

LIBRARY OF THE  
GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
on Wednesday evening 5 July 1933

LUKE 5 v 8

"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Vital religion is not a play thing, it is not a sentiment, it is not something a man can take up of himself. It is not a beautiful profession, it is not a form of sound words held naturally, neither is it a Calvinistic creed; that may be used to thinly cover Arminianism. Vital religion is the dealing of God with a soul, and the soul dealing with God as the effect. It is a solemn matter between God and the man, God coming first to the man, then the man coming to God by the Holy Ghost. If we now, in this service, got a glimpse of the glory, which Peter got, we should feel like Peter, unfit for that glorious presence, unable almost to bear the weight of that glory, the light of which would penetrate our very souls. We should shrink into a good nothingness, and we should know that saving work is the work of the Holy Ghost, nothing else; nothing short of it. The occasion of this verse was, as we are informed, the catching of a number of fishes after they had vainly toiled the whole night; the net let down at the commandment of the Lord. It would seem that they had been labouring in that neighbourhood of the water the whole night but now, at the commandment of their Master, they let down their net, and it was a striking thing that in that very neighbourhood there should have been gathered together a shoal of fishes. Who gathered that shoal? Who brought them into the net? Now the Apostle Peter, at that moment, seeing the glory of Deity, of omnipotence, was struck; there entered into, there penetrated into, his heart, the beams of eternal Deity through the Man Christ Jesus. Now in some measure, in different circumstances, the same beams of divine glory will have entered into all of you who have grace. Some measure of that glory you have seen, and a very solemn thing it is. The difference between Peter's experience here and the religions of the present day is unutterably solemn, and not the worldly religion, but the religion that is

growing up into our own little denomination. As far as I am able to observe, though I do not travel as much as I used to do, but by correspondence and by meeting people, I am struck with the lightness, the frivolity of the profession of many who profess to believe in God and to believe in the doctrines of sovereign grace. May the Lord hear prayer for this Church and congregation that the glory of God may fall upon us, penetrate our hearts. It was the divinity of Christ that brought this feeling in Peter. Men seem to think it is quite an easy matter to pray and get to God. If the glory of God fell into their souls, they would find eternal Deity, eternal purity, such as to make them understand Peter: Lord, I am not fit for this blaze, I am not fit to stand before Thee. Thou art pure, I am impure; Thou are mighty, I am weak; Thou has wrought a miracle and I am not worthy. O, the solemn feeling that a man has when the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ penetrates his very heart and soul. Ah, religion is a great reality; saving religion is a wonderful thing, my friends. It is God coming to a sinner, a sinner calling on God. This is quite consistent with, and indeed a blessed preparation for, Peter's confession, made later. "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" "Thou art the Christ", said Peter - after telling Christ what men were thinking and saying of Him, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God". And when the Lord Jesus, seeing the many disciples departing from Him, going back and walking no more with Him, said to His disciples: "Will ye also go away?" - See these many leaving Me; willyou cleave to Me? Will you follow Me? Seeing I have taught such a truth as offends these many, will you believe in that truth and cleave to Me? - Peter said: "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life". That was not saying, "Depart from me". No, the two live together; a sinful man, unworthy to be in the presence of God, and that same sinful man cleaving to that same God and saying, Lord, wilt Thou abide with me. I would make a remark or two upon the effect on Peter's soul by that blaze of glory that darted into his heart and soul when he saw the miracle that Jesus had performed. It did for him this; it showed him his nature. Yes, it revealed to him his sinful nature. That is always the effect of divine shining upon sinners into their hearts. Yes, you will never, never feel that you can say too much about your sinfulness when you have a view of it in the light of God's countenance and teaching. You will say, I can never say enough about it. It is too black, too filthy, too

