

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

EYES OPENED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And God opened her eyes.”—Genesis xxi. 19.

THERE was a well of water close to Hagar all the while though she saw it not. God did not cleave the earth and cause new waters to gush forth, nor was there need. The well was there already, but for all practical purposes it might not have been there, for she could not see it. The water was spent in her bottle, her child was dying with thirst, and she herself was ready to faint, and yet the cool spring was bubbling up hard by the spot. It was needful that she should see the well, quite as needful as that the well should be there, and therefore the Lord in great compassion led her to see it, or as the text puts it, “God opened her eyes.”

This was a small matter compared with the creation of a new fountain, but our God does very little things as well as very great things when there is need for them. The same God who divides the Red Sea, and makes the Jordan to be dried up, opens a poor woman's eyes. The same God who came with all his chariots of fire to Paran, and with all his holy ones to Sinai, and made the mountain utterly to smoke in his presence, is he of whom we read, “and God opened Hagar's eyes.” The infinite Lord is at home in doing little things; he counts the stars, but he also numbers the hairs of our heads. Remember that the same God who moulded the orb on which we dwell also fashions every tiny dewdrop, and he who makes the lightning bolt to fly through the midst of heaven wings every butterfly and guides every minnow in the brooklet. He prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah, but he also prepared a little worm to destroy the gourd. How condescending he is, since he carefully attends to minor matters for his children, and not only kills for them the fatted calf, but puts shoes on their feet. Sometimes very little things become absolutely necessary, for they act as the hinges of history, the pivots upon which the future turns. How frequently the whole course of a man's career has been affected by a moment's thought. The word of a child has affected the destiny of an empire: the chance expression of a speaker, as men talk of chance, has fired races with a new passion, and changed times and shaken kingdoms.

The Lord worketh gloriously by agents and events small and despised. God, by opening Hagar's eyes, secured the existence of the Ishmaelitic race, which even to this day remaineth : from the little cometh the great.

There may be persons present who want but very little to enable them to enter into eternal life : they need only that their eyes should be opened. May the Lord grant them that favour. O that he may now bid many a Hagar see his salvation. Why should the thirsty souls wait any longer? Everything is ready : they are on the borders of salvation, but they need that their eyes should be opened. Our subject at this time shall be *the opening of eyes*, taking rather a wide range, because it is a wide subject, and hoping that both to those who see and to those who cannot see there may come a gracious opening of the spiritual eye.

I. Our first head shall be that IF OUR EYES WERE FURTHER OPENED THE RESULT TO ANY ONE OF US WOULD BE VERY REMARKABLE. We are at present limited in our range of sight. This is true of our natural or physical vision, of our mental vision, and of our spiritual vision ; and in each case when the range of sight is enlarged very remarkable discoveries are made. God has been pleased to open the natural eyes of mankind by the invention of optical instruments. What a discovery it was when first of all certain pieces of glass were arranged in connection with each other, and men began to peer into the stars ! What a change has come over the knowledge of our race by the invention of the telescope ! How much of truly devout, adoring thought, and of deep, intense, unutterable reverence has been born into the world by the Lord's having in this sense opened men's eyes ! When he turned his telescope upon the nebulae, and discovered that these were innumerable stars, what a hymn of praise must have burst from the reverent astronomer's heart. How infinite thou art, most glorious Lord ! What wonders hast thou created ! Let thy name be had in reverence for ever and ever.

