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Led by the Lord in New Paths

Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel Brighton on 5th February 1986

“And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them and not forsake them.” Isaiah 42:16

Before we notice the character that is spoken of, for whom the Lord will be pleased to do all these things, I want to notice just briefly the first four words: ‘And I will bring.’ There is such a profound depth of precious truth and grace in that word ‘bring.’ It does not say that the Lord will invite, or that he will offer, or that he will propose, no, there is something here that is absolutely effectual, something which cannot possibly fail. The Lord says, ‘I will bring,’ and if the Lord is pleased to put forth his almighty power and effect his glorious claim upon the heart of a poor sinner, you may be sure of this, that they will be brought, they will come, for it is not the mind or purpose of man, or the response of the heart to any kind of proposition or offer or anything of that nature: it is God’s effectual work upon the spirit. So here we have set before us in regard to this matter, God’s salvation, it is an absolute certainty. Nothing can fail because it is God’s will and God’s work. The blessedness and beauty is that the salvation of the people of God is not uncertain, neither is it founded upon anything that may fail or alter. So we have this definite word, ‘I will bring.’

It is indeed the case that there are so many and various ways that the Lord is pleased to use and things that he is pleased to bless to the end that sinners might be brought. There are a great variety of experiences recorded in the Word of God as well as known among the people of God to this day, but there is one thing that is certain to every one of them, they shall come because they will be brought. ‘And I will bring.’ Now what a wonderful thing this is, and what matter and ground and reason and cause for us to pray unto, and wait upon, that God whose power and prerogative and will and grace alone it is to bring sinners to the knowledge of Christ and his salvation.

The point to be enabled to understand as we go along is this, that we have been brought—that the Holy Spirit, by his precious work, has caused us to come. May we not belittle in any way, or despise, any means that the Lord has been pleased to use in our own personal case to bring us to the knowledge of the truth and to bring us to the knowledge of that way which only and alone leadeth unto eternal and everlasting life. Well, those are a few preliminary thoughts regarding the certainty of God’s will being fulfilled. ‘And I will bring.’

He says that it is ‘the blind’ that he will bring ‘by a way that they knew not.’ Who are these characters? They are blind, by nature, through Adam’s fall and the influence of sin, and we are all by nature in a state of woeful and utter and complete ignorance in regard to all matters that are spiritual, and all matters to do with God, Christ and salvation. There is a total and absolute blindness. The Word of God says that they cannot see. How true this is! We have no need to go further than our own experience. Some of us may look back to the days of our unregeneracy. These were days of total ignorance and total blindness. The fact that we were brought up under the sound of the truth makes no difference whatsoever, for it is utterly impossible that any man should see until Christ is pleased to open his eyes that he may see, and it is by the gracious power of the Lord Jesus Christ that this is done, for he has been sent for that purpose and to that end, to open the eyes of the blind, to anoint the eyes with eye salve that they may see.

Now not only is there that total ignorance and blindness upon us through sin, through the fall, but there is that about us which is also very woeful and dreadful, that is, a willing ignorance. ‘They will not see.’ How we—many of us, I hope—may say amen to this as we look upon ourselves in our former days, when there was that unwillingness to come to the light, there was that wretched unbelief and ignorance upon our fallen hearts and there was that unwillingness that we should be given this light. We could not see and we would not see.

Well now, what a wonderful mercy if there has been this blessed and needful and vital change—if the Lord has given us spiritual sight and spiritual understanding. In some small measure at least this has been fulfilled, ‘I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not.’

There are two outstanding instances that I would set before you as an illustration of this. The first is the case of Saul of Tarsus. He was blind. He was one of those blind Pharisees that Jesus reproveth. They claimed that they could see and that they had the knowledge of the light. They presumptuously claimed that they had eyes to behold, and knew not that they were totally blind. But the day came when the Lord caused the apostle to be brought into a way that he had not known heretofore. We read that upon the third day, “there fell from his eyes as it had been scales.” (Acts 9:18) What are those scales upon our eyes? Tradition, prejudice, unbelief, infidelity, self-righteousness and all those things which harden, blind and darken men’s hearts. But O what a wonderful mercy that the apostle was brought to the light and given understanding, that the scales fell from off his blind eyes so that he could see!

The other case that I would just briefly note is that of the blessed man who was born blind and Jesus was pleased to open his eyes, to anoint them with eye salve. You know, it did not matter how much the scoffing Pharisees argued with him and sought to dispute with him, he was able to say, there was one thing he did know—and it was a very vital and needful thing, something that he could give witness to from experience. He said, “Whereas I was blind, now I see.” (John 9:25) Now, my friends, can we say that? O! can we say it? ‘Whereas I was blind, now I see. I have not much sight, there is still a lot of darkness; I have not much understanding; I am still very much in the dark; I have very little sight, but I hope I have got some; the Lord has opened my eyes that I might see. It is still rather dim, not very bright, but I hope and trust I have been brought sufficiently to the knowledge of those things which are vital, that I know the difference between what I once was, and what I am now. Whereas I was blind, now I see.’