abominable, ever to be fully expressed. Do not some of you believe me? Do not you feel that I cannot fully express the matter? I know you do. Every Spirit taught sinner says that he cannot express what he sees and feels in his own heart of the sinfulness of his sins. O, he is too bad, and it is that that makes salvation very great. I do not wonder at Peter; the little understanding I have in the shining of God's light into my soul, I have known the feeling of being unfit for the presence of God. Depart from me Lord; this blaze is too much for my weak frame; this glory is more than I am fit for. And so the sinner has this conviction. True conviction of sin comes from the shining of the true light. "That was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world". (John 1 v 9). "I am come a light into the world". It is a different light from all other light. The light of our wonderful sun is darkness compared with the light of this glory of God, and the more of it you get, the deeper will be your feeling of utter sinfulness. And that will have another effect; it will preserve you from putting a piece of new cloth and sewing it upon an old garment. You will understand a little more of that Scripture: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh"; you cannot make anything better of it. "That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit", and you cannot make it sinful. The two are different in their natures, and this is understood only by the teaching of the Spirit of God. You will never know it; you cannot read it. You can approve of it, as a professor, but you can never know it without the Holy Ghost. O, the solemn separation that is made in the conscience, in the understanding, in the heart, by the light of God's glory. It does separate you from yourself. And then it will separate you from all false religion, and from error, and from men who hold, and walk in, error. Men may hold the truth in a form and yet walk in the spirit of error. But when the light of God beams, darts into the soul, then there is a solemn separation. You cannot mix life and death, truth and error, sweetness and bitter, oil and water; they are different, and men know it when they are under the bright beams of divine light shining in the soul. And this is the preparation; a strange one, some may say. Yes, but it is a separation, a real separation between flesh and spirit. Here is new wine and here is an old bottle, an old, dried, withered, skin bottle, and the child of God says, my feelings, my hope, my light, my life, my prayers, my little faith, I cannot put into this old bottle. The working, the fermenting, will break the

bottle. This is what I hope God will help you and help me - nay, cause you and me - to be very careful about; what we hold and how we hold it. There come into this matter I am speaking about the words of the Lord Jesus, in another place. He says: "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness." If religious light is in you and no more, O how dark you are. But if the light of truth, in beams, now and again shines into your soul, then you have the true light and, as Jesus says, you will have no occasion of stumbling. "I am come, a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in Me should not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." Therefore, I would impress, as God might help me, this matter upon your attention, press it upon your notice, that there is such a thing in vital religion - yea the very ground and foundation of it - the glory of God shining into a sinner, so as to make him feel unworthy for the presence of the glory of God. I am not fit to be in this pulpit in my own judgment when the light shines, and you will feel you are not fit to be here, only fit for hell. When this light shines it tells the truth. But then it does not end there. O, no. Peter said: "To whom shall we go?" And that is consistent with his solemn feeling expressed in the text. Though I am not fit for Thy presence Lord, I want to come to Thee. Let us look at this. What is it that causes one, in whom the light of truth has shined so as to make him know and confess that he is not worthy of the presence of Christ, yet go to Him? What is it that makes him go to Him even with this feeling? The sweet attractions of that very Person whose glory shines and makes nature to be nature. There is, and blessed be God some of us know it, a great, an invincible attraction in the Lord Jesus. This Person, working a miracle, faith looks on and says, He can work the miracle of salvation in my soul. You understand that; this blessed God can work the miracle of salvation in the soul; give a new heart and a right spirit, precious faith, sweet hope, comfortable consolation. He can do it all. And this does draw the sinner to Him. Lord, there is no-one outside Thyself, there is no ground for a sinner to stand upon before God, but Thyself. There is no plea for a sinner to make, but Thy blood. There is no hope of a sinner being clothed and made fit to be the guest of God, but Thy righteousness. And, that being so, the devil cannot drive the sinner away; unbelief cannot keep him from praying; and all the sin that is felt to be in the nature, and all the sins that have been done by the sinner, cannot keep him away from the throne of God's heavenly grace.

And when it is said to the people of God "Grow in grace" old nature says, well you must do something; wants to patch up an old garment. Old nature is always busy, busy in the Church of God, trying to deceive people. O, but what says the Spirit? what says the glory of Christ shining in the gospel? Grow in grace, grow in faith by fresh manifestations of Christ. Grow in love by fresh glimpses of His lovely Person and blessed work. Grow in hope by the sweetness of the Word of God dropping into the heart. Grow in love with prayer by getting some answers. Grow in meekness by knowing the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Grow in grace. Faith strikes her roots deeper into grace, and then faith grows upward and bears fruit, the fruit of righteousness, the fruit of peace, the fruit of godliness, and this is consistent, let me say it, with the feeling that Peter had, that moved him to say: "Depart from me". There was a measure of ignorance in this, for he did not know the kindness of Christ at that moment, but still it is a true feeling that you are not fit for the presence of God. I know that feeling and I know how difficult it is sometimes to go on praying in the face of your unbelief, and ingratitude, and hardness of heart. O, it is very difficult, but God, the Holy Ghost, keeps us at it. Yes, He will keep us at it to the end, and prayer is necessary, very necessary. It is God's appointed means: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me. When you see miracles in your own soul's experience, that will wonderfully affect you. What are miracles of grace in experience? Well, one miracle is this; faith that all the devils that may come to tempt you, and all the sins that you have committed, and all the vile infidelity that rises up in your heart, cannot kill. You say sometimes, I believe in God. One miracle connected with this is that God is very real to you. A prayer that I have had to pray for many years at times, is this - Make Thyself real to me. You know God is not seeable to us by nature. "He dwelleth in the light that no man can approach unto." So, if He ever becomes real to us, it is by His own working. It has been a prayer with me in my heart many many days and years - Make Thyself real to me. That is to say, faith lays hold of Him when He makes Himself real to you and then you get a view of His fulness. "Of His fulness have all we received and grace for grace." That is the fulness of life. What a miracle that is, now to have faith in your heart. See the greatness of faith as the Apostle John speaks of it: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our

