

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SCALES TAKEN FROM THE EYES.

A Sermon

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C. H. SPURGEON,

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“And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales.”—Acts xi. 18.

THIS means that the film upon Saul's eyes was comparable to the scales of a fish, or else that it fell off as scales might fall. When the blinding film was gone, light broke into the darkness of Saul. In different men, sin manifests its chief power in different parts of their nature. In the case of many, sin is most apparent in their eyes; that is to say, ignorance, error, and prejudice have injured their mental sight. Some have the withered hand of conscious inability, others have the deaf ear of mental obtuseness; but there are far more who hear the joyful sound, and display much energy, but they hear without understanding, and are zealous without knowledge, for they are blind. This was Saul's condition. He was thoroughly honest: we might say of his heart, when it was at its worst, that it was always true to its convictions. He was no deceiver, and no timeserver. He went in for what he believed to be right with all his might; lukewarmness and selfish policy were alien to his nature. He dashed with all his might against the doctrine of the cross because he thought it to be an imposition. His fault lay in his eyes, and so, when the eyes were set right, Saul was right. When he perceived that Jesus was, after all, the Messiah, the man became just as earnest a follower of Christ as before he had been a persecutor.

We will talk about scales falling from men's eyes. I want to address those who would be right if they knew how; who are earnest, but it is in the wrong direction, for they do not see the truth. If the Lord, in his infinite mercy, will but touch that sightless eyeball, and remove the film, so that they discern the

right way, they will follow it at once. May the Lord remove many scales while we are proceeding!

First, we will speak of *scales which men fail to perceive, because they are inside*. Secondly, we will show what makes these scales come to the outside so that men do perceive them; then, thirdly, what instrumentality the Lord uses to take these outside scales away; and, fourthly, what did Saul see when the scales were gone?

I. First, then, THERE ARE SCALES WHICH MEN DO NOT PERCEIVE.

Saul had scales upon his eyes when he was on the road to Damascus; but if you had looked at his face, he would have appeared to have as bright an eye as any man. Scales on his eyes! Why, he was a sharp-sighted philosopher, a Pharisee, and a teacher of others. He would not have believed you for a minute if you had said to him, "Saul, you are blind." Yet blind he was, for his eyes were shut up with inside scales,—the worst sort of scales that can possibly becloud the sight.

Saul had the scale of *self* to darken his eye. He had a great idea of Saul of Tarsus. If he had written down his own character, he would have begun it, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;" and then he would have gone on to tell of countless good works, and fastings, and prayers; and have finished with, "concerning zeal, persecuting the church." He was far too great in his own estimation to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. How could the Rabbi who sat at the feet of Gamaliel become a follower of the despised Galilean? Poor peasants might follow the man of Nazareth, but Doctor Saul of Tarsus,—a man so educated both in the knowledge of the Hebrew literature and of the Greek philosophy,—it was not likely that he would mingle with fishermen and peasants in adoring the Nazarene. This is the reason why a great many people cannot see the beauties of Christ, and cannot come to him that they might have life, namely, because they are so great in their own esteem. Ah, my lord, it might have been a good thing for you if you had been a pauper! Ah, good moralist, it might not be amiss for you if you would sit by the side of those who have lost character among men, and discover that, after all, there are not many shades of difference between you and them! Great "I" must fall before the great Saviour will be seen. When a man becomes nothing in his own estimation, then Jesus Christ becomes everything to him; but not till then. Self is an effectual darkener of the windows of the soul. How can men see the gospel while they see so much of themselves? With such a noble righteousness of their own to deck themselves with, is it likely that they will buy of Christ the fine white linen which is the righteousness of saints?

