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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill, on
Sunday evening, July 19th, 1953

"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 v.16

You remember on one occasion during our Lord's ministry upon earth certain of the Pharisees said, "Are we blind also?", and the Lord said, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth". It is far better to be confessing our blindness and our ignorance than to be pretending to know a great deal when we know nothing at all aright. There are some who boast great things, pretend to great knowledge of gospel mysteries, yet with all their pretensions know nothing at all in reality, and their pretending to know so much and to see so much only heightens their guiltiness. The hymn-writer says,

"Better a babe that would be wise,
Than those who mind high things,
Whose long profession scorns advice
Those old and foolish kings".

There are one or two narratives in the New Testament that, to me, have seemed very full of teaching in this matter. We think first of all, of the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, how that when Philip said to him, "Understandest thou what thou readest?", he answered "How can I, except some man should guide me?". He very frankly confessed his ignorance, he did not pretend to know anything, he did not try, in pride of heart, to cover up his ignorance, but he frankly owned it. O what a hopeful case! and what a good issue the case had! How that man came under the blessing of God!

Then you remember the man who had been born blind, and his eyes had been opened by the Lord, and because he would confess what Christ had done for him and would not be beaten out of it, they had cast him out of the synagogue. Jesus knew that they had cast him out, and when he had found him said, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" And the man replied, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" He did not pretend to knowledge which he did not possess, but frankly owned his ignorance and his limitations. See what a good issue his case had. The Lord said to him, "Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee", and with those words went such light and power into the man's soul, that he said, "Lord, I believe", and he worshipped him. The apostle says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him". O may the Lord give us a child-like simplicity, make us willing to be taught,

willing to confess what know-nothings we really are, that we know nothing as we ought to know it, and that we are absolutely dependent upon the precious teaching of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus said of the Spirit of Truth, "He shall guide you into all truth", and there is no right soul-profitting entrance into any truth of the gospel save by the leading of the Holy Spirit. You may gather together a quantity of gospel notions, "Good creeds may stock your head around, but in your heart no faith be found". But better far be feelingly destitute of any right knowledge, and be crying out to the Lord, "What I see not, teach thou me", than make a mere pretence.

Well, here the Lord has a kindly word for these blind people, these people who feel like those described in the Word, "We grope for the wall like the blind;.. we are in desolate places as dead men". Do you know what it is to feel that you are groping after something that you cannot get at? that you want the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and yet can by no means attain to it? The more you strive after the knowledge of Him, the further you feel from it, you "grobe for the wall like the blind". Well, the Lord has spoken a kindly word to these blind people, these people who feel and confess how blind they are, how ignorant they are, how unbelieving they are, how unlike true christians they are. "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not", O He will in infinite compassion, in tender mercy take these people in hand, these blind folk who have no one to care for them. It is the Lord Himself who says, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not", and thus they will be encouraged to seek His guidance. "Lord, I am blind, be Thou my sight". "I will bring the blind" - no one else can do it; the Lord speaks of some as "blind leaders of the blind", and if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch. It is unwise to follow the guidance of man, the only safe guidance is that of the Lord Himself. The best of men may err, even apostles make mistakes in some cases. We read how one baptised Simon Magus, and a number of false characters managed to deceive the Lord's apostles, but the Lord is not deceived, and He is a safe guide. May we then be helped to commit ourselves to Him for guidance.

"I", said He, "will bring the blind by a way that they knew not". Now a blind man may get on tolerably well in a way with which he is familiar, in a district which he knows well. I remember once when in London trying to find a certain place, I asked two or three people who could see, if they could direct me to the place, but none of them could help me. At last a blind man who was passing heard what I wanted, and he gave me directions, which I followed and soon reached the place I wanted. But if that same blind man had been put down in a place that he was not familiar with, he would have been quite unable to guide his own steps, let alone give

directions to another. So you see the force of that "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not", an unfamiliar way, a way that they are complete strangers to. This way in which the Lord will lead the blind, is the gospel way. We have been singing of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Way, and He says of Himself, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by Me". And these blind people who feel and know and confess their blindness, who do not pretend to be anything but poor blind people, He will guide them, He will bring them this way, a way which they knew not, a way in which they could not possibly walk but by His leading, they shall

"Walk in Christ the living Way,
And fight and win the well-fought day".