These are the people that are in the text. All the words here are applicable to those characters. ‘And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them.’ These blind persons, I will make them to receive their sight, ‘And make crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them and not forsake them.’ The important point is this, whether we can come in with the first part of our text: ‘I will bring the blind.’ Has the Lord brought you? Has he opened your blind eyes? Have you some spiritual sight, knowledge and understanding?

There are two particular things I want to notice with regard to this way, ‘A way that they knew not.’ There is that one and only way which leads to eternal and everlasting life, and that way is Jesus Christ. “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6)

*Jesus is the way to God;
Jesus is the way to bliss;
In this way the church has trod,
Down from Adam’s day to this.*

(Gadsby’s 543)

Now if we are left to spiritual blindness and ignorance, we know nothing savingly of Jesus Christ, we know nothing of him as the way to God. We seek some other way to heaven, some other way to obtain God’s favour, some other way of justification, until our blind eyes are opened. If we are religious at all we shall be no better than the Pharisees, seeking salvation in a false way. But if we are brought to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, to see that he is the only way, and if our poor blind eyes have been sufficiently opened, we shall see that he is the only way of salvation and justification, the only way to peace, the only way to pardon, the only way of rest, the only way of redemption. May we see this by the leading of the Holy Spirit, that we may enter into the sweet and blessed experience of it in some gracious and blessed measure, knowing that he alone is sufficient! May we be led personally and feelingly to experience an interest in some measure in Christ as the living way by his precious finished work!

There may be a number of you who are not as yet satisfied with regard to your interest, but are brought thus far in experience, to know very well that if ever you are saved at all, if ever you are justified at all, if ever you can have a righteousness in which to appear before God, sanctified, made holy, it is Christ must be the way, no other. To be fully convinced of this truth is a wonderful mercy. If God the

Holy Spirit is gradually leading you in this one glorious and blessed way, step by step, here a little and there a little, a touch and a token, a little sweet hope and confirmation at times of an interest in it—this is being led ‘By a way that they knew not.’ O how ignorant some of us truly felt and proved ourselves to be when brought into our first real spiritual need! I do not want to preach my own experience, but I will remember the day, I trust, when God opened my eyes to see my state and condition through the fall and my sinnership before a holy God, and, my friends, I was as ignorant of Christ as if I had never heard his name and did not know there was such a person. I had heard him preached thousands of times, but I did not know there was such a person. We need the Lord to lead us in this way, to show us Christ as the precious surety, and to bring us to walk in this way.

‘I will lead them in paths that they have not known.’ Let us look a little at those paths in which they are led. Firstly, the path of prayer and supplication. We were ignorant of this before we were led therein. I will speak of the apostle of the Gentiles once more. There was no doubt that he had said thousands of prayers, but he had never prayed until the Lord opened his eyes. Then he began to pray, and we have the witness of that fact, for when Ananias was sent to comfort him, the Lord said unto him: “Inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth.” (Acts 9:11) What a path this is! He did not know anything about it previously. O it might be that some of you, with myself, had godly parents who taught us to say our prayers night and morning. I suppose I can hardly remember a time when I did not kneel by my bed and pray when I got in it at night and out in the morning. But there was no prayer until God brought me into a need. Then how different! What a different path it is when there is a real earnest longing desire in the heart, living prayer to God! This is something that will continue throughout our experience. I am sure if God begins to lead us in this path we shall proceed in it. It will be a path of prayer all our days. Prayer is something we cannot live without; we shall go on praying.

Secondly it is a pathway of repentance. That is something that we knew nothing of previously. We were ignorant of this feeling and exercise of a broken heart and sorrow for our sins. More or less these characters will be led in the path of repentance and confession all their days. Every day they would be penitent before God. Confession is something that becomes a sinner. The more knowledge we have of Christ and ourselves, the more our eyes are opened and anointed with heavenly eye salve, the more we shall be mourners before God, walking in a pathway we knew nothing of before. It is a blessed pathway, the pathway of repentance. I love it. I hope some of you love it; it is not a dismal thing, it is a sweet path. O that we might be given a knowledge of this true repentance and sorrow before God!

