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Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden, at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
Sunday morning 7th ~~September~~ 1968

July.

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"He must increase, but I must decrease".

John 3.v.30

This observation was occasioned by certain of the disciples questioning some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying, and they could not understand John who had preached to them and had baptised, why, now, all men came to the Lord Jesus. "John answered and said, a man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven, ye yourselves bear me witness that I said I am not the Christ but that I am sent before Him". He was merely Christ's forerunner, and now the Bridegroom had come and he had announced the Lord Jesus to the people, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world". John's work was nearly done, and he was but the forerunner of Jesus Christ and therefore, Christ must increase, increase in His reputation, but John must decrease, and he soon died.

It is a great truth that is expressed in the text: "He must increase but I must decrease". But He can neither increase and neither can any man decrease except a man is under divine teaching. A natural man who is without Christ and without hope in the world, destitute of grace, Christ is nothing to him. Christ is unknown to him, and therefore He neither increases neither does a worldly man decrease. So that this observation, it regards those who are born again, who have the life of God in their soul; and how important that is. As you see in the teaching of Nicodemus, that Ruler in Israel, that Master in Israel, a highly educated man, an intelligent man, but his intelligence and his education could not enter into the mystery of the things of God. Neither can it, and therefore, the Lord emphasised the great necessity of being born again, and the reason He gives is very definite: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit," and therefore, nothing can rise above its nature. If we are in the flesh and there is no change made by the grace of God, well, if we are religious people, our religion will be in the flesh, but if we are born again then that which is of the spirit will remain spirit, and it is to such that this word refers. "He must increase, but I must decrease."

But the Lord cannot increase, in many ways He cannot increase. He cannot increase in His Person. He is God, the eternal God the Son, and He cannot increase in His Person. He cannot increase either with respect to His divine perfections, His attributes can never be increased, and yet here is a definite declaration; "He must increase". Therefore, this increasing is in His manifestations. Of course this cannot be known very much by younger people, it is a truth that we learn as time goes on, and those who have lived and known something of the leading and teaching of the Spirit for twenty, thirty, forty and fifty years, know more about this truth than at the beginning. But there is this to say, and you can to a great extent judge of what your religion is if it takes this course, "He must increase, but I must decrease". It is the way of the teaching of the Spirit.

He must increase then first, in His manifestations. He was manifested at His birth. He was there the eternal God in human nature, and Simeon, it was revealed to him that he should not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ, he waited for this consolation; and when he saw the Babe, his faith took Him up in His arms and he said, "Now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace for mine eyes have seen Thine salvation", and it would seem that Simeon did not live long after that. So that the Lord Jesus manifested Himself by the Spirit to Simeon even when He was in the manger. "He must increase". But in His manifestation to His people He increases with regard to His people, as He brings them to realise increasingly their need of what He is. His divine perfections

increase, not in the nature of them, but in the exercise and manifestation of them toward His people, and in order that He increases in their experience they are brought into places and conditions to need Him. Now some of you may look back at your life, for He still leads His people about and instructs them in the wilderness, you can remember how that He has increased in His manifestation to you in, for instance, His power. His power itself can never increase, omnipotence cannot be increased, but it is increased in its exercise and manifestation to His people, and He will increase therefore in the knowledge of Him and in the knowledge of His power.

O have you not found Him sometimes to increase as you are brought into your state of helplessness, as you are brought into a condition where you have come to the end, the end of all your strength, your wisdom, your righteousness. How then in the communications and manifestations of His power, the invincibility of His grace, He increases in your experience. I do feel that this is an important thing. What I fear and have feared concerning myself is lest I should steal or borrow an experience from other people, what you may read what you may hear, and it will be a mercy to be concerned about that, that you may have a knowledge of Christ in the experience of Him. He can be experienced and in that way He must increase in the exercise of His divine power in your heart. Take for instance, the power of His resurrection. As you go on you will feel your need of the power of His resurrection. The power of Christ's resurrection is the power exerted when one is born again. The Holy Ghost takes the power of Christ's resurrection and communicates that resurrected life, eternal life, into the soul of a poor sinner. But you will find that He will increase in the power of His resurrection in your experience.

We can see this in that wonderful chapter in Ezekiel of the dry bones. You look how Christ increased as you read through that chapter. He must increase under divine teaching, and He increases too with respect to His grace. His grace cannot increase but it does increase in the exercise of it toward His people, and this is known by a clearer sense of what we are and our need of that sovereign grace. Also we need the sufficiency and support of that grace in every time of need. You take for instance the apostle, perhaps the greatest apostle, you would hardly have thought that Christ would have increased could have increased in the exercise of His grace toward Paul especially, he had been in the third heavens, had an experience perhaps that none others ever had. Well, you would not think that Christ could increase in His grace toward a man like that, but lest Paul should be exalted above measure, he had a thorn in the flesh for this very purpose, that He might yet learn that Christ must increase, that thorn could not be extracted, or the Lord would not extract it. It was a painful thing. But the Lord manifested this grace, "My grace is sufficient for thee". Sometimes I turn that round the other way in order to apply it to all the people of God with their different thorns and sores and afflictions and conflicts, that is, 'For thee my grace is sufficient', 'and for thee my grace is sufficient', and therefore He increases in the exercise and manifestation of His grace.