Another scale on Saul's inner eye was *ignorance*, and learned ignorance, too, which is by far the worst kind of ignorance. Saul knew everything but what he ought to have known; he was instructed in all other sorts of learning, but he did not know Christ. He had never studied the Lord's claim and character; he had picked up the popular rumours, and he had thought them to be sterling truth. Ah, had he known, poor soul, that Jesus of

Nazareth really was the Christ, he would never have haled men and women to prison; but the scale of ignorance was over his eyes. And how many there are, in this city of London, in what we call this "enlightened" nineteenth century, who know a great deal about a thousand things, but nothing about the one thing needful! They have never troubled to study that; and so, for lack of knowledge, they grope as the blind.

With ignorance generally goes another scale, namely, *prejudice*. The man who knows nothing about truth is usually the man who despises it most. He does not know, and does not want to know. "Don't tell me," he says, "don't tell me." He has nothing but a sneer for you when you have told him the truth to the best of your ability; the man has no candour, he has made up his mind, *he* has. Besides, his father before him was not of your religion, and do you think he is going to be a turncoat, and leave the old family faith? "Don't tell me," says he, "I don't want to know anything of your canting Methodism," or "Presbyterianism", or whatever it is that he likes to call it. He is *so* wise! He is wiser than seven men that can render a reason. O prejudice, prejudice, prejudice, how many hast thou destroyed! Men who might have been wise have remained fools because they thought they were wise. Many judge what the gospel *ought* to be, but do not actually enquire as to what it is. They do not come to the Bible to obtain their views of religion, but they open that Book to find texts to suit the opinions which they bring to it. They are not open to the honest force of truth, and therefore are not saved by it. Oh, that this scale would fall from every eye which it now closes!

Saul's soul was also darkened by the scale of *unbelief*. Saul had seen Stephen die. If he saw the martyr's heavenly face, he must have noticed the wondrous peace which sat upon his countenance when he fell asleep amid a shower of stones; but Saul did not believe. Though no sermon is like the sight of a martyrdom, yet Saul was not convinced. Perhaps he had heard about the Saviour more than he cared to remember, but he did not believe it; he counted the things rumoured concerning him to be idle tales, and cast them under his feet. O brothers and sisters, what multitudes are being ruined by this cruel unbelief towards Christ! Some of you, too, whom I have been addressing for years, are believers in the head, but unbelievers in the heart, not really putting your trust in Jesus. Who can see if he refuses the light? Who shall find salvation if he will not trust the Saviour for it? Unbelief is as sure to destroy those who are guilty of it as faith is sure to save believers.

Then the scale of *habit*, too, had formed over Saul's inner eye, for he had been for a long time what he then was. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" If so, then he that is accustomed to do evil may learn to do well. They say that use is second nature; and when the first nature is bad, the second nature is like the first, only it goes further in wrong. Ah, dear friends, some of you have been so accustomed to refuse the gospel, so accustomed to follow after the pleasures and the vices of

the world, that it does not seem possible that you should follow after Christ. Habits of secret sin are peculiarly blinding to the soul. May this scale be speedily made to fall!

Another scale is *worldliness*, and Saul had that upon his inner eye, for he loved the praise of men. He had his reputation to maintain, for he had profited beyond most of his brethren, and was reckoned to be a most hopeful and rising teacher of Israel. It was not likely that Saul would believe in Jesus Christ, for then he would have to lose the esteem of his fellow-countrymen. The fear of man, and the love of man's applause, how they prevent men from seeing the truth about Jesus, and recognizing him as the Son of God! "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?" How can men bow themselves before Jesus Christ when, all the while, they are bidding high for the homage of their fellow-sinners? The love of adulation, which is a form of worldliness, blinds the eye; and so will any other love of things beneath the moon. Let but the heart be set upon this blinding world, and there will be little sight for things divine.

II. These scales were upon the inside of Saul's eyes when he was on the way to Damascus, but now we have to notice them BROUGHT TO THE OUTSIDE. Those outside scales revealed in type and figure what had always been the matter with Saul; they were the material index of the spiritual mischief under which he had long laboured, only now they were brought outside so that he knew they were there, and others could perceive that they were there. Now there was hope that they would be removed from the eye; now that he was conscious of them, the evil was half cured. What brought those scales to the outside, and made Saul know that he was blind?

