

1024
Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, on
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Text: John iii.30.

He must increase, but I must decrease.

There are but two in this text - He and I. The particular "I" in this text is John the Baptist, but it refers to everyone that is born again. Oh what a meeting, what a mystery, that this great Person, God's eternal coequal Son should condescend to such a relationship as referred to in the preceding verse: "He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom; but the friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice; this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." It is a wonder of heaven that God the Father should not spare His Son, but deliver Him up for His people, the church; a wonder of grace that He should condescend to become the Saviour of lost sinners; but a greater wonder still that He should assume such a relationship to sinners as the Bridegroom of the bride.

In the 2nd of Hosea you have a very sweet prophecy of the Lord engaging Himself, betrothing His people to Him: "I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies; I will betroth thee unto Me for ever". This could never be said but by Him who is eternal. And in order to find His bride, He sends messengers, as Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac. A very beautiful type of the ministry is in the 24th Genesis; it is well worth reading. See the exercise of that servant, how he watched for a sign, and how he bowed his head when there was any evidence that he was in the right way toward that woman designed for the wife of Isaac, and how he came to her. There was only one thing that Abraham said to the servant - that he was to take a wife from their own kindred. He did not say where or who. But if you follow that servant along, you will see the exercise of a true minister of the Gospel.

"But he that hath the bride is the Bridegroom; but the friend of the Bridegroom", John the Baptist, and the friends are the true ministers of the Gospel, "rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice". And this is in the Gospel itself. It is the voice of Jesus calling to His bride. And also there is the Bridegroom's voice when the Spirit directs the ministry to one who was given unto Christ by the Father as His bride. You hear the Bridegroom's voice in the confession of faith and their love to Him. They said to Rebekah: "Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go". Very remarkable really; but the point was, she believed the report. The servant had given such a description of Isaac, of his beauty and of his dignity, and also that his father had given unto him all that he hath. Precious type of the Lord Jesus, to whom God has given all, and that all the fulness of the Godhead is in Him bodily! And so the Gospel is sent and reaches those characters for whom it is provided. And it is very blessed when the Spirit's voice is heard in the soul under the preaching of the Gospel: "Wilt thou go with this Man?" And the response of faith, "I will go", as said Ruth.

These records are left for our instruction and example. Salvation is not the exercise of mere naked omnipotence. It is not the violence of omnipotence; it is a work. There is a method. "By grace

ye are saved." That is absolute; nothing can resist that: "All that the Father giveth to Me shall come to Me", and nothing can frustrate that purpose. But in the fulfilment of the purpose there is the method of faith. And therefore that servant had to be led about, watch for signs and evidences, until he was led to the right person. And the Lord leads His people about in providence in the exercises of their souls, turns them to destruction; and then a minister, knowing nothing about it, is led into a particular pathway: "The watchmen that went about the city found me", and then in another place, "He smote me and took away my veil from me". But this is the Person spoken of in the text, this glorious Man, God-Man, this "Bridegroom coming out of His chamber, rejoicing to run a race".

"He must increase, but I must decrease." So it is imperative in both cases, and the one is in proportion to the other. Strictly speaking, the Lord Jesus is impossible of increase in any way. As God He cannot increase; He is infinite. He cannot increase either with respect to His humanity. His humanity is very real, and the reality of His humanity is important as it affects Him as a Substitute. If He were different from what we are in His human nature, He would not be a perfect Substitute. God created man out of the dust. When according to the covenant of grace there needed a Saviour, a Mediator, God did not create a human nature again from the dust. No, His human nature must be intimately connected with and related to our nature, so that He was born not out of the dust, but born of a woman. His human nature cannot increase.

And His grace cannot increase. Grace and all that belongs to the Lord Jesus is complete and perfect, and can know no increase of any kind at all. The life - for He brought life and immortality to light, the life that He brought with Him - "I am come that they might have life" - that cannot increase. There is nothing incomplete either with the Person, or work, or graces of the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet "He must increase".

The only way then that He must increase is in the manifestation of Himself, communications of the fulness of His grace and life to His dear people. "He must increase." What we have just referred to is an increase - "I am come that they might have life". That life in Christ is a complete life - "but that they might have it more abundantly". And we shall be brought to need this, because the work of grace in the soul is gradual. "He keeps a gradual pace" in experience. And as in nature, so in grace. Life in a child is not so fully developed as life in an adult, but it is the same life. It will be a mercy if we are babes in grace. And therefore He must increase in the manifestations and communications of life to His dear people.