faith". Think of it, a worm, a poor, destitute creature, with devils, men, providence seeming against him, and all things working for his fall and destruction; he overcomes by faith. He says, I have seen God, I have seen His mercy, I have felt His goodness. He has given me repentance and I am grieved that I am a sinner. He has shown to me Jesus Christ and I cleave to Him. This is the victory. One may say, a big professor may say, I shall hold on; I have a good confidence; I wont give up. And that man may, when temptation comes, fall away and never be restored. A trembling sinner says, Lord, I cannot hold on; I am too weak to resist any temptation and I am too ignorant to discern error from truth by my nature. Wilt Thou teach me, hold me up, and keep me to the very last breath that I shall breathe in this mortal state. Perhaps you say what I have said often, if I am left to draw my last breath alone what will become of me? Now that does not militate against the feeling of unworthiness; no, it lives with it; it thrives with it. One says, who had more grace than David? who had greater temptations and sins, than David?

Well, another miracle is this, love in your heart to God. He that loveth God knoweth God or rather is known of God. Well, this miracle may have been in some of you and yet you may be disposed now to question it. What is that miracle? Well, you have said, out of a sincere heart - "Jesus, I love Thy charming Name" - and your faith has sought to embrace and hold Him fast. What a blessing. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha." If any man love the Lord Jesus, peace be with him. The peace of God will always follow a real spirit of love to the Lord Jesus. God works miracles, I say. One miracle, added to what I have said, is this, an answer to prayer. When God has come to you in an hour of need and opened the throne of grace, which before was hidden from you; had been hidden for a time. When He comes and opens it to you and you see it, you see the gracious invitation: "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace". And that word, that truth, that grace meeting your need, brings you to the throne of grace. You open your mouth; you may not say many words, but you open your mouth wide; just tell the Lord the case, and the business is done; an answer comes sooner or later. O, says the sinner, how unworthy I am of this. O, how unworthy I am that God should bow down His ear and hear me, such a sinner, such a wretch; hear me in the hour of trouble when I sought Him. What a miracle of

grace that He did not turn away from me. The glory of grace, the glory of Christ, you feel to be very wonderful in this.

Now in the next place, and for the last observation, a miracle is this, the holding on, the perseverance of a saint to the end. I can speak to you about this more than some of you who are younger may be able to feel or follow, for I am old. O, but to finish well; that is to me now a very near thing. O, to finish well. But I am not fit, I am not worthy, I am not able, a poor sinner says, when the light of God has shined into him and he sees his utter unworthiness. Ah, he cries "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe." His footsteps are in the footsteps of the flock, and he says, "Hold up my goings in Thy paths that my footsteps slip not". Keep me Lord, keep me to the very end. Keep me faithful, keep me humble, keep me honest, keep me cleaving to the Lord Jesus as long as I live. May I die honourably; that is to say, may I die in the Lord. Jesus said to one Church: "Hold fast that which thou already hast that no man take thy crown."

Now dear friends, I have finished. This is a word I wish to say to you. Seek, seek, seek the glory of Christ to shine into your hearts. Then you will say with Peter, Lord I am not worthy, and yet you will say with him, to whom shall I go, Thou hast the words of eternal life. Then all the trappings, all the outsides of religion will be very little. You will say the one thing for me is to have God shining into my heart, dealing with my conscience, and for me, as an effect, to be dealing with Him. May He graciously grant this to us and we shall be well.

AMEN.