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Sermon preached by Mr. F L Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton,
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"And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country." Ezekiel 34:13.

The Scriptures denominate the wicked as goats, the righteous as sheep. A dividing line runs through the whole of the Scriptures, and there are but two classes of people upon the earth, the righteous and the wicked. That may appear quite an ordinary statement, but O if it is made a concern with us as to which side of that line we stand as before God – I say deliberately, as before God, for men may be very much deceived in us – we shall be anxious and pray with the Psalmist: "Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence;" "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Psalm 17:2 & Psalm 139:23-24)

But these sheep of Christ's were equally involved in the fall of man. In the 16th verse we read: "I will seek that which was lost." The first doctrine of the Bible is the doctrine of the fall, sometimes called original sin. It was declared by God Himself immediately after the flood: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." (Genesis 8:21) Therefore the Lord said He would not drown the earth any more, nor curse it any more, because the imagination of the heart of man is evil from his youth; otherwise He would have been continually drowning the world. But He made a covenant: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." (v.22) There is no doctrine of the Gospel that could be explained, or have any meaning, apart from this first doctrine of the fall of man. It is a wonderful consideration. All the blessedness of the Gospel, all the glory of Christ in His condescension, in His mediatorial office, in His Priesthood, all the love of God in Christ to sinners, must stand together with the utter ruin and fall of man. If you consider any doctrine of the Gospel you will find it will be completely meaningless except for the fall, the universal ruin of mankind; and His people equally fell with the rest of mankind.

The Lord's sheep were not made sheep when they were born again. That is a mistaken idea that some have. They were born sheep, although they were born in sin and shapen in iniquity. They were sheep in the covenant of grace. They were given to His dear Son in an unfallen condition. But the fall of man was anticipated by God, who knows the end from the beginning. Well now, this will be a part of the teaching of the Spirit in the heart of every sinner. He will be brought first of all to know himself as a ruined sinner, not half-fallen, but completely fallen; the completeness of the ruin of mankind in the fall is absolute. There is nothing can be added to his ruin, it is complete. Now upon that fact the whole of the blessed Gospel evolves, and you will find it written in your very heart if you are taught of the Spirit.

You might ask what has that got to do with the text? Well, if you read these few verses, the 11th to the 16th, you will see the love, mercy, grace, wisdom and power of God in the midst of such

conditions as obtained through the fall, and you will be able, so far as the Holy Spirit leads you, to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," because, throughout the Scriptures there is a wonderful explanation and unfolding of how the Lord saves sinners, and you will prove that it is all of grace. These few verses, as we see from the 11th to the 16th, gives a most blessed view of the mercy and grace and love of God in seeking out His sheep; and this is the Foundation of it: "The Lord knoweth them that are His." They may be hidden, they may be in the world, in the pleasures, the sins of the world, but He knows them: "Behold, I, even I, will both search My sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places." He knows the places they are in. Some of you perhaps can remember the places you were in before you were called by grace. "All places" – equally fallen. The apostle was a good young man. Some are fallen into the dregs of immorality and vice, but the apostle Paul was fallen in religion, in a false religion. That is the place he was in. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Ruth was a Moabitish heathen, of a heathenish country. The Lord knew where she was. "And will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day."

So men are equally born in sin and shapen in iniquity, go forth from the womb speaking lies. It is not everybody that knows it, it is not everybody that believes it, but whether they know it or believe it, it is a fact; and how it is to be observed from day to day, the whole universe, that sin has entered into the world. You only have to take up the newspaper – O what a smoke, as it were, arises from this poor sin-cursed world out of the daily press! And yet, in the midst of it all, the Lord knows His people. "And I will bring them out from the people." It is the Lord that does it. It is not a proposition. He does not look about among the people and see whether there is any that have anything in them that would commend them to His notice. No; the covenant of grace controls the life and life's minutest circumstances of His sheep.