"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not". O what a strange way it is when the Spirit of God is leading a poor sinner to Christ causing him to walk in Him, what a strange way it is! What contradictions a man has to meet with, what a puzzle it all is to him until the Lord interprets the matter to him!

"How strange is the course that a Christian must steer,
How perplexed is the path he must tread!
The hope of his happiness rises from fear,
And his life he receives from the dead".

A strange path the believer has to walk in, a strange path one who is seeking after Jesus has to walk in. One said,

"His fairest pretensions must wholly be waived,
And his best resolutions be crossed;
Nor can he expect to be perfectly saved,
Till he finds himself utterly lost".

This is the way in which the Lord leads His people, a way in which self is being continually brought to nothing that the Lord Jesus Christ alone may be exalted in that day.

As a man is led by the Spirit thus to seek the Lord, what oppositions he meets with! He meets with the opposition of his own carnal mind, the carnal mind is enmity, and he meets with the opposition of the devil. He often will say, "all these things are against me". He is often brought into places where he knows not what to do, where he feels completely beaten, where he has to suffer the loss of all things, the things that he fondly clung to and built his hopes upon all have to go. This is a strange way to him, to have to part with all his hopes of being saved by his own righteousness, justified by anything in himself or done by him, to have to part with all that, to be brought down to this, to be a poor sinner and nothing at all,

"A limping beggar clothed with rags,
Disgraceful and forlorn".

"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not". This is a very humbling way, a way in which there is a continual mortification of the pride of a man's heart.

"Jesus is the way of strength,
Yet the strong this way can't come".

Human strength has to be brought down to nothing, out of weakness His people are made strong. The Lord helps the infirmities of His people, not some fancied strength or ability which they have, but their infirmities, and they are brought to know something of this, (as Hart says) "Always be receiving strength and yet be always weak". "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not", and instead of the light which they hoped would break in upon them, they often find the darkness deepens. Instead of finding as they fondly hoped that they get better and better by slow degrees, they find they get worse and worse. Instead of being led into peace they find what Hezekiah found, "Behold for peace I had great bitterness". A strange path this to walk in. O how it completely baffles the wisdom of the flesh. A poor man cannot see what the Lord is doing, yet what the Lord is doing is this, cutting a man off from everything as a ground of hope, that he may build only upon Christ. There is a digging through all the rubbish of nature, that no rubbish of nature may stand between the soul and Christ.

"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, I will lead them in paths that they have not known", paths so strange to them that they know not which way to turn; they will need to have that word fulfilled to them that Isaiah heard, "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it", and they will for this have to wait upon God. It is not at all a bad thing to be so ignorant, so unable to guide your own course as to be driven to wait upon God continually for His merciful guidance, for His strong and kindly arm. We sometimes sing,

"Guide me O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land,
I am weak but thou art mighty,
Hold me with thy powerful hand".

O how strange this all is to the soul who is walking in this path! He cannot understand it, he is utterly perplexed, but the Lord says, "I will bring the blind", and when the Lord has matters in hand He is sure to lead to a good issue. Perplexed a poor soul may be, emptied from vessel to vessel, and his fondest hopes may be torn away from him, but the Lord will bring, the Lord will lead. Sometimes we sing a very precious hymn in which are these words,

"Foolish and impotent and blind,
Lead me the way they saints have known,
Bring me where I my heaven may find,
The heaven of loving thee alone".

