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Notes of a sermon by Mr. F. Gosden preached at "Ebenezer" Chapel, Clapham  
on Wednesday evening 24th. August, 1955

Text: Matthew 11.4-6

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me."

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Every power outside of God in Christ and the Gospel is against Christ and His church, every power, and, if through grace, we are Christ's we shall know it. A dead professor knows nothing about it, they go down with the stream as the dead fish, but as sure as we are born again we shall prove the truth of Hart's words, "From that moment the conflict begins", not ends, begins. The Word of God gives examples of this invariably. Take the case for instance of James and Peter. Herod killed James and put Peter into prison intending also to kill Peter but prayer was made for Peter by the church of God and God delivered Peter miraculously from prison. He could have delivered James, He could have delivered John the Baptist; divine sovereignty is absolute but when we look at it in the circumstances in which it operates and the things which divine sovereignty orders there appears often a paradox. God is carrying on His undisturbed affairs and directing all things with one blessed end, His glory in the salvation of the church. We are living in perilous times, to my mind it is well within the bounds of possibility that persecution will again be permitted and judgment will begin at the house of God as Peter says. If you look at that chapter and the whole of the first epistle of Peter you will find that it speaks of the sufferings of Christ and His people with Him, and shows that when the judgments of God are in the earth the Lord's people will be the first to feel it. We do not half know the solemn state and condition of the nation and the nations, it is only the restraining power of God that there is not a revolution, the insubordination of men is very perilous and very solemn. In the conferences among the nations so far as I can see the name of God has been completely ignored, God is not in all their thoughts. It seems to me that we are brought to a crisis, there is only one point of hope and rest, "Thou Lord remainest", "For ever and ever the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth".

John the Baptist, of whom the Lord later in the chapter gives such a testimony, was put into prison by the influence of a wretched woman. There are many things if we look at them on the surface will give us to conclude that the devil reigns. John the Baptist never came out of prison alive. Not only so,

it would seem that the Lord left him for a time in darkness and soul desertion. I would not presume to claim that I have been in the depths that John was but I have known, and that lately, that nearness to despair which two things uniting together will bring you in your soul's experience and you will know it if ever they combine together. They are soul destitution and soul desertion, and you will be very near the pit. When I was there the Lord mercifully made use of two lines of a hymn which, although it did not deliver, kept me waiting stand and they were this,

"Look from the borders of the pit  
To my recovering grace."

What a sight it is! Well, these things concerning John are written, not for John's sake alone. Indeed John is in heaven; the Lord cut his days of tribulation short; he finished his work. It was but a short time previously that John declared, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world", and now he was in prison and it was a severe test to his faith. Doubts and fears seemed to fill him with confusion. The Lord's people will be brought there in their experience. This is not written for nothing, neither is that blessed encouragement in Zechariah written for nothing, "Turn ye to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope", but you may depend upon it if we are in the foot steps of the flock we shall be brought into such places and conditions as are recorded throughout the Word of God. "We shall! Can you look into your experience and find that the Word of God is a counterpart of your experience?"

So John sent to the Lord Jesus. His faith rose to send a message from his prison. Have you ever done that? Have you every been in a prison? There are many kinds of prisons. When the Lord leaves you for a time then life and light will have left you. You will be left in your weakness, you will be in darkness, and you will prove that your carnal nature, a body of death, is a prison which you must carry to your grave; and you will prove that when the Lord hides His face and the blessed Spirit withholds His communications you will be left with this - what you really are. The Lord sometimes leaves His people there to have another look as He did in Isaiah 51, "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged". You will be in a prison, you cannot unlock it, what a mercy! Would you have it different? Would you have that religion that you can manipulate, that faith that you can get yourself, to pray when you like, believe when you like, hear when you like, preach when you like? Some of you may be in a prison of affliction and shut up. I know now a person at Heathfield, hardly middle-aged, and there is a creeping paralysis in that youngish woman that I expect everytime she comes to chapel will be the last. What a mercy to bow before sovereignty, not in fatalism, but to send a message from whatever prison you are in to the Lord Jesus.