"He must increase" as His people are led about and taught as we were trying to speak lately, "He teacheth them to profit", and a lot of this profit is the increase of Christ in their experience. "He must increase". He increases too in the value of His sin atoning blood. Now the value of His blood never increases but it does increase in the application of it and that will be in proportion as a poor sinner is brought to feel his guilt. Now you see this increasing of Christ in the case of David. You go through the 51st Psalm and see how the Lord increases even in that prayer, and some of you may have known when you have been brought into circumstances, very low in your own soul, burdened with guilt, united trials, that you have even found Him increase from the beginning of your prayer to the end of it.

"He must increase". He came for that purpose. He said it Himself; "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly," that that life might be increased. Well,

I say again, can we trace this in our religion, that Christ increases ?  
"He must increase".

He increases too, in His offices. As a great High Priest. Now that office does not increase. He can never be a greater High Priest than He is, but He does increase as the Holy Ghost reveals the benefits of it to a poor needy sinner. Ah, you will be brought to see and feel that whatever is brought to that great High Priest can be cured. There is no leprosy too deep but what He can cleanse, no sin too black and vile but what He can make it whiter than the snows. There is no case too hard but what He can, as an Advocate, plead your case, and He will increase in His attractions as a great High Priest.

A High Priest, an altar and a sacrifice all have to do with sin. If there is no sin there is no need of a sacrifice, no need for an altar, no need for a High Priest. O do you not feel increasingly the need of this, and the preciousness of this great High Priest ? "Seeing therefore, we have an High Priest that is entered into heaven, let us come boldly", and you will find in your experience that the benefit of this great High Priest will increase. You will come and cast your burdens upon Him. Very similar to the Queen of Sheba when she heard of the glory and riches and wisdom of Solomon. She believed the report, some may believe the report, but she did more, the report moved her, she went from that far country to prove Solomon, to prove him with hard questions, and instead of finding things not so great as she expected, she said, the half was not told me. He increased as it was manifested to her his greatness, his glory, his wisdom. "He must increase".

Sometimes you will find Him increase in your poor soul and feel it in your very heart. "He must increase". He increases in His love. His love does not increase. He never loves a sinner more at one time than another, but it does increase in the experience of it. O we little know the height, the depth, the length, the breadth of the love of God. It is an impassable ocean. A love that can never be passed by. Ezekiel, he found this love increase in its flowings, in its manifestation. First of all it was to his ankles, then to his knees, then to his loins, it increased.

"O love divine, how sweet Thou art,  
When shall I find my willing heart  
All taken up by Thee ?"

He must increase if we are living people. You take again the Apostle Paul, he said, "I count not myself to have apprehended, but forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press toward the mark". There was something more to be known than he already knew and he pressed toward it, and therefore, He must increase in the knowledge of Him. This does seem to me to be an evidence of a living soul. This purpose of the Holy Ghost to reveal the Lord Jesus and the application of Christ to a sinner in all his various needs, in all the changing scenes of life, all the conflicts between sin and grace within; "He must increase".

But then He increases in His love by manifesting to His people His willingness to save them. I do believe that there are some poor trembling sinners who implicitly believe in the ability of Christ, but knowing themselves they wonder whether He is willing. He is able, and therefore the Lord increases in His love and manifestation of His willingness. You take even the case of Hezekiah in the 38th Isaiah; and see how the Lord increased in him and where He brought him to, to teach him this. Hezekiah, as you remember, he received a solemn sentence of death: "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live", he turned his face to the wall; a very striking expression, that is to say he turned away from every kind of support and every kind of comfort and turned his face to the wall. It seems to me that at that time Hezekiah was not ready to die, otherwise that sentence of death would have been welcome to him, but you read that chapter down and presently you will find this; "The Lord was ready to save me", he looks

back at all his complaints, when his prayer was like the chattering of a crane, when all he could say was, "O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me", but when the Lord blessed him with that great promise to add fifteen years to his life, he could see that that was the purpose and intention of God, even when He said that sentence of death to him. It was not an afterthought of the Lord at all, and therefore, the Lord manifested His willingness. Said Hezekiah, "He was ready to save me". I thought He was ready to kill me, ready to destroy me, but He was ready to save me".

He must increase", and how sweet this is to a poor sinner that feels utterly unworthy to name His name, when the Lord shows to that sinner that He is more willing to save him than the sinner is to be saved by Him. It is a very sweet experience when the Lord increases in a poor sinner's heart in His willingness.