"He must increase" too in His power. "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." And that power, so far as He is concerned, is a complete power. It includes His divine ability to save. It is the ability of omnipotence, and yet this power increases as it is manifested to poor people who need it. It increases in this sense, He will give power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Paul prayed for the Ephesians, for the increase of this power of Christ, "that they might be strengthened with all might by His Spirit in the inner man". "He must increase."

The increase is in His manifestations to His people as they are

brought into a sense of need of it. And some of you feel that He must increase with respect to you. As your needs increase, as your weakness increases, you need His power to increase. He increases too with respect to His saving grace. There is something very sweet in this, the impossibility of the increase of any of these things that belong to Christ, and yet He must increase in dispensing and disposing of what He is and has, to cases according to their several needs. So that His grace increases. How the Apostle Peter prayed for this, "that grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ". Oh some of you feel to need Him to increase in your heart with respect to the exercise of His Spirit of His grace in your soul!

"He must increase." He increases too with respect to His infinite wisdom. "His wisdom is perfect, His power is supreme." But has He not increased to some of you? Have you not increased in the knowledge of Him, "grown in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ"? And He is made of God unto His people wisdom. But not until their wisdom has been turned into foolishness and ignorance, and we are learning what need we have of Him; so that the two things go together like a pair of scales. As He increases so we decrease, until we are brought to our proper dimensions before Him as less than nothing and vanity, and He becomes All and in all in our souls. "He must increase."

He increases too with respect to His patience. He is the God of patience. "See His patience lengthened out to those who fear His name." This is His longsuffering. Ah, how we have tried His patience by our provocations, our backslidings! But He did not fail. Oh my friends, the patience of the Lord Jesus does manifest His loving-kindness! It changes not. All these His graces, His gifts, are immutable - patience. He needs patience with those that are rebels. He has ascended on high, led captivity captive, received gifts for men, yea for the rebellious also. He has patience with His people in teaching them. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth unto all men liberally and upbraideth not." He is so patient that He does not upbraid His people who are such slow scholars, and doesn't say He has taught them that lesson a dozen times, and it is time they knew it. And as He deals with cases in His wisdom, so He lengthens out His patience.

It is a mercy that He increases. It may be a sweet truth to some of you, and you pray for Him to increase in your heart. In a most important sense the Lord Jesus is that "path of the just which is as a shining light, shining more and more" - increasing more and more, "unto the perfect day". And if we have a religion of the Holy Ghost, it will be after this manner in the text. Can we trace this imperative increase of the Lord in our souls, and our decreasing in ourselves?

"He must increase" with respect to His kingdom, although it cannot increase. His kingdom is the whole election of grace, and not a hoof shall be left behind; but it must increase manifestly. "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring"; and this is a very blessed increasing of Christ. It is said concerning Him, "He must needs go through Samaria". There was an object of His love, one who constituted His bride. He knew her followings after the things of this world, but He knew the place and time, and must needs call that woman by His saving grace. And so we sing that prayer:

"Go on, Thou mighty God,
 Thy wonders to make known,
 Till every sinner bought with blood,
 Shall trust in Thee alone."

He must increase in His kingdom, in the church of God. Foolishly we are apt to think that things are dying out. We may look at the church of God in the country in this day of small things, and say, "Well, I think the whole will very soon die out". But it must increase to that extent of the whole election of grace. "Of all those whom Thou hast given Me, I have lost nothing"; and He must increase until He has accomplished that kingdom, the number of His elect.

He must increase too with respect to His kingdom in the soul. When He establishes His kingdom when one is called by grace, born again as we believe Nicodemus was, for although we hear nothing much of him from the time that the Lord Jesus instructed him until the death of Jesus, so that it is very evident he loved and feared the Lord - and when that kingdom is established in the soul in the new birth, there will be an increase in the heart of the divine authority of that kingdom. He must increase. He is a living Lord; it is a living kingdom. There is no standing still, and there will be Christ increasing in it in His manifestations.

