

EFFECTUAL CALLING

A SERMON

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“And anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see.” Revelation
3:18

THE following Scripture stole over my mind with some degree of sweetness, and that seemed as though it was intended to be the keynote to our subject this morning, “For you see your calling, brethren.” I thought, Well, if our eyes are so anointed that we can see our calling, see that we are called by grace, see that we are born of God, see that the Lord has begun a good work in our hearts, then, taking our stand there, we can from that one point see everything that we want to see; and if we cannot see that, we, in a certain sense, can see nothing, because everything turns there; either we are born of God, or we are not. I will therefore give, in the first place, *a threefold representation of this calling*; and then, secondly, I will notice *five things which you can see very clearly from or in that light into which you are thus brought*, which the apostle Peter calls “marvelous light,” into which he has brought us, that we should by that light show forth his eternal praises. So that my desire is this morning to anoint my own eyes and yours too, the Lord enabling me so to do; that we may be enabled by the word of the Lord this morning to acquire that clearness of vision by which we shall see that we are called by his grace. And if some of you are not called, are, not born of God, and are strangers to what I have to advance, and cannot join with me in what I say as I go along, what a mercy it will be for you if you are convinced of your destitution, and if it should become a concern in your mind to be taught of the Spirit of God, and to be led by the grace of God, for this appears to me to be the way in which the Lord does his work, according to his command to Jeremiah, “If you take forth the precious from the vile, you shall be as my mouth.” We must therefore ever be setting forth that work that discriminates the living from the dead; hereby the spiritually living are encouraged, and hereby the dead are quickened, and hereby the deceived are undeceived; and of all things I am sure there is nothing so fearful as that of being deceived upon these eternal things.

I will therefore set before you a *threefold description of your calling*. The first is that in the first chapter of the 1st Corinthians, “But God has chosen” and there you see choice and calling are put together, “the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.” Now let us be careful to understand each clause as we go along. “The Lord has chosen the foolish things of the world.” You see your calling now; that the Lord has chosen you, he has called you; and the meaning there

is that as he has called the foolish things to confound the things that are wise, a sinner is called to a knowledge of his state, for which the wisdom of this world can find no remedy. I think that is the meaning of the apostle, when he says, "to confound the wise." So that a man who is brought to feel his ignorance as a sinner before God, and brought to feel what a poor sinner he is, he may look at philosophy, he may look, at the ingeniously contrived systems of Popery, Puseyism, or any other ism whatever, and none of these systems contain the remedy that man wants. He feels he is a poor sinner, and there is no contrivance of any human wisdom that can supply him with what he wants. That is the way that the man confounds the wisdom of this world. He knows that in these matters the wisdom of this world, which is good in its place and about its own business, when it meddles with the things of God, then it is foolishness with God. So that, if we are called by grace, we are called to a knowledge of our ignorance, and to know that the wisdom of man cannot find the remedy that we want. That remedy is Christ. And hence the apostle dreaded the thought of the Corinthians, or any Christians indeed, putting their faith in the wisdom of man; but he wished their faith to stand in the power of God, and that power of God is shown in the salvation wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ. "And God has chosen the weak things," that is, he brings you to feel that you are a poor, weak creature, unable to stand before one of God's commandments. There is not one commandment in all the law before which your nature can stand, because there stands the declaration by the side of it, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" So that, turn and twist which way you may; make the outside as clean as you may; you may wash, and scrub, and whitewash, and turn and twist, and make yourself, in your own eyes, and in the eyes of others, as holy as an angel, but that does not alter your nature; your heart is still wicked, and when tested by the law of God, you prove as weak as water, unable to meet one of these commandments. So that, here again, there is nothing in the world that can find that remedy that you need. "And he has chosen the base things;" and so you will become base in your own sight; you will find that your poor, old, feeble nature is degraded down to the very likeness of Satan, for what is the likeness of Satan but sin? and what is the likeness that we became assimilated to by the fall but Satan? We are all by nature children of wrath and assimilated to Satan; so that "there is none that does good; no, not one." And you will find the descriptions given of him are given also of men; that they come under the same descriptions. If he be called a liar, then it is said, "Let God be true, and every man a liar." If he be called a murderer, then it is said, "He that is angry with his brother without a cause is a murderer," that is, every man in his heart is a murderer; in a word, everything which the law of God prohibits. So, if we are called by grace, this our weakness, and this our ignorance, and this our baseness, will become a burden to us; and the knowledge of our ignorance will make us seek an acquaintance with Christ; a knowledge of our weakness will make us seek that strength that comes from God by Jesus Christ; a knowledge of our baseness will make us appreciate his mercy, as the apostle presently beautifully shows. But not only so, but he adds, "Things which are despised." Ah, what a difference there is between the true Christian, who despises himself, and looks upon himself, as the next words say, as a thing of nothing; what a difference there is between the Christian and the natural man. The Christian comes before the Lord, and says, Lord, here I am, a poor, ignorant creature; I by nature know nothing whatever savingly of your name; here I am, Lord, weak as water; without Christ I can do nothing; here I am, as base as sin and guilt can make me; here I am, as despicable as Satan could wish me to be; as despicable, when tested in my heart and nature by your holy law, as it is possible for me to be; and I am altogether a thing of nothing. And why are you thus brought down? What is this for? Why, "that no flesh should glory in his presence." Now, there is one sign of being called, to know our ignorance, our weakness, our baseness, and to despise ourselves in our own sight, as being nothing