Equally marvellous was the effect upon human knowledge when the microscope was invented. We could never have imagined what wonders of skill and of taste would be revealed by the magnifying glass, and what marvels of beauty would be found compressed within a space too small to measure. Who dreamed that a butterfly's wing would display art and wisdom, and a delicacy never to be rivalled by human workmanship. The most delicate work of art is rough, crude, raw compared with the commonest object in nature ; the one is the production of man, the other the handiwork of God. Spend an evening with the microscope, and if your heart be right, you will lift your eye away from the glass to heaven, and exclaim, "Great God, thou art as wonderful in the little as thou art in the great, and as much to be praised for the minute as for the magnificent." While we say, "Great art thou, O God, for thou madest the great and wide sea, and the leviathan whose lot it is to play therein"; we feel that we can also say, "Great art thou, O Lord, for thou madest the drop of water and hast filled it with living things innumerable." Our physical eyes thus opened by either glass reveal strange marvels, and we may infer from this fact that the opening of our mental and spiritual eyes will discover to us equal wonders in other domains, and thus increase our reverence and love towards God.

Suppose, dear brethren, that our eyes could be opened as to all *our past lives*. We have seen them, for we have travelled through them; but it was very cloudy when I went that way; I do not know how it was with you. None of us have our eyes thoroughly opened yet; we have hitherto been travelling through life as men who journey in a mist. Even the things which have come close to us, and have most affected us, have been hidden, as it were, in that which is not light, but darkness visible. — And now, if we could look back upon the whole length of life, forty, or fifty, or sixty, or seventy years, with our eyes opened, how singular it would look! Our childhood—how different that period would now appear with God's light upon it. Those early struggles for a livelihood: we thought them hard, but we already begin to see what discipline there was in them, and how necessary they were for us. Those losses and crosses,—why even with our present partial sight we can see how much they were for our good. Yet there remain in life some singular things which we cannot as yet explain. Why was the favourite son taken away just when all our hopes were to have been fulfilled in him? Why was the husband struck down when the little children were so dependent? Why was the wife removed when a mother's care was most needed? Why fell that daughter sick so suddenly? Why were we ourselves balked in the moment of success? If our eyes could be opened so that we could see what would have been if things had gone differently we should all of us thank God that our lives were ordered as they have been. Have you never heard of one who was grievously lamenting the death of his favourite son, and falling asleep dreamed that he saw his boy alive again and that he beheld the life which that son would have led. It was such a life that he wept in his dream, and waking he blessed God that his son could never act according to what he had seen in vision; it was better that he should be dead. Repine no more, my sorrowing friend, for that which you would have kept in your bosom might have turned into a viper, that which you thought a treasure might have burned in your heart like coals of fire. Providence has ordered all things wisely, and if our eyes were opened we should bow in adoring reverence and magnify the God who hath done all things well. Our vision will be strengthened one day, so that we shall see the end from the beginning, and then we shall understand that the Lord maketh all things work together for good to them that love him.

And now suppose, again, our eyes should be opened upon *the future*. Ay, would you not like to spy into destiny? My curiosity is, probably, as great as yours, but still it is balanced by another faculty, and I protest that if I could see into to-morrow I would refuse to look. There is a desire in man to know what lines are written for him in the book of fate—whether they shall be bright or dark. Ah, dear friend, if your eyes could be opened as to all that is to happen, what would you do? If you were wise, and knew your future, you would commit it unto God: commit it to him though you do not know it. If you were wise you would wish to spend that future in his service if you knew it: spend it in his service though it is hidden from you. If you knew what would happen you would feel great need for faith; you do not know what will happen, but your need of faith is precisely the same. Trust

you in God, come what may. This thing is certain—that to live unsaved, and unforgiven, is a very dangerous condition; God help you to get out of it at once by flying to Jesus for present salvation, and finding it on the spot. If you knew the future, it might make you idle, but it ought to make you diligent; if you knew the future, it might make you vain, but it should make you humble; if you knew the future, it might make you despondent, but it should make you trust. At any rate, knowing nothing at all about it, obey the voice of the Holy Ghost, who saith, “Commit thy way unto the Lord: trust also in him and he shall bring it to pass: and he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.”