Thirdly it is the path of dependence. This is something we know nothing of until the Lord leads us in it. The vile nature that is ours through the fall is a proud and independent nature. The Lord leads all his people in this pathway of dependence, and it is a path of absolute and complete dependence—not partial dependence, but complete dependence upon him for everything. This is something that the blind are caused to be led into, and they feelingly become more and more dependent, as they proceed, for everything of a gracious nature—every touch, every movement, every real desire, every token of the love of God, every movement of the heart upward—for strength, for wisdom, for grace and for everything they need. It is a path of dependence. Do we know a little of this pathway? As we proceed we need to lean more and more upon the Lord. We cannot possibly continue without him, it is complete dependence. You see, it is only those who are brought according to the words of our text, ‘I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not,’ who know the path of dependence. It is a blessed thing when we are brought to make this path our choice.

Now the fourth point is that this is the path of acquiescence and submission to the will of God. This is a good path. Might we be led into it respecting the whole of our experience, with regard to our souls as well as our circumstances! All the temptations, difficulties, trials and disappointments are appointed by God. In the secret exercises of our souls, the oppressions and trials and the many assaults of the adversary that we are subject to are all appointed of God, as well as those difficult and distressing matters in the providential pathway. But there is the path of acquiescence to God’s will. We know nothing of this, it is a strange path to us, until we are led into it. ‘I will lead them in paths that they have not known.’ All who are in an unregenerate state and condition and live in rebellion against God and opposition to him and all his ways, know nothing of acquiescence to him either in gracious matters or providence. But O to be brought to know the path of true submission!

Fifthly, there is the path of faith and trust. This is another needful and most precious pathway. It is one of constant and continual trust alone in God. We cannot take a single step in this way unless the Lord leads us in it. It is a strange path to all those who are not given this spiritual sight and understanding. Do we know a little of it? Trusting wholly in Christ for all; trusting in his merits; trusting in his atonement; trusting in his intercession; trusting in his advocacy; trusting in him as a great High Priest; trusting in him as the Saviour.

Now a sixth pathway, a very needful and very sacred pathway, is the pathway of communion. O how desirable this is to these people! We shall be complete strangers to this except we be among the people of God—that sweet, close, lively, effectual communion between the soul and God, God and the soul. O I hope that we are not complete strangers to this! Do we know what it is to get God's ear sometimes? Do we ever hear his voice? Does he communicate to us in the way in which he communicates to sinners? Do we know what it is, sometimes, to feel a little of his sweet and sacred presence? Do we know what it is to get near to him in our supplications and prayers, when our hearts are burdened and distressed? Do we know what it is to hold communion with him? A blessed thing if we know anything of it at all! It is a strange path to all but God's people. I know very well from my own experience there is nothing like as much as we would have and do desire, and indeed, there seems to be very little today in comparison with what there used to be. But this does not alter the fact that there still is communion and God's people do know a little about it.

*Larger communion let me prove
With thee, blest Object of my love:*

(Gadsby's 991)

O it is sweet to be given some sacred precious nearness, liberty and freedom before God, and to be enabled to speak to him and for him to speak to us! Just one more thought drops into my mind. I wonder how many there are here now who have something they want the Lord to speak to them about. You are waiting upon God that you may hear his voice, that he will not be silent to you about the matter, but reveal to you his gracious sovereign will and purpose. You are waiting upon him; you are not a stranger to the pathway.

Then one final path is the precious path of fellowship with Christ. Do we know something of this fellowship with him, in a small measure, in his sufferings? It is a strange path to all but those who are led therein—to really be favoured with a little sweet fellowship with the suffering Saviour. To know what it is for a broken-hearted sinner to have fellowship with a broken-hearted Saviour. For one who is burdened with sin to have fellowship with one who died for sin. A precious pathway! O may the Lord lead us in it! That path will bring about in our experience a sweet sanctification and separation to Christ and his ways. 'I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known.'

Now there is a going on in this, for there are many paths and many experiences of which we may yet still be ignorant. We need the Lord to fulfil this precious word toward us: 'I will lead them in paths that they have not known.' There are many things yet to be revealed, but we will go a little further.

'I will make darkness light before them.' First we will look a little at the darkness. O the days of darkness are many. There are many things that appear dark and God's people have to walk the darkest paths alone. We are not promised that it will be always daytime, and it may be that many are struggling, striving and labouring in the dark, yet, (very much so), groping for the wall as the blind. We want the Lord to make darkness light. It may be that you will have to wait a very long time before you get that degree and measure of light that you would love to have, but there are sweet promises in God's Word. "At evening time it shall be light." (Zechariah 14:7) Some indeed are favoured with a comfortable measure and degree of light early in their experience. With others it is quite the opposite; they have to wait a long season before they get the blessed in-shining of the glorious Sun of Righteousness. Christ is his people's light and he it is and he alone that can make darkness light before them.

I want to stay a moment upon that which is of the greatest importance in regard to our souls, then to look a little at those things which are circumstantial. This darkness: just to enlarge upon one or two branches in regard to experience. Has election ever been a very dark doctrine to us? We need light on it. O who can give us to understand the glory of this doctrine unless God makes the dark things light to us!