apart from Christ but sinners, and to know that we are altogether a thing of nothing; as the apostle says, “things which are not,” or things of nothing. If, then, I am brought to know that without the Holy Spirit I know nothing savingly of Christ, and that apart from his grace I am weak as water, as base as sin can make me, and that I am despicable, and that I am altogether a thing of nothing, and altogether put to silence, for the Lord has said, “You shall not open your month any more, when I am pacified toward you;” and I have not a word to say, nor a reason to assign, in and of and from myself, why I should not be condemned, this is divine calling. “You see your calling.” You are called to a knowledge of what you are. That is a very significant scripture relative to the prodigal. It is said, “*He came to himself.*” Whenever God intends to bring a sinner to himself, he brings the sinner to his own self first. The sinner himself must be brought to his own self first, and he will want to get away from himself; he will not know what to do with himself; he will be a kind of *Magor Missabib* to himself, a terror to himself, and he will say, “O wretched man that I am!” Now, then, if the Lord has been pleased by his word to open your eyes to this your real condition, then you see your calling. You did not always see this; you did not always see your condition; thus, and that remedy which the apostle presents was not always to you what it is now. See how beautifully he presents the remedy, that while no flesh is to glory in the presence of the Lord, yet, “of him are you in Christ Jesus.” Do not let us pass over this hastily; “Of him are you.” What are those people that thus know their ignorance, and their weakness, and their baseness, and their despicableness, and the entire negative the law has put upon them as to their doings, for “all flesh is grass,” are they of God? Yes, they are of God; for if they had not been of God, they would never thus have known their condition. “Of him are you,” It is God’s work that has wrought this conviction. Now notice: “But of him are you in Christ Jesus.” Thus foolish, weak, base despicable things of nothing, the knowledge of it is an evidence of their eternal election of God, “Of him are you in Christ Jesus;” chosen in Christ Jesus; loved in Christ Jesus; approved in Christ Jesus; accepted in Christ Jesus; eternal life in Christ Jesus; eternal victory in Christ Jesus, everything you can need in Christ Jesus. But let us hear the holy apostle in detail upon this matter. “Who of God is made unto us wisdom.” Ah! how much foolishness has been mingled with my thoughts, and words, and works, since I have known the Lord! Where is my remedy? Jesus never had a foolish thought, never said a foolish word, never did a foolish thing. All his thoughts were wise, all his words were wise, and all his works were wise. He never had to do over again what he had done once; never had to undo it; never said a word, nor thought a thought, nor did a thing but what was wise. In the best sermon I ever preached, in my greatest attempts to glorify God, when I have been in earnest as much as I could, yet the follies and the imperfections of the flesh will mingle themselves, more or less, with all we do, and with all we say. But when Satan would twit me with this, my remedy is that Jesus is my wisdom; his wise thoughts, wise words, and wise doings are set to my account; and whatever his wisdom was, that I am esteemed, that I am held. Ah! then, farewell to folly, my follies, not one of them, will be set to my account. Men may set them to my account, and my conscience may set them to my account, and I may set them to my account, but they can’t remain long, because the Lord will not set them to my account; for he has made Christ our wisdom. Bless the Lord for this! This delivers us from folly, and especially the folly of Pharisaism, in supposing we can do something towards our own salvation. He delivers us from such folly as that and brings us to know that we are saved by grace, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.

Again, Christ is to us sanctification. How true this is! I never have any holy seasons without Christ. Ah! when I contrast my legal strivings with my gospel privileges; when, years ago, I heard those

