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Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton,
on Wed. Evng., 15 June, 1960

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Text: John 1.47,48.

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The inspired narratives that the Lord Jesus brought before His disciples are full of gracious instruction, and the case of Nathaniel brings before us a character which I much envy. Oh that I could find in myself those spiritual features that are so clearly portrayed in Nathaniel! And attention is called to it: "Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to Him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" And this narrative gives us another instance of how salvation is of free and sovereign grace. We have many accounts of how the Lord called different people by grace. We have the account of Jacob. He had a similar manifestation of Christ to Nathaniel. He was found at Bethel. The Lord revealed Himself to Jacob and gave him a vision, the heavens opening and the Son of Man at the top of a ladder, and angels ascending and descending on that ladder. Whether Nathaniel under the fig tree - for he was in secret worship there - whether he was reading the 28th of Genesis, the account of Jacob, is not sure; but in any case the Lord said unto him, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man".

Therefore, as enabled, we will consider this character and the work of grace begun in his heart, and it would be well if, as we go along, we may look into our own cases and see whether there is a similar work wrought in our souls. I was thinking of David. So far as I have observed, I can see no account of the call by grace in David's experience. There is no doubt of his call by grace, because of his experience and how the Lord was with him. It may be that some here could not say the day or any particular circumstances that are outstanding; but this must be known - there has been a change in your heart.

Now here we have a character, and the testimony of God concerning him is; "An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile". So there are disciples indeed, and there are Israelites indeed. Paul says, "He is not a Jew that is one outwardly, but he is a Jew which is one inwardly", and so was Nathaniel. And the Lord said of him, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!" And I wish that could be said of me. We have a real case of this guilelessness in the 32nd Psalm: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile". It does not say that he has no sin, but the prevailing spirit is the tender fear of God. That was the outstanding feature of Nathaniel, and when one is under the influence of the fear of God, there will be no guile while that fear is in exercise. And "guile" here intends every evil spirit, every evil thing. Peter was so jealous for the spiritual health of the saints and those that were born again, "being born, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible" - therefore seeing that ye are born again, manifest it by "laying aside all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings", and evil thinking. Oh what a purging that would be, and how I have desired that the Lord would thus purge my spirit, that I may be more of the character of Nathaniel, in whose spirit there is no guile.

It includes too the blessedness of those that are meek: "Blessed are the meek". Not weak; a man can be weak, and not meek. A man can stand firm for the truth, and he can rightly reprove error and wrong, and yet in the spirit of meekness, with the absence of guile, and bitterness, and wrath. Oh we need much wisdom, my friends! I feel to need it. But the Lord knew him, knew his heart. He had never seen him in the flesh before, neither had Nathaniel ever seen the Lord in the flesh. "Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to Him." He sees all His people coming to Him. Has He seen us coming to Him? and seeing us coming to Him, could He say of us, "Here is an Israelite indeed, in whose spirit there is no guile"? I believe that it is profitable to examine ourselves as we read the Word of God constantly. It will keep us tender, and "he that believeth hath the witness in himself", and "let every man prove his own work". And the only way is by the standard of the Word of God. And if we can lay our experience line by line by that work of the Holy Spirit recorded in the Scriptures, it is a safe standard, a safe guide. Well now, some of us may feel to come very short of this 47th verse: "Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to Him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile".

Well, if we come short of it, what shall we say about ourselves? Shall we make excuses? Shall we say, "But I am not Nathaniel"? Now the standard that is set up, and what the Holy Ghost will set up in the conscience, is the Word of God. Oh it is great when we are brought to prayer through the Scriptures searching us, shedding a light in our conscience, that we may fall before the Lord and ask Him to exercise our souls unto godliness, and purge us, and to use all our trials, our family trials, and difficulties, and sorrows, and astonishments, and all our afflictions, disappointments, and losses to meekken our spirit, and to bring us more in line with Nathaniel, in whom is no guile!

