "I see men as trees, walking" (Mk. 8 v. 24). He saw nothing really clearly, but the Lord put His hand a second time upon his eyes and he saw clearly. But what a mercy it is if we see out of obscurity, if we can see even as described by Bunyan in the Pilgrim's Progress. There was poor Christian with a burden on his back. If you have no burden on your back, you know, you are no pilgrim. And he got out of the way, was sent to the town of Morality, but as he passed by Sinai the thunder and lightning struck terror into him, until Evangelist - oh, what a mercy it is to have a God-sent minister; it makes me tremble about myself, but I must leave that out - Evangelist came to him, and he said, "Dost thou see yonder wicket-gate?" He said "No." "Dost thou see yonder shining light?" "I think I do." "Follow that light; it will bring you to the wicket-gate." What a mercy to have, as it were, the day dawn, the dayspring, arise in your heart! You cannot see things very clearly, but you follow that light of life, for that is what it is. It will bring you to the Lord Jesus, and when your eyes are opened you will see things that you never saw before. "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21 v. 5). Do you remember when the Bible, which perhaps you had read and read, became a new book? When your eyes are opened you read the Word of God, and the Word of God begins to read you. Before, you read the words; there was no entrance. "The entrance of Thy Words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple" (Ps. 119 v. 130); but the Word never enters until the eyes are opened.

'To open their eyes.' When the eyes are opened, there are two things presented to view. First, a real sight of self. A natural man does not know himself at all really; he is born blind, but he thinks he can see. The Pharisees thought they could see. When the Lord cured that blind man outside of the Temple, the Pharisees said unto the Lord, "Are we blind also?" (John 9 v. 40) There is a peculiar life in one that is dead in trespasses and sins, and there is a peculiar sight to one who is blind in his unregeneracy. What I mean is this: one that is dead in trespasses and in sins is alive to dead things, alive in the world, alive to sin, and one who is born blind; he is in a dream:

*"The carnal mind takes different ways,
And different objects she surveys;
She's pleased with things that suit her taste,
But hates the God of truth and grace."*

(W Gadsby; Gadsby's 621)

But what a wonder everything appears when the eyes are opened, and when the eyes are opened to behold the Lord of life and glory, and those eyes are given to look “into the perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1 v. 25), and to see the amazing fulness, the all-sufficiency, of Christ in the Gospel!

“I have appeared unto thee for this purpose ... to open their eyes.” It is the Holy Spirit anointing the eyes with eye-salve (Rev. 3 v. 16). “Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty” (Is. 33 v. 17). Now, my friends, if your eyes have been opened, you will see the things revealed in the gospel. I know “faith cometh by hearing” (Rom. 10 v. 17), but when the eyes are opened you will see the things that you hear; and so far as I feel, it is the consequence of this secret, an answer to this prayer: “O send out Thy light and Thy truth” (Ps. 43 v. 3), for it to be sent out by the Holy Spirit revealing light into the heart, so that you not only hear somebody in the pulpit speaking, but it will be an internal light which will see the things spoken. It will take a form in your understanding.

I hardly like to venture to express one thing, but I have felt on one occasion I have so seen the things that I have heard and read in the Word of God, so beheld the glory of God, that I believe that I should know the Lord Jesus – not like they draw pictures of Him, but the work that He does upon the heart, the all-sufficiency that He makes known to a poor needy sinner, His saving, invincible grace. His precious atoning blood, full of efficacy, invaluable blood, is such that as it connects your deep needs as a ruined sinner unto the Lord Jesus, in all His righteousness and excellency, as you view that in Him a poor sinner can be complete in righteousness, in holiness, why, it takes a form in your understanding. A man could take a course of theology for years and never have his eyes opened. Oh, this inshining, and the reception of this inshining, is by faith! It is faith that receives the light, for there are the eyes of faith, and what enters, enters into the very heart itself.

Now things are conveyed by the Holy Ghost as His people are gathered together, and gathered together because they feel to need what the Gospel provides, gathered together because they realise that

“All other grounds are sinking sand,”

(Erskine: Gospel Sonnets Ch. 4 S. 6)

and they see it sinking, feel it sinking. Have you? Why, these are points in experience. Have you ever sunk in deep mire, in the mire of your self, in the mire of your deprived nature, in the mire of the world where there is no standing (Ps. 69 v. 2), and you feel it, and feel that except you are a partaker in the grace of God, you shall – must – sink to rise no more? And *that* is to have your eyes opened. Oh, we need an experimental religion!