Well, first, it was *the exceeding glory of Christ*. He says, "About noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me," and he adds, "I could not see for the glory of that light." Let my Lord Jesus Christ only manifest himself to any of you, and you will be well enough aware of your blindness, and you will say to yourselves, "What a strangely blind being I must have been not to have loved such beauty as this,—not to have yielded myself to such grace as this,—not to have trusted myself to so complete a Saviour as this!" Oh, the glory of Christ! It has even laid the saints prostrate when they have seen it. Those who dwell nearest to their Lord are frequently overcome with the exceeding brightness of his glory, and have to confess with those favoured three,—

"When, in ecstasy sublime,
Tabor's glorious steep we climb,
At the too-transporting light,
Darkness rushes o'er our sight."

So it is with the sinner when he gets his first view of a glorious Christ, the inrush of the glory makes him mourn his native blindness; he perceives that he has had no perception, and knows that he has known nothing.

Another thing which made the scales pass to the outside of Saul's eyes was *that unanswerable question*, "*Why persecutest thou me?*" That brought home to him a sense of his sin. "*Why?*" That was a "why" for which Saul of Tarsus could not find a "because." When he discovered that the man of Nazareth was the glorious Christ of God, then, indeed, he was "confounded." He could make no reply to the demand, "*Why persecutest thou me?*" Oh, that the Lord would fix such a "why" in some of your hearts! Why should you live in sin? Why are you choosing the wages of unrighteousness? Why are you hardening your hearts against the gospel? Why are you ridiculing it? Why do you sneer at the servants of God? If the Holy Spirit drives that "why" home to your heart, you will begin to say, "What a blind fool I am to have acted as I have done, to go kicking against the pricks, fighting against my best Friend, and pouring scorn on those whom I ought most of all to admire!" The *why* from the lip of Christ will show you your blindness.

The scales were on the outside of Saul's eyes now, because *his soul had been cast into a terrible bewilderment*. We read of him that, when his eyes were opened, he saw no man; but, trembling and astonished, he asked the Lord what he must do. Some of us know what that experience means. We have been brought under the hand of God till we have been utterly astonished,—astonished at our Saviour, astonished at our sin, astonished that there should be a hope remaining for us, astonished that we should have rejected that hope so long. With this amazement, there was mixed trembling lest, after all, the mercy should be too great for us, and the next word from the Lord should be, "You have kicked against the pricks so long that, henceforth, the gates of mercy are shut against you." May the Lord fill some of you with trembling and astonishment, and, if he does, then you will perceive the blindness of your soul, and cry for light.

I have no doubt the scales became all the more perceptible to poor Saul when he came to those *three days and nights of prayer*; for, when you get a man on his knees, and he begins crying for mercy, he is in the way of being more fully taught his need of it. If relief does not come at once, then the penitent cries more and more intensely; his heart all the while is aching more and more, and he perceives how blind he must have been to bring himself into such a condition. It is a good thing, sometimes, when the Lord keeps a man in prayer, pleading for the mercy, and pleading, and pleading, and pleading on and on, until he perceives how great his need of that mercy is. When he has bitterly felt the darkness of his soul, he will be exceedingly bold in bearing light to his fellow-men. May God bring many of you to agonizing prayer; and if that prayer should last days and nights, and you should neither eat nor drink for anguish of spirit, I warrant you that you will learn your blindness thoroughly, and the scales upon your eyes will be painfully evident to yourself.

III. Now, thirdly, and here I should like to stir up the people of God to a little practical business;—we have seen Saul with the

scales outside his eyes: he now knows that he is blind, though he did not know it before when he was a proud Pharisee; he can see a great deal better now than he could when he thought he could see; but, still, there he is, in darkness, and we long for the scales to be removed;—WHAT INSTRUMENTALITY DID THE LORD USE TO GET THE SCALES AWAY?