"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, I will lead them in paths that they have not known." You look at the path that Bunyan had to walk in, and many other of God's saints who have been made wonderfully useful to the church of the living God. Think what Bunyan had to pass through, what a scene of terrific temptation, a way that he knew not, paths that he did not know, O how the poor man suffered being tempted, tempted of the devil, driven hither and thither, scattered in his feelings, in a path he did not know. He could not tell what the Lord was doing, yet the Lord was all the time wisely ordering things for him. He sat as a refiner and purifier of silver, He was accomplishing His own gracious purposes in a man who was destined to be a most useful servant in his day. Bunyan was able to record how the Lord brought him out, how He brought him out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, and set his feet upon a rock and established his going, put a new song in his mouth, even praise to his God. That long season, three years it was, of temptation was of immense service to John Bunyan, for it was the means of giving him an understanding of the cases of other tempted people. You remember when Bunyan applied to an ancient christian, hoping to get some help, some encouragement, instead of getting help and encouragement, the man who seemed to be a stranger to much temptation, said he thought he must have committed the unpardonable sin. Now Bunyan would have been no better counsellor than that, one may say, had it not been for his experience of such terrific temptation. It had a great deal to do with making him the good servant of Jesus Christ that he was, enabling him to speak for the comfort of God's people, and "he being dead, yet speaketh". So the Lord is accomplishing His own purposes, He is teaching His people, here a little and there a little, precept upon precept, line upon line. He is teaching them and not one line is in vain.

"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, I will lead them in paths that they have not know, I will make darkness light before them". O how this answers exactly to what they feel to need. "Who is among you", says the Lord, "who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon His God". And you know, one mark of those who fear God is that they dread a false light, they want nothing but the true light, that light that comes from God Himself, which God alone can shed upon their path and upon their case. This is what they want, and therefore until they get it they walk in darkness and they dread the thought of kindling a fire of their own, and walking in the light of their fire and of the sparks which they have kindled, for they know from the word of God that the ultimate end of such

is that they shall lie down in sorrow.

"I will make darkness light before them". They come into dark dispensations, "They cannot see the cloud cleared up nor know which path to take". Soul matters look dark, and God only can make that darkness light. When it is darkness in soul matters, when a poor man can get no light upon his case, when he can say, "Of light not a beam, of love not a spark", O how he wants the light to shine. 'Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me, cause thy face to shine, and I shall be saved'. Do you know what it is to long for the light of His countenance? that He would cause His face to shine upon you? "I will make darkness light". And one said,

"Sudden He stands confessed,
We look, and all is light"

O what a glad day it is, what a blessed day, a day to be remembered when the Lord says in effect, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee", when He shines and dispels the darkness, when he bids the darkened cloud withdraw, gives that faith that "climbs the ladder Jacob saw". Nothing meets the soul's case fully but the revelation of Jesus Christ. "I will make darkness light before thee". Then see how dark Jacob's path was providentially. Said he, "All these things are against me", and everything looked as black as black could be, but the Lord made darkness light before him, in due time matters were cleared up and Jacob's gloomy conclusions were proved to be unfounded. Joseph was yet alive, and Jacob's eyes were favoured to look again upon his son and to rejoice in his son's prosperity. He saw that the hand of God had been working in all his seemingly adverse circumstances, and how wonderful he saw the work of God to be - "the angel that redeemed me from all evil" -. So it is with God's people as the dealings of God with them are very strange and seem very contrary, they are utterly perplexed and know not how to interpret their case, but when the Lord shines upon their path then everything appears in perfect order,

"Wisdom and mercy guide my way,
Shall I resist them both?
A poor blind creature of a day,
And crushed before the moth?"

"I will make darkness light before them". Sometimes He does that by speaking a word or applying a promise, a promise that exactly meets the case, that has in its bosom just that blessing and that mercy and that grace that they so sorely stand in need of. Wonderful it is when "some sweet promise warms our heart and cheers us under every care", for it is the Spirit's gracious part "to take that word and fix it there". "I will make darkness light", said the Lord, and so He causes His word to shine with a clear and sweet light upon a poor sinner's dark path, and the man looks,

and there is a springing up of hope, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance".