If you take notice of the Word of God, and of those whom He has called by grace, you will see the different positions and conditions and far countries from which He gathers them. But "I will bring them out from the people." "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing...and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)

The Lord brought the people out from Egypt; in the first place, He used ten plagues to bring them out. There was no necessity in God to use one plague, but He used that method in order to demonstrate His omnipotence, His divine power and wisdom, His absolute sovereignty. And as He brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, so He brings every one of His people out of Egyptian bondage - Egyptian darkness. The Apostle thanked God for it on behalf of the Colossians, he thanked

God Who had delivered them from the power of darkness and from the power of Satan, and translated them into the kingdom of His dear Son. So that this bringing out from among the people and gathering them from the countries is a separation; and where there is a true beginning, that beginning will be a separation; and the most important separation is to be separated from ourselves, to have a new creature created, to be separated from our sins. We shall still be sinners, but my friends, we shall be made to differ from the condition in which we were born. If we are never separated from ourselves as sinners, a body of sin and death, then no other separation is to any

purpose. Has the Lord made us to differ from what we once were? It is very solemn to be a professing Christian and yet never to be made a new creature. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17) But it is the Lord that brings out, and the covenant of grace is behind all this.

"All that the Father giveth Me." His people were given Him in the covenant of grace to redeem, and "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me." Nothing can alter; nothing can frustrate that declaration, that "shall come." And this is how they come: "I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries." "Shall come unto Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37) "I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land." Of course, this primarily speaks concerning the Jews. They are national promises to the national Jews, and it is very evident that the purposes of God and His promises are being fulfilled among the Jews today. But national Jews and spiritual Jews are not the same thing. "I will bring them to their own land." And He does this in conversion. The people of God are predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son, and they are predestinated to obtain salvation; and therefore the world is not their land really, and the Lord will take possession of them, as it is again in this same prophecy: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until He come whose right it is; and I will give it to Him." (ch.21:27) That is to say, the day will come in the experience of His people when they will be completely overturned, and the Lord will overturn the mountains in them by the roots – overturn their nature and create a new heart, a new nature in them; overturn the world that captivated them. "And I will give it to Him whose right it is." The right of His people belongs to the Lord, belongs to Him by gift, belongs to Him by purchase. He has purchased His sheep by His own precious blood, and they will be His by conquest. I will conquer them and overturn everything in them, smite into all inferior things in their heart that dare usurp My throne, and give it to Him whose right it is.

What a wonderful thing if we are the subjects of the love of God, and the subjects of His sovereign grace, to be His right! And He knows those that are, and so He will come. "I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land." Of course, this is figuratively speaking. The land of the people of God is the Gospel, He is their King, He is their inheritance; and some of you will feel that that is your land, your nativity. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." (Ephesians 2:19) Citizens of Zion! O do you feel it? Have you any ground to believe that the Lord has thus brought you out from the people, and gathered you from the countries, and from all places where you were scattered in the cloudy and dark day of your unregeneracy?

"And I will bring them to their own land." You will feel it at times, that you have a home, a land, a citizenship in Zion among His people; and the Lord Jesus is the centre, He will be your King, your glorious and great High Priest. He will be the centre of your life, the centre of your soul. Everything will revolve around Him, even those things concerning your body – all your infirmities and weaknesses and pains, the things concerning your providence, all your responsibilities and cases, your disappointments and your calamities. He will be the centre around which everything will revolve, and all things will be sanctified to bring you to that blessed centre; and He will be the centre of your soul. As we have said, the very fact of sin, the completeness of the ruin that we are in by

nature, will give a meaning to, and make effective in your heart, every doctrine of the blessed Gospel.

"I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land." In very blessed and simple language, we have this in the 23rd Psalm. There David expressed with gratitude the truth that is in these verses: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters." And these are a spiritual and living reality in experience. It is the only thing that will put the world beneath your feet; and the teaching of the Spirit in your dire necessity, bringing you to feel your universal destitution in yourself of anything that is living, and realise that you are universally dead in yourself, and give you to feel the mighty attraction of Christ, which in Him is the very opposite, and that that fulness that is in Him is made available through His dear Son by the Holy Spirit to the worst of sinners.

"I will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers." The mountain of Israel is the church of God. The mountain of the Lord's house shall be above every other mountain. The church of God occupies a unique position in the world; it is impregnable, it is built upon the Rock of Ages, Christ Jesus. The church of God has for its defence all the divine attributes and perfections of Jehovah. O the security of the Church! Whatever may come to the world, whatever confusion, whatever wars, the Church of God is impregnable. I do not mean to say that His people do not feel the scourge of war, that they do not die with others – they do, but the covenant of grace is ordered, and controls everything in their lives – even their death.