It was not an angel, nor was it an apostle, but it was a *plain man*, named Ananias, who was the means of bringing sight to blind Saul. We do not know much about this useful brother. We know his name, and that is enough; but Ananias was the only person whom the Lord used in taking off the scales from this apostle's eyes. Dear brethren, dear sisters, too, there are some of you, if you be but alive to it, whom God will bless in like work. Perhaps this very night, though you are unknown and obscure Christian people, he may make you to be the means of taking the scales from the eyes of somebody who will be eminently useful in future years. The Holy Spirit blessed the great apostle to the Gentiles by Ananias, and he may lead another of his mighties to himself by some obscure disciple.

Ananias was a plain man, but he was a *good man*. You can see that Ananias was a thorough man of God. He was one who knew his Lord, and recognized his voice when he said to him, in a vision, "Ananias," and he was a man whom the Lord knew, for he called him by his name. "I have called thee by thy name: thou art mine." The Lord will not send you on his errands unless you are sound, and sincere, and living near to him; but, if you be that, no matter how feeble you may be, I beseech you be looking out, even to-night, for some blind soul to whom you may be as eyes.

Notice, that this Ananias was a *ready man*, for when the Lord spoke to him, he said, "Behold, I am here, Lord." I know many professors who would have to answer, "Behold, I am anywhere else, Lord, but certainly not here." They are not "all there" when they are in Christ's work; the heart is away after something else. But, "Behold, I am here, Lord," is a grand thing for a believer to say when his Lord bids him seek the wanderer. It is well to say, "Behold, I am here, Lord, ready for the poor awakened one. If he wants a word of comfort, I am ready to say it to him; if he wants a word of direction, here am I, as thou shalt help me, to speak it to him." My brother, be thou like Ananias was, a ready man.

And he was an *understanding man*, for, when the Lord said to him concerning Saul, "Behold, he prayeth," he knew what that meant. He well understood the first indication of grace in the soul. Beloved, you must have a personal experience of the things of God, or you cannot help newborn souls. If you do not yourself know what it is to pass from death to life, and do not know the marks of regeneration, you are useless.

At the same time, he was a *discerning man*,—an enquiring, discriminating man, for he began to say, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man." He wanted to know a little about Saul, so he enquired of the great Master as to his character, and

whether it was a genuine work of grace in his soul. It will not do to pat all people on the back, and give them comfort without examining into their state. Some of you must know by this time that indiscriminate consolation does more hurt than good. Certain classes need no consolation, but rather require reproof. They want wounding before they can be healed; and it is a good thing to know your man, and, especially, to wait upon the Lord, and ask him to tell you about your man, so that you may know how to deal with him when you do come to him. Use all diligence to know the case, as Ananias did.

But when once he had made his enquiry, he was *an obedient man*. He was told to go into a house where I do not suppose he had ever left his card in his life; but he did not stop for an introduction, but went off at once to the house of Judas, and enquired for one called Saul, of Tarsus. He had divine authority; the Lord had given him a search-warrant, and so he entered the house.

“Thus the eternal mandate ran,
Almighty grace, arrest that man.”

Ananias must be the sheriff's officer to go and arrest Saul in the name of the Lord, and so away he went.

And you will notice what a *personal-dealing man* he was, for he did not stand at a distance, but, putting his hands on him, he said, “*Brother Saul.*” Ah, that is the way to talk to people who are seeking the Lord; not to stand five miles off, and speak distantly, or preach condescendingly, as from the supreme heaven of a sanctified believer, down to the poor sinner mourning below. No, go and talk to him; call him brother. Go and speak to him, with a true, loving, brotherly accent, as Ananias did, for he was a *brotherly man*.

Ananias also was a *man whose subject was Christ*. As soon as ever you do speak to the sinner, let the first thing you have to say be, “The Lord, *even Jesus.*” Whatever you say next, begin with that, “Brother Saul, the Lord, *even Jesus.*” Have something to say about Jesus, but say it personally and pointedly, not as though you were alluding to persons living in Australia seven hundred years ago, but as referring to Brother Saul, and intending the word for him.