"I will make darkness light before them and crooked things straight". Do you know what crooked things are? have you a crook in your lot?, a thing that you cannot straighten? for who can make straight that which God has made crooked? Now if you have a crook in your lot, it is very important that you should be enabled to acknowledge that God has made it. 'This is God's handiwork, God has put this crook into my lot'. "He performeth the thing that is appointed for me, and many such things are with Him", and if He puts a crook in the lot of any of His children He has a wise purpose to serve. He designs their profit in it, and His glory. But this crooked thing is meant to be crooked; His people are meant to feel it is a crook; a cross is meant to be a cross, it has to be a cross to do the work God has designed it shall do. The crook has to be a crooked thing that God may exercise the soul in that way that He designs it to be exercised. Now it is a great thing, I say, to see the hand of God in a crook, whatever may be the secondary cause of it. You may look to this person or the other, you may look to this secondary cause and that secondary cause but we make a sad mistake if we look not beyond all these causes to God Himself. Job was right when he said, "He performeth the thing that is appointed for me and many such things are with Him". Now, He who makes the crook alone can make the matter straight, and I will tell you one way in which He does it, and that is, He reconciles a poor man to his crook, as I think Thomas Boston puts it in His "Crook in the Lot", "He makes the mind even with the crook", and when a man is reconciled to the crook, it ceases to be a crook.

"And all is right that seems most wrong,
If it be His sweet will".

Thus He makes the crooked things straight. Besides that, the Lord has a wonderful way in His own time of making crooked things straight. There may be a very crooked person you have to deal with, and many of God's people have found that the Lord is able to make crooked people straight. A man may have to work side by side with another who is a constant cause of annoyance to him, is continually seeking to injure him or to cause him discomfort and distress, but the Lord is able when a man's ways please Him, to make even his enemies to be at peace with him. Sometimes those who have been the cause of the greatest annoyance to a child of God have been completely altered as to their attitude and have never been a trouble to them again. You remember the late Charles James of Sevenhampton. a little record of whom we published. One of his fellow workmen used to annoy him very considerably by following with a truck very closely and

pushing upon his heels. After a while of enduring this annoyance in silence the two men were together at dinner time, and this man said to Charles James, 'You have got something that I have not got'. 'What do you mean?' said James. 'Why, look at the way I've treated you and yet you've done nothing and said nothing.' And from that day the man never ill-treated him again. The Lord took that crooked man in hand and straightened him as far as Charles James was concerned. Wonderful is His work, with His people and the crook will only last so long as the Lord sees it necessary for their profit, that they may be well exercised thereby, that they may have an errand to the throne of grace, that they may have a proper sense of their need of grace; for when one has got a crook in his lot, he needs a good deal of grace to enable him to walk rightly under it. God's people, as they have these crooks and crosses, are caused to be silent when they realise how sinful they are under the weight and incommo- dity of them. O how rebellion arises, how unbelief works even in the best of men and they find ill-will against their fellows and a whole host of things. All these things become a man's grief and are turned into confess- ion, "Lord, do help me to walk under my daily cross in a manner becoming godliness, enable me to walk believably and submissively under it'. Ah, this is a good exercise, and that cross is not doing a man much harm, that crook is not really hurting you much if it is a means of thus drawing you near to God. This Asaph found when he confessed, "It is good for me to draw near to God". That which was the occasion of his drawing near to God was a very uncomfortable experience, very unpleasant to him, but see how God made darkness light before him and crooked things straight. Every- thing that seemed so crooked was straightened out beautifully before his view. He saw his portion was in heaven even the Lord Himself "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee". Wonderful it is when the Lord gives His people a sight of Himself as their portion. How that leads them above their worries, their anxieties, their crosses, their perplexities, their annoyances, leads them completely out of them and enables them to rejoice in the Lord as their portion with joy unspeakable at times, and full of glory.

"And crooked things straight, these things will I do unto them and not forsake them", and the Lord has said it, and "His are faithful words and true". "These things will I do unto them". These poor blind people, these helpless people who can do nothing for themselves and are quite unable to straighten their own crooks, and are often at their wit's end "these things will I do unto them and not forsake them". O what a great word is that "and not forsake them". "O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me". The Lord has said Israel shall not be forsaken of his God, and the apostle reminds us of an Old Testament promise when he writes, "For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee".

May the Lord enable us to build our hopes upon His word, may He lead us to Himself in our times of perplexity, when we are walking in darkness and have no light, when we cannot find our path, know not which way to take nor what to do. May the Lord lead us to Himself for direction, for strength, for light, for teaching, for all we stand in need of, for He is all-sufficient.

May the Lord add His blessing.

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