Is it a dark word to us? It is in God's Word, it is Scriptural and in the Bible from beginning to end. How can we understand the depth and extent and the vital realisation of it? We cannot, and we need the Lord to make it light. You may look at it and study and read about the glorious doctrine of predestination, but it is all darkness until the Lord makes darkness light before us. Again, we may read of the precious and blessed doctrine of justification, but as to any understanding thereof until the Lord reveals it, it is dark. O to have a sacred, precious, personal experience and knowledge of it! We also need the Lord to make it light to us, that we may truly believe and perceive that there is such a thing as adoption—that the Lord has a people whom he has loved, children he has chosen. It is all so dark until the Lord makes darkness light before us.

How often one and another may be constrained to say unto the Lord, 'I am so ignorant, *so ignorant*, so blind! I need thee to give me light, make these dark things light to me.' It may be too that there are seasons when we have a measure of light, then darkness comes on again, things become misty, and sight seems to get more dim. In the Epistle of Peter we read of those who could not see afar off. 'They were blind, although not totally so, but purblind, short sighted. (2 Peter 1:9) They needed the Lord to clear their dim sight that they might see afar off, clear their misty eyes, make darkness light before them. They were walking in spiritual darkness in their feelings. They were ignorant and needed the Lord to do these things for them, to fulfil this promise, 'I will make darkness light before them.' 'I will do it; I am abundantly able to do so.'

Now briefly on the matter as it is applicable to providence. Have we got some dark matter in our experience somewhere? It is very dark, we cannot see any light, and it seems to get darker. There may be a number of paths set before us and we hardly know which one to take. But the Lord will make it light before us. One good minister once said, 'If there is more than one path which seems to open up, take the darkest one, it is sure to be more right than the rest.' How we need the Lord to make darkness light! 'Daylight will spring up at last,' says the hymn writer. The Lord will command his light in the daytime; it will not always be night. There will not always be darkness if we are among these characters. The Lord will make his light to shine presently and how blessed that light will be! One glimpse of this divine light puts everything right in a moment, does it not? All the shades of darkness flee and all is light and we are amazed sometimes that we could not see it previously. But O it is the want of this light! But he has promised to make darkness light before them.

'And crooked things straight.' I have no doubt whatsoever that every exercised child of God, every true believer, has a crook in his lot somewhere or other. This is the appointed way for his people. It may be there are many things that are crooked, and who can make that straight which he has made crooked? Many crooked things there are in regard to our spiritual experiences, there may be many things which we cannot lay straight, many things that seem dark, we cannot see our signs, our evidences. We cannot see our way, we cannot see the will of the Lord, everything seems to be crooked and opposite to what we had hoped and expected. There may be a promise of God toward us and instead of the fulfilment of that promise everything seems to go so awry, so crooked. Now this is the way and the only way whereby we shall be brought to experience the power, wisdom, goodness and love of the Lord in making our crooked things straight. Has he ever made anything straight for us? As you look back over your past experience, has he ever appeared? Something that may have been crooked for years, has the day come when the Lord put it straight? Nobody else could, it was beyond the power of man. It may be you are sorely tempted with regard to a certain matter and there may be many things, perhaps in providence, where everything seems crooked, but my friends, the day will come when everything will be right. With an exercised child of God the day will come when he will be constrained to say at last, 'Nothing was wrong, all has been right.' I well remember the word of a dear dying saint, as that godly man looked over his earthly career, all the way the Lord had led him, and he said, 'The way has been straight, all the crookedness has been in me; the Lord has not done anything wrong, it has been a straight way.' On his deathbed he said, 'I would not have one thing altered.'

The Lord can make the crooked straight, and here is the promise for God's people: 'I will make ... crooked things straight.' How straight he makes them when he brings us to see the glory and wonder and perfection and beauty of his will, and brings our wills to be in perfect and sweet acquiescence with his! That puts it straight. Well, this is the promise, 'I will make ... crooked things straight.'

Now just in closing: 'These things will I do.' O what a promise! If you know something of the exercise, if you can go back to the beginning and say this, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see," (John 9:25) you are one of these people, are you not? And one of those to whom the Lord has spoken these words, 'These things will I do unto them and not forsake them.' He will not forsake his own work, he will not forsake his own people. It is an oft repeated promise: 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, world without end.' Under no circumstances, not for any reason, not upon any pretence whatsoever, no, 'I will not forsake them.'

Well, may we be favoured and blessed to really feel that this God is our God and that we are the people with whom he is dealing so mercifully and graciously, and that he will indeed fulfil his precious Word toward us.

This is such a comprehensive and large and beautiful subject, but may the very brief hints be some help to our poor hearts and encourage us to wait upon the Lord to do for us what he has promised to do for his people. The Lord add his blessing.

Amen.