"Nathaniel said unto Him, Whence knowest Thou me?" Oh this does manifest humility! Nathaniel did not "strut with a frame". He did not turn to Philip and say, "Did you hear what He said to me, here's an Israelite indeed, in whose spirit there is no guile?" But, "Lord, whence knowest Thou me?" Ah if the Lord recognizes you as a poor sinner that He has seen under the fig tree, and makes known Himself to you, it will humble you before His Majesty! You will sit in a chapel pew, whether a back or a front seat, and say, "Lord, whence knowest Thou me?" You look at some others in the chapel whom you love, and to whom you have felt a union, and say, "Lord, I don't wonder that Thou knowest so-and-so, but however didst Thou know me?" Is that in our religion? Does the Lord so recognize us? There is a recognition. In Luke it is said, the people followed Him and received Him. Do you know the difference between coming to chapel and going away disappointed, and the difference of coming into a service and having a blessed persuasion that the Lord recognizes you? "and the people when they knew it, followed Him; and He received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing" (Luke ix. 11). You may depend upon it, these visits had produced this meekness and this guilelessness. It will remove all bitterness and evil speaking. Yes, it is such a spirit that brings us into the

position of the disciples when the Lord said unto them, "One of you shall betray Me", and they each began to say, "Lord, is it I?" There are so many people that would say, "Lord, I am sure it is him". That is not having a spirit with no guile. Oh but, in tenderness of conscience, whatever the case, to feel before the Lord and say, "Lord, is it I?" Blessed Nathaniel!

"Nathaniel said unto Him, Whence knowest Thou me?" Jesus answered and said unto him, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." Why, it was such a revelation as the woman at the well had. She was astonished that the Lord Jesus should know all about her, so that she went and told the men, saying, "Come, see a Man that told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" It must be. She said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that Thou art a Prophet". And He called her by grace. She left her water-pot, and thirsted after different water. This is how the Lord blesses people and lays the foundation in their hearts, and these are the people that will cry at last with shoutings, "Grace, grace unto it".

"Nathaniel said unto Him, Whence knowest Thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." Has the Lord ever seen us in secret? Oh this is a secret religion, because he had a secret life! I do like those cases that manifest that their beginning was in the secret of their heart. That is where the Holy Ghost begins a work of grace; not in the head, but in the heart. It was the same with Abraham. He "called him alone". And Jeremiah, speaking of the same character in the Lamentations says, "He sitteth alone because he hath borne it upon him; he putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope". Oh that inward, secret, heart beginning of religion! How different it is from a noisy, bulky, clamorous kind of religion.

We may thus look at that point and see how things were begun with us. You take the case of Lydia. The Lord opened her heart. It was not her head at all. And the Lord only can open, and when He opens no man can shut. And this is the way to prove our own work. "Let every man prove his own work" of grace; "then shall he have rejoicing in himself and not in another". Nathaniel had no need to rejoice in somebody else. If all of you here were to tell me that I am right and you are sure I am going to heaven, that would be of no use to me unless the Lord Himself by His Spirit confirmed it. And on the other hand, if the Lord should say to me what He did to Nathaniel, "When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee", I should not mind if you all said I was wrong. "Let every man prove his own work; then shall he have rejoicing in himself", and not in the verdict of any creature. Have we that testimony in our religion? "For he that believeth hath the witness in himself."

"Jesus answered and said unto him, When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." This shows His divinity, His foreknowledge. He foreknew Nathaniel. And yet His divinity united to humanity, so that He could communicate to Nathaniel that grace that He saw under the fig tree. His divine sovereignty and foreknowledge was also manifested in the woman at the well. He had never seen her before.

He knew what time she would be at the well. Do you believe it with respect to your own case? Has the Lord ever met with you and given you to realize that He knows your goings? It is a great thing, my friends, to have this ~~Apparition~~ evidence of our interest in the covenant of grace, as that covenant is ordered in all things, ~~And~~ in every particular of our lives, and sure because those who are interested in that covenant of grace, their lives are governed by it. Even in their unregeneracy their lives are ordered in it, and a child of God is immortal until called by sovereign grace. But oh the omniscience of the Lord, and His omniscient love! Because when He sees these people in secret when the work of the Holy Spirit is begun, He sees them with the heart ~~and~~ and eye ~~of~~ of divine love.

"Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." Now before we pass from this part of the text, it is of such importance, may we each look into our own experience and see whether the Lord began our religion in secret. If our religion begins in public, there is no evidence that it is the work of the Holy Spirit. But how blessed it is when that secret work is brought forth, when the seed which is out of sight germinates in the heart and makes its appearance, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. Oh what a beautiful sight! My friends, I feel anxious about myself and about you. Nothing may we accept except the life of God in the soul, and life is secret. Life itself is invisible; you cannot see it. But oh the effects of it, the power of it, the movements of it! We have a description in the Word of God: "The wind bloweth where it listeth. Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit." Oh pray for the secret of the Lord, which is with them that fear Him! "Nathaniel answered and said unto Him, Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel." The Lord revealed Himself to Nathaniel.

"No man can truly say,
That Jesus is the Lord,
Unless Thou take the veil away,
And speak the living word."

Peter made the same noble confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." So this is essential in this work of grace. My friends, we cannot have a beginning of a work of grace in our souls, and be ignorant of the Lord Jesus. So here is another point, do you believe in the Son of God? A close question, but is it a question that we can leave out? It is a most vital thing

I know when we come face to face with these fundamental truths, it does make us look about ourselves, and a good thing too. But let us for a moment see whether we could say, "Thou art the Son of God, the King of Israel".

It comes into the mind just now about the dying thief. He was completely ignorant of who Christ on the cross was, when he was first nailed there himself. He had got nothing in his life to commend him, but he must have had a revelation of Christ as He hung there, as a Substitute of that poor malefactor. And as He

hung there He revealed Himself to him, and therefore he knew that He was a King and had a kingdom, and was entering into that kingdom; "Remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom". He knew the Son of God in the last moments of his life. Now here we are. We have much preaching. Some of us have made a profession of religion many years, and look at this tender fear of God in Nathaniel, and yet it was brought to this - "Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel".

Now some of you may feel, "Can I say it? Do I know Him?" Well, it is an important thing for me to speak about. I would not deceive a soul. But I would say this, What do you come here for? What think ye of Christ? What do you think about Him? That is the test. What do you think of His condescension, that He came into the world to save sinners? Can you come in there - "a sinner"? It is not everybody that can. And have you ever been thankful that this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that the Lord Jesus came into the world to save sinners? You cannot honestly say it unless you can finish it - "of whom I am chief". I believe that it is honestly the experience of every convinced sinner, that there is not a worse sinner living than he is. Some may say, "Well, that is an exaggeration"; but it is not, because when the Holy Spirit convinces a sinner, He convinces that soul of His sins, not somebody else's. And you will know more about yourself, and life, and corruptions, and complete ruin than anybody else's. That will make you the chief of sinners.

But the point that we are upon now is this - does that point of your sinnership have any connection with the Lord Jesus as a Redeemer and Saviour? You might say, it has this connection, that I need it, and unless I receive His grace I shall be for ever lost. Then you know Him, sinner. You do, and your knowledge of Him will be increased by the Holy Spirit. So the knowledge of yourself will be increased.

"Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel." Do you know that He is the Son of God in the same way as the leper did? He came kneeling unto Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean". Do you know Him as much as that? There is the knowledge of the Son of God in it. How did he know that the Lord Jesus could make him clean? Do you believe that He could make you clean? Oh may the blessed Spirit encourage any poor trembling sinner! I would not encourage a hypocrite, but I would encourage a trembling repenting sinner. If you can say, "Thou, O Christ, art all I want", you know Him that He is the Son of God. Yes, it may be that under this exercise, and as the Spirit may even take these words of mine into your heart, may open your heart and acknowledge it, and bring out of your heart this confession, that you love Him. You cannot know Him without loving Him, and you certainly cannot love Him without knowing Him. And if you love Him, it is because He first loved you; and if this is the case, there has been a purity in your love when you have worshipped Him in secret, when you felt after, if haply you might find Him.