For instance, He must increase with respect to His blessed Word. Jabez prayed that He would enlarge his coast. The Lord Jesus may be manifested to some of you more than to others in your present experience. He must increase in His Word till the whole of His Word is fulfilled, and to the extent that every promise of the Gospel is fulfilled. And not only so, He must increase in individual experience with regard to His Word. I have observed before that we each, that is those who possess the grace of God, possess a Bible of their own; some a larger Bible than others. But He can increase it. There is no need to increase the sacred inspired Word of God. It is perfect and sufficient to furnish a man unto all good works. But oh my friends, how much of this Word belongs to you personally? That which you have experienced and walked out, with that which the Lord has given you out of the Word. And sometimes you thus increase in tribulations, and your circumstances take you in as you read a chapter, and He speaks to you through the Word.

"I must decrease." One way is this - He turneth them unto destruction, when their wisdom is turned into foolishness, brought to weakness, and fall down when there is none to help. They decrease, go down in the estimation of themselves, and that will be in proportion; because as you thus decrease, so the Lord Jesus will increase in your deep need of Him. John the Baptist was put in prison. He had nearly finished his work as Christ's forerunner. "I must decrease", and it is true of us all. Our poor ministry. He whom we so feebly attempt to preach must increase. When we are gone, He will increase; but I must decrease. And the method that the Lord uses to decrease His people is strange, and yet in wisdom and love. And this is one reason of His chastenings, because in this decreasing there is teaching to profit. What strange language, what secrets there are in the methods of God. "Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, and teashest him out of Thy law, that Thou mayest give him rest in the day of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked." And a man will decrease under the chastening hand of God,

"All to make him,
Sick of self, and fond of Him".

If what we have said so far is true, is that the way we are being led? Does He increase in our hearts? Does He increase in His preciousness, increase in our affections? If so, then we decrease in ourselves. We must decrease, we must go down. And we decrease in this sense too - you remember in the Apostle Paul's voyage to Rome, they began to cast things out of the vessel to lighten it. First one thing, and then another, until they cast out the taklings of the ship, the very thing that would appear to be essential. But they had to throw everything overboard. Does that interpret anything in your experience of decreasing? Have you not had to throw away much that you thought was real, and it had not stood the fire which will try everyman's work? And he will go out smaller than he goes in. He decreases, and as he is refined and tried real faith shines with beauty reflected from Christ Himself, the light of His glorious countenance.

This is very painful to nature, but when the two things are perceived to go together, you are glad of it. I should be glad to truly feel the experience of this text in my own heart. Don't some of you feel you will be willing to decrease until you are brought to utterly nothing in yourselves, and the Lord Jesus become All in all? And so people are emptied from vessel to vessel, utterly emptied. I find it so with respect to the ministry, a most solemn and difficult path before God. I distinctly feel He must increase, but I must decrease.

We must die, and what a decreasing that is, to be brought to the grave, and therefore He must increase. And it is the union between these two that makes it so blessed. However far we sink, this will be true with respect to His people - He must increase in His people's graves. He has been therefore. He is the Redeemer, both of their soul and of their body, and oh the exceeding great and precious promises concerning those that lie in their graves! He must increase there at the resurrection day, so that when His dear people are brought to the lowest point, into the grave itself, He must increase. The manifestations of grace and the communications of the Lord Jesus are altogether beyond what we can conceive. We decrease into absolute poverty, but He supplies our needs, not according to what we feel or to what we can express of our needs; but He answers our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus, and He so increases as to be able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. So here is the increasing glorious Conqueror. Therefore looking at the matter the Apostle makes this challenge: "What shall separate us from the love of Christ?" That will increase in its manifestations. "Shall tribulation, or distress, or peril, or nakedness, or sword?" "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors." How can that be? In this way. It is one thing to conquer an enemy, but oh my friends, to take possession of the prize! "More than conquerors through Him that loved us."

"He must increase, but I must decrease." What will it be when we get there? Oh my friends, I believe that the response of faith here below, and a good hope through grace as feeling and seeing an increasing Redeemer, a glorious Head, will sing, yea "loudest of the crowd I'll sing, While heaven's resounding mansions ring, With shouts of sovereign grace". Yes, you will cast your crowns before Him and

crowns Him Lord of all. But this is what I have felt in myself, if the blessed Spirit was to communicate Christ and His Gospel that you might feel Him rise in your soul above the hills and mountains of your guilt, until the Gospel fills your heart; and then you will proportionately decrease in yourself. "When thou art nothing in Thyself, Thou then art close to Him."

My little strength is gone, and I must leave it. But oh may we be given to realize in our own souls that He does increase while we decrease.