"He will never never leave us, nor will  
Let us quite leave Him",

we have been singing. "He must increase". He increases too in His divine compassion. That does not increase, but it does in the exercise, in the manifestation of it, and where does this increase, but when His people are brought into deep affliction, weakness, pain and distress, and what makes this increase? well, when the Lord speaks as He does in the Lamentations; He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men; and when He shows us in the midst of affliction that it is not in anger but in His love, the divine compassion of the Lord as it is manifested and brought, by the Spirit, as a sweet cordial in the midst of much sorrow and temptation and weakness. He increases in your knowledge of Him, and in His communications of His mercy and love and grace. He must increase.

He must increase too in a sense of His faithfulness. None of these things increase in themselves, but they do as they are communicated to a sinner. Divine faithfulness, always connected with immutability. They increase as they are communicated to a poor sinner who is brought to need a Rock to stand upon, and it will increase in this teaching too, that we shall realise that all other ground is sinking sand, and the more you feel that as you look within, as you look at this poor world, and all its confusion and the storms and tempest of life, the more you will value divine faithfulness and immutability, and the Lord manifests that to His dear people, says to them, "Be still and know that I am God". You believe that I am God, you have professed that I am God, now be still and know it.

So that He increases in the manifestation of His faithfulness and immutability, and as He thus increases so you increase in a sense of your interest in it, and therefore, to my mind, it is indeed a personal experience. An acquired religion, a theoretical religion has none of this increase in it, because it is dead and if you can trace in your own experience the preciousness of Christ in His increases in these various ways, it is some good indication that you are a living soul. He must increase and He will increase to the end".

He will increase in His characters, as a Refuge. Some of you who are older realise that you need this Refuge more than you have ever needed it before, and when He fulfils that gracious word: "God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present help in trouble", He will increase in His preciousness to you as your Refuge, your Hiding place, your strong Rock. A strong habitation unto which you may continually resort. You will need it more.

He will increase too in His great name. His great name cannot be more than it is, but O, has He not made that name more to you now than years ago? Has it not been made to you a strong tower? Have you not been brought to know that name, that His name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace? That is His name and it increases in a poor sinner's heart so that he

can sing:

"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds,  
In a believer's ear".

O this blessed increasing ! it is the lifting up of the Lord Jesus; "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up", and when He is thus lifted up in your heart as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, He increases, increases as a Mediator, a Redeemer.

Well, what is the end ? "He must increase", well, this is the culminating blessing, "Ye are complete in Him" As complete in Him as He is in Himself. That will be the end of the increasing, heaven itself. The highest point of Christ increasing is in His prayer, "Father I will, that all those whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am that they may behold my glory". So that this increasing will go on into eternity. Why, the little that you have here below will increase into that eternal inheritance, that blessed 7th Revelation which sets forth the blessedness of His people around His throne, worshipping Him day and night, leading them to fountains of living waters, it is so here.

"But I must decrease". Well, it must be so. It is like balances, like scales, as He increases so we shall decrease, and this decreasing is in a deeper knowledge of what we are in our nature. We are ever learning this, and this decreasing will be carried on until we are brought to nothing in ourselves. This is spoken spiritually. I do think about the young people, the Lord does not bring people to nothing, in their natural mind. We need a mind, we need natural intelligence while we live, but this is spiritual. They will be reduced to nothing with respect to salvation, can contribute nothing to it; 'the native treasure of our mind is sin, and death and hell', and we shall increase in the decreasing of self.

But there is another way in which His people decrease and that is in the attractions of Christ, "The more Thy glory strikes my eyes, the humbler I shall lie", and that is a blessed way of decreasing, it is indeed. The glory of Christ revealed in a sinner's heart, he will decrease to nothing in himself, and willingly. O how gladly some of us would be nothing if Christ would be everything. How willingly we would be emptied if we could be filled with the fulness of Christ we would decrease, willingly decrease.

"But I must decrease". O how important are these two things in experience, and my dear friends, I believe that this is absent in a good deal of religion today. It is vital, I have not the ability to speak of it as it should be spoken of, but I do trust that I know a little of it. "I must decrease". Sometimes you will feel this decreasing as you fall before Him as a guilty, weak and helpless worm,

"A guilty weak and helpless worm,  
On Thy kind arms I fall,  
Be Thou my strength and righteousness,  
My Jesus and my all".

There you get the two things, you get a poor sinner decreasing, prostrate in the dust, and the Lord Jesus lifted up in that poor sinner's heart increasing in His divine merit, in His saving grace, in His sweet mercy, in His sanctifying righteousness, justifying righteousness. It is a beautiful religion. "He must increase & but I must decrease". We must decrease, we must die. "We must needs die", and be as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again", but even so, He must increase though we die. It shows the blessed union that subsists between an increasing Christ and a decreasing sinner.

Now in conclusion I would make a remark which perhaps looks contradictory, but in this decreasing of a poor sinner there is an increasing in a knowledge of God, Peter says, "Grow in grace and in a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. well, if we do thus grow, we must be alive. I have sometimes observed, because of the importance of the contrast, dead things accumulate, living things grow, we may have an accumulation of correct religion, all dead. The text will not be in that religion at all, but if we grow in grace we shall grow this way, "He must increase, but I must decrease".

Amen