Very tender is the beginning of a work of grace. I remember it in my little experience when living at Ardingly. Oh how sacred,

how sweet the Gospel was to me in those days! When you get home, you would go in secret and try and find that God of whom you have heard. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these." Well, it was one way in which the Lord revealed Himself to Nathaniel, and it was that way in which He revealed Himself to the woman at the well. He manifested Himself to her as a Prophet, that He was divine, that although He had never seen her before, He knew everything about her. And He made her honest in her confession. "Go, call thy husband." She said, "I have no husband". The Lord made her honest in the confession of sin. He said, "You have had five husbands". Oh the astonishment of that woman when He told her all things that ever she did! And the astonishment of Nathaniel when, knowing that he had sought the Lord under the fig tree, longed for His salvation, that he should be brought to that same Jesus and be told, "I saw you under the fig tree". Would not some of you rejoice if the Lord was to manifest Himself like that to you, and confirm your beginning? Very similar to that in Jeremiah, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown". The Lord says, "I remember that kindness of yours". If He says that, you will remember it too.

"Hereafter thou shalt see the heavens opened, and the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Well, there were great things that Nathaniel had seen, and yet the Lord says, "Thou shalt see greater things than these". Not greater things than Christ, who had revealed Himself to him, but greater knowledge of Him and further manifestations of Him. "Thou shalt see the heavens opened." I do need wisdom to speak rightly upon this point. Oh I would not speculate in the solemn things of eternity, but we read in the 19th Psalm, "The heavens declare the glory of God", and here to my mind one of the heavens that will be opened is the Gospel itself. Indeed, the heavens are all the things of God whereby He reveals Himself to His people through His Son by the Holy Spirit, and that is the opening of the heavens.

Paul puts it in this way to the Hebrews, "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the assembly of the Firstborn, to the spirits of just men made perfect". In its fullest sense, that intends heaven itself, but in a proper sense the intention of the Holy Spirit there is, the assemblies of His saints here below. It is heavenly doctrines, it is Mount Zion, for it is impregnable, and the King of grace is invincible and omnipotent in His power, and therefore the heaven that Nathaniel would see opened is the whole of the Gospel of the grace of God, and all the means of grace. Have not some of you felt it? In a small measure it may be, but oh the blessedness of Zion, of a company gathered by the Holy Ghost in whose heart is the kingdom of God set up, those who fear His great name and worship Him in spirit and in truth! It is His kingdom, and as He gathers His people together, so in the Gospel He opens the heavens. It was just that that the church prayed for in Isaiah: "Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down!"

"Hereafter ye shall see the heavens opened." What a blessed thing to one seeking the Lord when the Lord first manifests Himself to him, to say to him, "Thou shalt see greater things than these, and you will grow in grace, you will see more and more of the glory of Christ in the church, receive more and more abundance of His grace", "and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." I know in the Hebrews we read of the angels being ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be the heirs of salvation, but they are invisible. But these are visible angels, and therefore it intends the ministers of the Gospel, those angels that are spoken of to the seven churches, the angels of the seven churches. And that angel spoken of in the Revelation: "I saw also an angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth" (Rev. xiv. 6). A heavenly angel does not preach the Gospel; they could not. So here there is a promise that Nathaniel should see the Gospel, the purposes of grace revealed in the Scripture, and the heavens of the ministry opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending in their meditations; and as the Spirit raises their thoughts above the ground, and draws their thoughts up, and sets their affections on things above, so the people rise and fall under the same influence of the blessed Spirit. Oh how sacred is worship when the Holy Spirit's influence is felt to come from heaven to a poor sinful man in the pulpit and convey blessings and the power of Christ's resurrection! But the whole matter of the ministry and their ascendings and descendings are upon the Son of Man.

Oh what a great work it would be if the Lord should make His power known in this place as in Nathaniel! I wonder if there is anybody here whom He hears in secret seeking Him. A great thing it will be when as Philip, who is a type of a minister, brings Nathaniel to the Lord Jesus. A great thing if the ministry here should bring such a seeker forth, and the Lord to recognize him: "When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee". Oh may the Lord let His work appear and establish the work of our hands upon us!