Among Christian people, there are mighty hunters before the Lord, who strive after souls, but I wish that a hundred times as many really cared for the souls of their fellow-men. Some church-members never speak to anybody about spiritual things. You come into your pews, and you like two seats if you can get them; like gentlemen in a first-class carriage, you want a compartment to yourselves; and then, after service, no matter who is impressed, many of you have not a word to say. Should it be so, brethren? We should always be on the look out to seat strangers comfortably, and afterwards to drive home by personal remark any truth which may have been advanced. “Ah!” says one, but I may speak to the wrong person.” Suppose you did, is it such a mighty misfortune to miss

your mark once? Ah, brethren, if you were to address the wrong person fifty times, and ultimately meet the right one once in a year, it would well reward you. If you were to receive rebuffs, and rebuffs, and rebuffs, and yet at last you should find out the Brother Saul who is to have the scales removed by you, and by none but you, you would be well rewarded. A plain common-sense word from a common-sense Christian has often been the very thing to set some able critic at liberty. Some man of profound mind—a Thomas of abundant doubts and questions,—has only just wanted a simple-hearted Christian man to say the right word, and he has entered into peace and liberty. You must not think that learned personages, when the Lord touches them in the heart, want to be talked to by doctors of divinity. Not they! They become as simple-hearted as others, and, like dying kings and dying bishops, they ask to hear a shepherd pray, because they find more savour, more plainness, more earnestness, more faith, and more familiarity with God, in the humble expressions of the lowly than in the language of courtly preachers. Do not, therefore, Brother Ananias, say, "I cannot go and talk to anybody. I have never been to college." Do not, sister in Christ, keep back because you are a woman, for oftentimes the Lord makes the sweet and gentle voice of woman to sound out the music of grace. God grant that many of us may be the instruments of taking the scales from men's eyes!

IV. Lastly, WHAT DID SAUL SEE WHEN THE SCALES WERE GONE?

The first person he saw was *Brother Ananias*. It was a fine sight for Saul to see Brother Ananias's Christian countenance beaming with love and joy. I fancy he was like one of our elders, a fine old Christian man, with love to souls written on his face. When Saul opened his eyes, it must have done him good to see just such a face as that,—a plain, simple man, full of holy zeal and intense anxiety for his good. Dear friend, if the Lord opens your eyes, you will see the brotherhood of Christians. Perhaps you will enjoy that among the first delights of your Christian experience; and, for a little while, your faith, it may be, will hang upon the testimony of an instructed Christian woman, and your confidence will need confirmation by the witness of a more advanced brother in the Lord. But, my fellow-worker, the saved one will never see Brother Ananias unless Ananias goes to him, and becomes the means of opening his eyes; but if you will go and do that, you will win a friend who will love you as long as life lasts. There are some of you between whom and myself there are ties which death cannot snap. I will find you out in heaven if I can, and I know you will desire to meet me. The Lord gave you to me as my spiritual children; and if it should come to pass that earthly fathers should not see their children in heaven, yet the spiritual father will see his children there praising and blessing the Lord. One of the next joys to knowing Christ yourself must surely be that of leading others to know him. Seek after this bliss.

The next thing that Saul would see would be a *Saviour in Christ*, for Ananias said to him, "The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest

receive thy sight." Now he would see what an opener of the eyes Jesus is, what a mighty Saviour for sinners. And, oh, this is a blessed sight,—to see Christ as a Saviour, as *my* Saviour, opening *my* eyes, so that I can say, "One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see." This is a heavenly sight. May you help many to gaze upon it!

Right speedily he saw *the Spirit of God waiting to fill him*: "that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." Ah, dear soul, when thou hast come to see Christ, then the blessed Spirit will become dear to thee, and thou wilt rejoice to think that he will dwell in thee, to sanctify thee, to enlighten thee, to strengthen thee, and to make thee a vessel of mercy unto others.