If our eyes were opened, again, on another point, as to *the existence of angels*, we should see marvels. We will enter into no speculations; but what a sight would be before us if suddenly we could behold all the creatures that are round about us. The prophet of old prayed for a young man that his eyes might be opened, and immediately he saw horses of fire and chariots of fire round about Elisha. So do angels encircle the people of God. “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him.” “He shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways: they shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them that are heirs of salvation?” Millions of spiritual creatures walk this earth, both when we sleep and when we wake, and, if we were more like those pure spirits and more familiar with their Master, we should feel more gratitude to him for setting them round about us. Fear not, you are not alone, O child of God; your Father never calls off your body-guard. The evil spirit comes to tempt you, but the Lord has set his angel-sentinel to keep watch and ward that no ill may approach you. If the Lord opened the eyes of his greatly beloved servants to see how many of these mighty intelligences are silently guarding them, they would cease to complain of loneliness while in the midst of such a thronging ministry of willing friends.

And what, once more, if your eyes could be opened to look into *heaven*? Where it is we do not know. It is not very far away. At any rate, the glorified know what we do here, for they rejoice over one sinner that repents. Evidently, too, it takes not long to travel thither, for it was eventide when Jesus told the thief that he should be with him in paradise that very day, and you may be sure he was there. Oh, that we could see the place of unveiled glory and unmingled bliss as we shall see it in an instant when our Father’s messenger, called death, shall strike the scales from our eyes, or rather, remove these dim optics with which we blunderingly see, and let our naked spirit gaze on the reality of things without these hindering eyes, which do but inform us of their outward show. Oh, what glories shall we then see! What splendour, above the light of the sun! What music, sweeter than harpers harping with their harps! What glory! Solomon knew not the like of this. There is the light of all lights, the delight of all delights, the heaven of heavens, the sun of our soul, our all in all,—Jesus upon the throne! What bliss to be with him—with him for ever and ever. Break, thou eternal morning! Break c’en now! Would God that, at

least for once, till the day break and the shadows flee away, we had our eyes opened to see the glories beyond; then this poor world would be despised by us, we should forget its pains and pleasures, we should rise superior to all its influences, and we should rise to be heavenly ourselves. Wait awhile, brethren. Wait for a very little while. Wait a "wee and dinna weary," as the Scotchwoman said, and you shall see it all.

"Just when thou wilt, O Bridegroom, say,
 'Rise up, my love, and come away!'
 Open to me thy golden gate
 Just when thou wilt, or soon or late."

So far, I have wandered from the text, but now in my second head I will come back to it.

II. IN SOME THINGS OUR EYES MUST BE OPENED. Those I have spoken about are desirable in a measure, but these are absolutely necessary. For instance, as to the divine salvation, our eyes must be opened. Hagar's case is a strange one. Picture it. She is thirsty, and her boy is dying: her instincts are quickened by her love to her child, and yet she cannot see a well of water. There it is! Close to her! Do you not see it? Just there. She cannot see it till her eyes are opened. It is as plain as a pikestaff, but she does not perceive it. Now, this is a graphic representation of the position of many a seeking sinner. There is the way of salvation, and, if there is anything plain in the world, it is that road of life. The act that twice two make four is not plainer than—believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Look unto the Son of God and live: what can be more simple? And yet nobody ever did understand the doctrine of "believe and live" till God opened his eyes. The well is there, but the thirsty soul cannot see it. Christ is there, but the sinner cannot see him. There is the fountain filled with blood, but he does not know how to wash in it. There stand the words, "Believe and live," simple words that need no explanation, legible by their own light, and so plain that the wayfaring man, though a fool, may comprehend them; yet, till the eternal light flashes upon the darkened eyeballs of the sinner, he cannot, and he will not perceive the self-evident truth.

Whence this inability to see? I suppose Hagar's eye was somewhat darkened by her grief. She was broken-hearted, poor woman, and therefore her eye was not so clear as usual. So some souls have such grief for sin, such sorrow for having offended God, such fear of wrath to come, that they cannot perceive the truth which would comfort them. What aileth thee, poor soul? What aileth thee? It is well that thou dost grieve for sin, but Christ has come to put it away. It is well that thou dost mourn thy lost estate, but Christ has come to save thee, and there he is right before thee if thou canst but see him.