The world is a prison, some of you may feel it, where you have to work;

death is all around you and you feel to be in prison in every sense. But what a mercy to have a living soul, to be possessed of that life that nothing can kill and therefore that faith which "lives and labours under load", and therefore a living hope that anchors in the Rock of Ages. John sent a message to the Lord Jesus. O the messages that come from urgent prison cases! I am sure you will be brought into them and then when you are, O "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you". (1 Peter 4.12) Daniel was in the lions' den before you. The Lord will be gracious in these places and enable you to be faithful unto death. I knew a godly man, now in heaven, who went into an asylum and they took his Bible away from him. However, a Bible was got to him and he opened it for the first time on that Psalm 57.4, "My soul is among lions". There is something very blessed to see a child of God in trouble, (you might say that is not a very kind thing to say) and see the life of God and faith struggling toward Him. I visited a dear woman in an asylum, she had been put into a padded room. She is a jewel, and they allowed me to sit with her alone. She wanted me to help her get out; I said to her, do you feel you are in a prison in here? She said, yes; I said, but you are Christ's prisoner; you are, "a prisoner of hope" and when the time comes the Lord will bring you out. Do not try to get out. I had my hymnbook in my pocket and I said, You used to sing some of these hymns. She took the hymnbook from me like a hungry man taking a crust of bread and opened on 950,

"What object's this which meets my eyes  
Without Jerusalem's gate;  
Which fills my mind with such surprise  
As wonder to create?"

She sung that hymn, fell down on her knees and poured out her heart before God. Do you ever do that?

O the deep places the Lord's people are brought into, they send messages to heaven. But not only so, the Lord sends messages back. O that is what does you good. "Jesus answered, and said unto them, Go and shew John again", show him again. When you have been locked up in desertion and bondage, when you are brought to the ends of the earth, what a sweet surprise it is when the Lord sovereignly speaks to your heart, "Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God". That is the foundation of it; there is the ground of your hope, there is the power, the incentive to look from the ends of the earth; "I am God", infinite, omnipotent, omnipotent in wisdom, "Jesus answered and said unto them, go and shew John again those things". If the Lord was to show some of you again what you once saw, now hidden, what a resurrection you would have. That is just what I need. He said to His disciples just before He left them, "Ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you". O when the blessed

Spirit in His infallible teaching teaches you to profit in the midst of afflictions and sorrows and soul exercises and desertion, what teaching it is. It is the way the Lord is sanctifying and preparing you for heaven, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest". Can you agree with God in that? Multitudes do not who hear such a word as that; they will conclude we are fools and you can keep your religion. For my part, blessed is the man whom the Lord teacheth to profit, to come out of affliction with something more than you went in with.

"Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see"; He will know whether I am He or whether he should look for another. Poor John, as though he would say to the Lord, Lord have I made a mistake after all, have I introduced the wrong Person; I declared to the people, "Behold the Lamb of God;" art Thou He? In your prison you may say upon your bed in the night, Lord was the work I hope Thou didst begin in my heart Thy work or am I to look for something different? When the blessed Spirit brings to your remembrance all things whatsoever have been spoken to you it will confirm your faith, confirm your soul. But we need this discipline, this exercise. The Lord does not deal so with the world at large; He tells us why in Amos, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth": only you in a way of love, I know only you in a way of divine grace, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end". (Jer.29.11) What about it? "Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities", and then in the next verse He tells us another reason, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Sanctified affliction and sanctified exercise brings you into an agreement with the Lord and you walk with Him as the three Hebrew children walked in the fire. Their enemies thought they had despatched them, so hot was the fire that those who threw them in were burned. Then it was seen that there were four men, a fourth like unto the Son of Man. What a blessed affliction. O my friends it is better to go to heaven through deep waters and a fiery furnace, through the lions' den, than to go dancing to hell.

"Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see", and you may depend upon it that the Lord sent with that message divine authority; when the Lord speaks His speaking is full of Himself. "Thou hast the words of eternal life". You remember upon another occasion when He had been speaking to the multitude He turned and said unto His disciples, privately... privately. He gave them a private audience. Has He ever given you a private audience? He turned away from the multitude and spoke to His disciples privately things that did not belong to the world and what He said was this, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear." (Mark 13.16) In

a congregation there may be people who by the Spirit hear so that it penetrates further than the outward ear and, the light of the living enlightening the eyes of their understanding, they hear the things the Gospel declares. "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them", John, I am just the same One, the same Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever, John, and nothing can alter it. I believe in that message communicated to John the substance, the comfort of Christ's immutability and of His divine sovereignty, of His everlasting love, of His enduring mercy and of His supporting grace and gave him a sight of His glory. I remember what a comfort this was made in 1942 with respect to a fine young man who was lost in the Air Force. I visited the stricken parents and I mentioned this case of John, how the Lord permitted him to remain in prison and took him thence to heaven. That young man left a testimony behind him, but O how it did shake those dear parents; my heart ached for them, and my prayer for them was this, (and it happened that I had to preach at Hanover just at that time) and I could feel that nothing could reach their case but this, "Uphold me according to Thy word and let my soul live, and let me not be ashamed of my hope". It seemed as though it would sweep everything away and what a mercy to have an anchorage in a storm; what a mercy to go from your prison to the Lord and to receive from Him some sweet assurance of His immutable love, so that you can join with Paul, being brought to some persuasion because of your experience, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8.38-39) O the reality of religion! but where can you find it, that religion that will live in secret in your heart, a religion that would live if you came down into some unknown country where there was no Gospel and no other child of God? Have you got a religion between your soul and God that would live there? You would be in a prison then with respect to this world but it is beautiful to see prisoners straining their eyes through the grating to get a glimpse of the King in His beauty and hear His voice, I have traced this, not only in my little experience but lately with cases I have come into contact with. I buried a person last week that walked a path of poverty and sickness for many years but the Lord gave her this when she was baptised,

"Thou shalt see my glory soon,  
When the work of grace is done"

and she reminded me of it at the end.

"The blind receive their sight". The Pharisees said, "Are we blind also?" They were offended. Are you offended at what the Scriptures say about you and

your nature? It is one of the first works of the Spirit. When Paul was called to preach the Gospel it was to open their eyes to turn their darkness to light; their terrible darkness, the darkness of death, to the light of the living. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world". He was the Light of lights, a living Light, everything that comes from Him was living. The whole Gospel was a living gospel, every stream is a living stream, everything that we are occupied in, you and your dear pastor, everything that concerns this church is living and everlasting; all we speak about is eternal, and therefore when His dear people come to die they enter into everything they have been hearing about and everything they have been singing about and everything that has been preached about; it all has to do with heaven. The Lord conveyed this truth to John.

"The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk". You will be brought to know what it is to be blind and lame; and "the lepers are cleansed", and these bodily diseases which the Lord healed are typical although they were actual diseases. Do you think you are really warranted to go to the Lord with all the diseases you see? Do you beg Him to do for your soul what He did for their bodies? Things are so important and so vital you feel you do not want to trifle with them and just fit these things in; you see something about a leper and fit it in, but you are warranted to. I will give you a Scripture which will warrant you, if you feel you have these diseases in your soul you are warranted to take these diseases to the Lord Jesus. The warrant is this, there was a man with the palsy and they brought him before the Lord and the Lord did not do what they thought He would do. They thought He would work a miracle and the man would get up, He did not do anything of the kind, He said, "Son thy sins be forgiven thee". The Pharisees were always on the catch and they murmured at Him but Jesus made this observation which will give you a warrant, all you that are diseased, you lepers that are pressing through the crowd in your vile condition, will give you a warrant to lay your case before Him as it is in the Word of God, "Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?", as though the Lord would say, it is the same to Me, body or soul, He turned it round the other way, "He saith to the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house". (Mark 2.10-11) It is a marvellous Scripture if you look at it, there was a palsied man and the Lord said, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee". He confirmed that blessed truth by reversing the whole matter, "Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?".