"I will feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers" – and it is the mountain whose height reaches unto heaven. It is a mountain because Christ is the Eternal Rock, a Rock that is higher than His people. It is spoken of as His everlasting love, the height, the depth, the length, the breadth of the love of God. The depths of His love are in the fall, it under-bottoms it; the love of God in Christ got beneath it. The height of His love is heaven, the length and breadth of His love is from everlasting to everlasting, and it is that love which instituted the Church of God, that drew the wondrous plan of salvation by sovereign grace. "I will bring them to their own land, and feed them by the mountains of Israel by the rivers." He feeds His people; a new nature needs new food. The prodigal would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, but he could not put up with it. That is one evidence of being brought out from the people, gathered from the countries, and delivered from all places where they were scattered in a cloudy and dark day.

Well, it is well to look within ourselves and see whether we have ever had this change of appetite. The world want nothing different, nothing better would suit their palate except what the world provides for them. The dove that was sent out from the ark could not feed upon the dead carcasses; she had to return to the ark. The raven that was sent out never returned, because the raven could feed on unclean food. And if the Lord has given you a new nature, a spiritual appetite, then you will want right pasture; and this food with which He feeds His people is the Gospel itself. O how rich! It is living food, He is living bread, He is living water; and you will be conscious at times of a spiritual appetite. Our natural lives are very distinct from a spiritual life, although they are analogous. You hunger naturally, you feel it, you understand you need food; and if you are spiritually alive you will know what it is to hunger and thirst for the living God, for the Gospel; and there will be a connexion

with that hunger and thirst for the living God with what we commenced with – a knowledge and sense of your deep need as a depraved and ruined and wrecked sinner. That is what makes the Gospel precious. To have new eyes, and yet to look out from a self that is ruined and wretched, and to behold the glory and blessedness of the grace and righteousness, holiness, sanctification, unsearchable riches that are in Christ, and the fulness there for empty sinners, that the blood of the Lord Jesus was shed in order to cleanse, to heal, to pardon, to deliver the worst of sinners. This is the food, and do you find your soul at times, as it were, open its mouth wide? Do you ever look at times beyond the pulpit, beyond the ceiling, beyond the world, and have this prayer in your heart: "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together." (Isaiah 45:8) This is feeding the soul. You will feel the truth flowing into your heart, and bringing its power, its vital life, the savour of Christ to your soul.

"I will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers." "There is a river" – there is a river, a full river, a river that flows from an eternal source. It has the water of life, and it brings life to every one to whom it comes. And it derives its virtue from its source; its source is God. It has streams, the streams of mercy, of love, and of grace – streams of sanctification, streams that bring unsearchable riches unto a poor, poverty-stricken sinner – and there will be room for it in your heart.

Sometimes you will lie before the Lord and feel the need of your soul, together with such a vehement desire for these streams of the Gospel, that you will confess this:

"Though I have nothing of my own,
My treasure is immense in Thee",

(Gadsby's 740)

"I will feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country." That is where His people are gathered together, for it is the purpose of God that there should be a Church. I do not mean a building. The Church is His people. "Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." (Psalm 50:5) – and the gathering together of the people we see in these verses. He seeks His sheep, and delivers them from all places where they have been scattered, and by divine teaching they realise that they must have something that they have not got, that they must know something that this world cannot teach them. There is created in them an aching void, a void that nothing, nothing in this world, can satisfy or fill; and the same blessed Spirit leads them on, so that they begin to feel after, if haply they might find God. They are brought to realise that they must have God; not the whole world could save them. The whole world and all its contents could never pardon one sin. They see in God, revealed in the Person of His dear Son by the Holy Ghost, an inheritance, an eternal portion, and they begin to "ask their way to Zion with their faces thither ward." (Jeremiah 50:5) Whereas before they may have asked their way to pleasure, wealth, fame, to the picture-houses, to the theatre, anywhere; but now there is death stamped upon all that vanity, and they want God; and this is how the Holy Ghost begins to gather them together.

O how some have wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way, and perhaps have gone from this people to that religion, that religious society, until the Lord has called them to pass under the rod, and brought them again to Zion; and when they have got there, then they find just what will meet their ease, satisfy their soul, bring them life and light. A light, a true light, which shines into their hearts, shines upon His sacred Word, shines upon the road that leads them to heaven.

"I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, in all the inhabited places of the country." And this is the institution of the Church. "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." It is a blessed ordination, a divine institution, and the Lord has promised to be there: "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." (Psalm 132:14) He dwells in the midst of His people who are gathered together, and sometimes you will know He is present, and brings all heaven before your eyes, by the appointed means of preaching the Gospel, as the Spirit may anoint the minister and anoint the hearers. O what a mercy thus to be called by grace! We must leave it.

Amen.