It was unbelief, too, that darkened Hagar's eyes. God had appeared to her years before, you remember, when she was in very much the same plight, and he had then given her a promise that he would make of her son that was to be born a great nation. She might have reflected that this could never happen unless the boy's life was preserved, and since he could not live without a drink of water, she should have felt confident that water would be forthcoming. She was unbelieving, but it is not ours to

judge her ; for, alas, we are unbelieving too. Anxious soul, is that thy case ? Oh, if thou couldst believe ! Truly, thou hast good cause. It should not be hard to believe what God says, for he cannot lie ; but, still, unbelief darkens many an eye.

There are many who cannot see because of self-conceit. When great self feasts his eye upon his own good works or religious performances, of course he cannot see the way of salvation by Christ alone. The Lord take these scales from thy eyes, poor sinner, for self is a great maker of darkness. Nothing more surely holds a soul in gloom than a conceit of its own powers. How I wish I could so put the gospel as to win men from self. I preach the plan of salvation as plainly as ever I can. I use very homely metaphors. I have sometimes even employed what the more refined call vulgar expressions : I would be more vulgar still, if I could thereby help a soul to see Christ. I tell you Jesus is near to you, and within your reach, and that salvation is close at your foot. You have but to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved. But I know that, after all is said and done, if you ever see Christ it will be because the Holy Spirit opens your eyes. I cannot open them, nor any other mortal man ; for since the world began it hath not been known that any man has opened the eyes of one that was born blind. Oh, that the Lord would be pleased now to open the eye of every sinner here to see salvation in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

III. I must leave that point, and finish with one more. IN OUR PRESENT CASE IT IS VERY DESIRABLE THAT OUR EYES SHOULD BE OPENED. To many it is imperatively needful at this very moment, for if not now recovered from their blindness they will die in their sins. In this great throng there are some to whom it is pre-eminently desirable that their eyes should be opened at once to see what the inevitable result of their present mode of life will be, for their blindness is the source of great peril to them. That young gentleman who is spending his money upon the racecourse and loose society, I should think he might see with half an eye what will come of his conduct. The devil never runs express trains to hell : there is no need for it, for you can go there fast enough by race-horses. The turf has furnished to many an express method of ruining their fortunes and their souls. Get into that line of things, and all it means, and all the society that goes with it, and your future needs no prophet. Many young men do not think till it is too late to think. I wish I could put a cool hand upon that hot brow and stop that young man and make him stand still and consider. O that the Lord would open his eyes. And that young woman who has begun to look (not much, as yet) on what is called gaiety. Ah, the Lord stay thee, my sister, and open thy eyes ere thou goest one step farther, for one step farther may be thy ruin. And that tradesman who has begun—no, he has not quite begun as yet,—but he is thinking about a course of trade which will land him in something more shameful than bankruptcy, I pray the Lord to open his eyes that he may see matters in the true light. I see a man before me who is about to commit moral suicide. O for a gleam of light just now, and a touch of that finger which can open blind eyes. I cannot particularize and go into every case, but I have upon me a strong impression that I am speaking

to some young man whose future depends upon his prudent pausing and careful consideration before he puts his foot down again. One step more, and you fall. I beseech you, stand still and hear what God would speak to you now. Turn thee, turn thee from thy sin and seek thy Saviour now, and he will be found of thee at once, and there shall be a life honourable and bright before thee to his glory. But if thou go one step farther in the way in which the tempter's charms, like siren music, would entice thee, thou art lost for ever. God help thee, therefore, to stop, and may it be said of thee, "God opened his eyes."

Now, leaving all these themes of thought, I would remind you that we are about to gather at the communion table and there we would sit with opened eyes. Those who love the Lord cannot endure to sit as blind men in his palace, but they long for all the sight which grace can give them.