"Urge thy claim through all unfitness;  
Sue it out, spurning doubt;  
The Holy Ghost's thy witness."

What ever disease you have got.

"The dead are raised up". I am glad it comes as low as that, right down to death. They are raised up. Have you ever had the sentence of death in yourself? What a mercy! Because death must be absolute, there is not such a thing as half dead. I know it is an expression but it is absurd to talk about being half dead, if you are half dead you are alive but O to have the sentence of death in ourselves, right through, as dead as a corpse, "that we should not trust in ourselves but in God that raiseth the dead." You will need Him to raise you from the dead many times in your experience. You will pray "Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead?. I need wonders wrought in me again and again. He saves to the uttermost, He is able to do it. O, send to Him, whatever prison you are in, whatever difficulty, however low you are.

"Take refuge in Jesus, though hell should pursue."

Be thankful if hell does not pursue. Ought I to say that? The powers of hell will pursue a child of God but if you are fleeing to the Refuge and hell is behind you, you will never go to hell. There is more in the city of Refuge to save you than there is in hell to swallow you up, sinner. It is only poor people that prove it, not necessarily poor in this life, though most of them are, but there are millions of poor people in this world that are ignorant of Christ and the Gospel. It is spiritual poverty, I am persuaded of this, that if our Queen was called by grace, (it is not impossible, O that it might please God), but if she was called by everlasting grace it would not be proper in her, in her high position, to show weakness before the world, but she would come in secret before God in a state of destitution of soul, she would say, let my earthly honours go, they can never do me any good, I am poor without Thee Lord. A rich man will say it. Our real state is poor, miserable, blind, wretched, naked, whatever we think of ourselves that is true. I do not know what people would say going down the street, strutting about as though they created the earth, if we touched them on the arm and said, Do you know you are poor and wretched and blind and naked? How suitable such a sinner is to the Gospel, to look out of wretchedness and poverty and see eternal joy; the contrast is so blessed, and the infinite and eternal difference between the two.

"The poor have the gospel preached to them", the blessed Spirit preaches it. Those are the people, "Blessed are the poor in spirit", theirs is the kingdom of God; look at it, not the kingdom of England. If you could be put into Buckingham Palace tonight, you might be dead tomorrow. But there is the kingdom of heaven. If you see it in your prison it will help you to wait as

did Job, all the days of your appointed time. Paul wraps it up in one parcel, writing to the Corinthians, "Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's". (1 Cor.3.21-23) Paul had that Gospel preached. Everything in the Gospel belongs to them, the Lord Jesus is theirs, He is their Substitute; the merits of His Person, the virtue of His work are theirs. When this Gospel comes to you, whoever you are, you will rejoice in the Lord, you will!

"Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. You would not be offended in Him when He sends a message or comes and visits you. Job says, "Thy visitation hath preserved my spirit" (Job 10.12); "Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13.15) Esther gave directions to Mordecai and those at Shushan to pray and she said I and my maidens will pray; with united prayer she could say, "So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." She was not offended. Are you offended? Are you ashamed of Him, ashamed of Jesus? Have you received Him in the particulars that we have tried to set out? Well, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord you will have to walk in Him in the same way as you received Him. Did you receive Him as a poor, destitute sinner, as a mighty Saviour? You will have to walk in Him like that; you will never be better in yourself, you will always need Him, His fulness is always the same. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me". O may His love so fill your heart that it may constrain you to honour Him, to walk in His ways, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh. Amen

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