One more thing that Saul saw, when his eyes were opened, was what some do not see, although their eyes are opened in other aspects. "He received sight forthwith, and *arose, and was baptized.*" He saw the duty of believers' baptism, and he attended to it directly. You who believe in Jesus should confess Jesus, and you who have confessed Jesus should gently bestir the memories of those very retiring young converts, who are afraid to put on Christ in baptism. You know right well that salvation lies in the believing, but still how singularly the two things are put together, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." The two things are joined together by Christ, so let no man put them asunder. Surely, dear friends, wherever there is a genuine faith in Christ, there ought to be a speedy obedience to the other matter. I once met a man who had been forty years a Christian, and believed it to be his duty to be baptized; but when I spoke to him about it, he said, "He that believeth shall not make haste." After forty years' delay, he talked about not making haste. I quoted to him another passage: "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandment," and showed him what the meaning of his misapplied passage was. Now, soul, do not delay. As soon as Saul's eyes were opened, straightway he took upon himself the outward badge of the Christian faith, and arose, and was baptized. Now, I call upon you who love the Lord Jesus Christ not to play the coward, but come out, and own your Lord and Master. You that are truly his disciples, confess it. I like to see the soldier wearing his red coat; it is the right thing for him to wear his regimentals. It is the same with the soldiers of Christ. What are you ashamed of? Be ashamed of being ashamed, if you are ashamed of Christ. "Oh, but I am afraid I might not hold on my way!" Whose business is it to make you hold on your way? Is it not his business who has bidden you take up your cross, and follow him, and who has said, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven"?

I pray the Lord to bless these feeble words of mine. O souls, O souls, it does seem to me so dreadful that so many of you should come here continually, and yet be blinded! I try to talk plainly about your souls' need, and about Christ Jesus as able to meet that need; how long must I repeat the old story? Once again, I beseech

you, think upon my Lord and Master, and see what a Saviour he is, and how suitable he is for you. I would entreat you to delay no longer, but to close in with the invitations of his mercy. I think, sometimes, that my Master deserves that we should do more than invite you. We command you, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, to bow before his sceptre, for he is the King. Own his dominion, and let him be your Saviour; for this know,—that his gospel comes with divine authority as well as with gentle persuasion, neither can men reject it except at the peril of their souls. He whom I preach to you to-night will shortly come to be your Judge; and if you will not trust him on his cross, you must tremble before him on his throne. Oh, come to him! Simple trust is the way to come to him. Believe in him, and he is yours, and his salvation is yours.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

ACTS IX. 1—22; AND XXII. 1—16.

Chapter ix. Verses 1, 2. *And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*

His very breath was hot with malice against the saints, he could not live without venting his spite upon the disciples of Christ. He showed this by the fact that he not only sought to arrest men, but he was equally cruel towards women, who, from their weakness, one would have thought might have been let alone; but he expressly desired it to be written in the letters that, "whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."

3. *And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:*

When speaking before Agrippa, Paul said that it was "a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun." Was it not that very Shechinah which of old had shone forth between the cherubim over the mercy-seat?

4, 5. *And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

There is something very characteristic about Christ's answer to Saul's question. He did not say, "It is hard for me;" although he was himself persecuted in his members, and felt intense sympathy with them, he did not dwell upon that; but he said to Saul, "It is hard for thee." There was much pity in the rebuke. Saul was like a bullock that has been pricked by the sharp ox-goad, and that kicks against it, and so is hurt all the more. Our Lord knew what sorrow it would cause Saul in the years to come, for he would never cease to lament that he had persecuted the disciples of Christ.

6. *And he trembling and astonished—*

Finding that Jesus, whom he thought to be dead and buried, and whose followers he was so violently opposing, was yet alive,—

6—8. *Said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.*