‘To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light.’ The apostle speaks of this in the Colossians. If you read the history of Paul and his conversion, you will see that his epistles come from his own experience. He says “giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” – that inheritance referred to in the text. But how did He do it? “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col. 1 v. 12-3). There is a power, then, of darkness, a powerful darkness; and it is the darkness of nature, the darkness, that “gross darkness” which covers the nations, covers “the earth, and gross darkness the people” (Is. 60 v. 2). It is the darkness of ignorance of God. Very solemn to be

ignorant of God, for Him to have nothing to do with us, and for us to have nothing to do with Him, to be content and satisfied with our fallen condition, and with the fallen things that are round about us, the dark, dead literature, the rubbish! Oh my friends, the filth, the darkness, the blackness, the pollution that is in this world! Oh, may the dear young people be delivered from darkness, its dark pleasures, its dark, vile publications! And even its riches are dark riches. "Such were some of you," says Paul, "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified" (1 Cor. 6 v. 11).

'To turn them from darkness to light' – the opposite. Conversion *is* a conversion – it makes things different from what they were. It is a solemn thing to be a religious person and yet not to be a different person. That has troubled me. I expect you sometimes think it is time you got over some of those troubles – you are old enough. It troubles me, my friends. As long as I live I shall never be better than a wretched man; but oh, if in that state the eyes of faith behold the Lord Jesus, and I could say with Paul, "Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"! He got an answer, a living answer: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7 v. 24-5). There is enough there. There is more there of blessedness than there is of wretchedness in me; there is more life there than there is death in me; there is more reason there to hope for heaven than there is in me to despair for hell.

'Open their eyes ... turn them' - they cannot turn themselves – we learn that. We need divine teaching as long as we live – 'turn them from darkness,' and not turn them *to nothing*. Oh my friends, if the Lord spoils this world to you, makes it a desolate wilderness to you, He will give you something better! Oh, when faith sees the contrast (and here faith *can* see it) between all the things that this world calls good and great, its gold and silver, its vain pleasures, and, as the eyes are opened to behold, to see, to hear, to feel the text, the provision that is in Christ, that provision which is communicated by the Spirit to His people – why, my friends, then you see the beggarly elements of this poor world. Yes,

*"Vain are all things here below,
How false, and yet how fair!"*

(J Watts; Gadsby's 1064)

When Paul was writing to the Philippians he so observed them that he was "confident of this very thing, that this good work was begun in them, and that it would be performed to the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1 v. 6). I am persuaded of that, my friends. If the Lord has done the slightest thing for you, He will do it all, or not at all. The Lord would not look at a sinner whom He had no intention to save. He would not speak a word to a sinner, but to those whom he has appointed for salvation. If the Lord has done the slightest thing for you He will do it all – and you cannot have a *part* of Christ. If you have tasted that He is gracious, He is yours. You might say, 'Be careful; don't make things too easy!' Easy, my friends? Why, you know, and I know, that it is impossible to raise one spiritual thought or desire ourselves, so that we need the Lord to do it *all*. He does the turning when His mighty invincible grace takes hold of a sinner and turns him round. He does not make any proposition, like the free-will people would have it. No!

*"Grace is a firm but friendly hand,
Put forth by God to save His own."*

(J Stevens; Gadsby's 224)

'To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light.' And the light that He turns them to is the light of the living, and it is Christ Himself. "I am the Light of the world"

(John 8 v. 12; 9 v. 5). It is a *living* light. It is a light which is above the brightness of the sun. Oh my friends, if your eyes are opened and you are turned from darkness to light, it will be amazing to you at times! But you will have to find *everything* in Christ.

I remember on one occasion being very cast down, having been reading Philpot, and I felt so unworthy to have anything to do with the ministry, that I felt I could not go on. It was a bright sunny June day, and I went out in Wadhurst, and they had the main electric light on at mid-day. You would not have known it was alight; the sunshine eclipsed it; you would not have known it was there. What we are upon now is, 'to turn them from darkness to light,' and I had a hope of this, that when I got to heaven and saw Him as He is, He would put Philpot out of it; you won't see *him*; you will see Christ. Oh my friends, if He turns us from darkness to light, He will turn us to Himself, and therefore we are not wise to compare ourselves with ourselves. But what a mercy, my friends, if we have a grain of faith, if we have a glimmer of the true light shining in our hearts! I felt a love to Philpot, but what life he had came from the Sun of Righteousness. This may be a help to some who feel they come so far behind; if they follow at all, they follow afar off.

'I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister ... to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light.' Oh, blessed turning!

Well, I feel exceedingly unable to preach, but I must leave it. It may leave you with this prayer: "O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me." Blessed leading! Safe leading! You think of it: this light sent out into your poor heart! Light is no good unless it shines upon something. Therefore "Thy light and Thy truth" take hold of your heart, and lead you to His holy hill, right up unto His tabernacles (Ps 43 v. 3).

Amen.