First, we would have opened eyes that we may *see Jesus to be very near us*. Do not think of him just now as if he were far away in heaven. He is there in his glorious personality, but his spiritual presence is here also. Did he not say, "Lo, I am with you alway;" and "If I go away I will come again"? He abides with us by his Spirit for ever. Come, let us sit while this sacramental feast is going on, and sing—

"Amidst us our Belovèd stands,
And bids us view his piercèd hands;
Points to his wounded feet and side,
Blest emblems of the Crucified.

"If now with eyes defiled and dim,
We see the signs but see not *him*,
Oh may his love the scales displace,
And bid us see *him* face to face!

"Our former transports we recount,
When with him in the holy mount,
These cause our souls to thirst anew,
His marr'd but lovely face to view."

We desire that you may have your eyes opened to see *what you are in Christ*. You complain that you are black in yourselves; but you are most fair in him. You lament that you are so wandering: yes, but you are fixed in him. You mourn that you are so weak; yet you are strong in him. A good man went the other day to visit a poor child who was dying, a child whom the Lord had taught many things; and the dear little fellow as he put out his wasted hand said, "So strong in Christ." He could hardly lift a finger, and yet he knew that his weakness was clothed with power in Christ. We are poor puny things, but we can do all things through Christ. We are poor foolish things, but we are wise in Christ. We are good-for-nothing things, but yet we are so precious in Christ, so dear to God in Christ, as to be numbered with his jewels, and known as the Lord's peculiar portion. We are sinful creatures in ourselves, and yet we are perfect in Christ Jesus and complete in him. These are strong expressions, but as they are scriptural, they are assuredly true. How blessed we are in our covenant Head! The Lord open our eyes to see this.

Lastly, dear friend, may the Lord open your eyes to see *what you*

will be in him. Ah, what will you be in Christ? In a very little while we shall be with him. Many of our members have gone home to Jesus, and one very earnest brother, very diligent in working for the Master, a young man of whom we expected much, has been swept away by the receding tide while bathing in the sea, but he has gone to his rest, I doubt not. Older friends have also ascended to God just lately, rejoicing to enter into the joy of the Lord. Between now and next month's communion some of us will, probably, have departed to the Father. Let our eyes be opened to behold by faith the glory soon to be revealed. It may almost make you laugh for joy to think of your head wearing a crown—that poor head of yours. These poor aching knees, and weary feet, there will be no more toil for them. That poor scantily furnished room, and hard fare, and narrow means, and weary labour will all be exchanged for mansions of rest, bread of bliss, and new wine of delight. You know each pavement stone between here and your house, for you come so often to the Tabernacle, but you will be walking the streets of gold before long to the eternal temple above. Instead of noisy streets you will traverse paths of rest, amid the songs of seraphs and the psalms of the redeemed, and that, perhaps, within a month. Yes, in less than it takes the moon to fill her horns you shall be where the Lord God and the Lamb are the eternal light. Certain of us are nearer heaven than we think. Let our hearts dance for joy at the bare thought of such speedy felicity. Let us go on our way blessing and magnifying him who has opened our eyes to see the glory which he has prepared for them that love him, which shall be ours ere long.

God bless you for Christ's sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis xxi. 1—21.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK."—852, 785.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

TO MY FRIENDS IN ENGLAND,—Until yesterday the weather here has been so unsettled that it was not favourable to my complaint, but now I hope it has taken a turn for the better, and will be more suitable for rheumatic joints. It has taken me six weeks to get rid of the disease, and now I hope to spend the rest of my sojourn here in gathering strength. If it may please God to permit me to return in full vigour to my delightful work, I shall indeed rejoice. Till then be so good as to maintain by your prayers and liberality the good works over which I have so long presided, so that there may be no lack. College, Orphanage, Colportage, and Evangelists are all work, and must not be forgotten. May the Lord's own blessing rest on them all.

Yours heartily,

Mentone, February 28.

C. H. SPURGEON.