half-way men, they prescribed a great many rules, and I used to go home and say, "Now, tomorrow shall be one of the holiest days I ever had. Not a passion shall move, not a thought shall stray, not a thing shall be wrong whereas hardly anything during the whole day was right. I could not get on and broke down again and again and again; and there I am, the same poor creature now. But I did not know the remedy then; I did not know that Jesus Christ was my sanctification; so that if I am renewed now in holiness, it is by Jesus Christ; if I have a holy season now, it is by the savor and presence of Christ; if I have a holy day now, it is by enjoying Jesus Christ; if I have a profitable day now, it is by Jesus Christ. "His blood cleanses from all sin." "Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Made unto us righteousness as well. Here, then, Christ is our righteousness. We are to live by faith, by the confidence of his mediatorial work. I am fully aware there is such a thing as a presumptuous spirit; and therefore, while I speak of living by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, do not let us understand it in the presumptuous sense; because, if we are making much of Christ's righteousness, Christ as our righteousness and sanctification, the Lord knows whether we at the same time really know our need of the same, and whether we do really love Jesus Christ as our justification and sanctification. If we do, from a sight and sense of need, holdfast the testimony of what he is, then here is our calling. It is the Lord that has begun this good work in our hearts. And then, again, he is our redemption, that delivers us from all thralldom; the wisdom delivers us from all folly; the righteousness delivers us from all condemnation; and the sanctification delivers us from all diseases, and all sins; and the redemption delivers us from all thralldom, and sets us eternally free; "that, according as it is written, He that glories, let him glory in the Lord."

Now let us look at this item of our calling, "Let him glory in the Lord." I glory in God the Father, because I know his love is free, and is always the same; I glory in him because I know that he has taken away all my sins, and made it impossible for anything to be laid to my charge; I glory in Jesus Christ, not only because he is the end of sin, but because he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. I glory in the Almighty Spirit of God, because I know he carries on his work sovereignly, giving to every man severally as he will. And thus, when I can view the Lord in this gospel, order of things, I can glory in him. Why should I not? My sins, that I am the subject of, only demonstrate the truth that, without such a covenant God, I could have no hope. This calling, then, will lead us to glory in the Lord, and in the Lord alone. And this will be our employment to all eternity. What will heaven be but the Lord glorying in his people, and his people glorying in him?

Again: I go to another scripture to read out our calling, in the 40th of Isaiah, where you will find the same climax of diminution under another form. The prophet is there led on from one degree of diminution to another, till he comes down to what the creature is in the estimation of God's law; and then, after thrusting aside idolatrous systems, the prophet again returns to these people, and after showing what they are without Christ, he then shows what they are with Christ. And this is what the apostle does in that First of Corinthians, showing, first, what they are without Christ, and then showing what they are with Christ. Hence there it is said that they "are as a drop of a bucket." Now I like that uncommonly well, because God's law is a fiery law; and to set a drop of water to quench the fire of Sinai, would be madness to the last degree. You might just as well have brought a drop of water to have quenched the fires of Sinai. No, I will go further; you might as well bring a drop of water and think with that drop of water to quench the fires of hell, as to meet the fiery law of God by anything you can do. Now, if you feel this, then you will retire from all hope of

ever doing anything the law of God can approve. But the prophet goes on, "They are counted as the small dust of the balance," imperceptible. So, if you are weighed in the scales of the law your weight will be as the small dust of the balance, that is to say, nothing; you will weigh nothing; it will not be known, as it were, that you are there. And then, when you expect to see something written in your favor, Well, I have been weighed, what is the testimony of him who weighed me? Why, that you are found wanting. How much am I found wanting? Why, everything; for your weight is only as the small dust of the balance; you are wanting in everything; you have not one thing on your side to weigh a single ounce. The prophet goes on again, "He takes up the isles as a very little thing." The word translated "little thing" means "an atom." And here you are brought down to a mere atom, just exist, and that's all, a poor creature. So that if you are brought to the law as a fiery law you are a thing of nothing; if weighed in the balances you come altogether short, and then, if measured, you prove to be an atom. The law requires a righteousness up to the stature of a man; and when the law comes to measure you it finds you a dwarf indeed, finds you only an atom. Why, poor creature, you might well, I was going to say, say to the rocks, Fall on me, and hide me from the wrath of this God Almighty, for I am but as a drop of water before an unquenchable fire; I am but as the small dust of the balance, and therefore, I am found wanting; I am as a little thing, a mere atom, and therefore, when measured, come infinitely short. And the prophet does not stop even now; he goes on to say that "all nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing." Now, there is a kind of hyperbolical diminution, "less than nothing." What a strong expression is that, "less than nothing, and vanity," Perhaps I shall carry the prophet's meaning further than he intended, and therefore, you must be a little bit aware of me, lest I should go beyond his meaning. But I have thought sometimes, the idea is this, the reason he calls us less than nothing is, that nothing would not get in the way; but so far from our helping in the matter of salvation, we are just enough to get in the way; so that we are "less than nothing." Hence, you would say to a servant who thinks himself very clever, and is doing more harm than good, You are worse than nothing, because you are doing more harm than good. And that is just the way with us all; as the Lord lives, so far from any man, from the foundation of the world to the present moment, ever helping on his own salvation, he has stood in the way of it, and if his own damnation were possible he must have accomplished it. But is Jesus a mere drop of a bucket? No, he is God. Is he small dust of the balance? No, but of infinite weight. Is he a mere atom? No, but Immanuel. Is he nothing? No, he is *something*, he is everything. Is he less than nothing, and vanity? No, he is more than can be comprehended, and verity itself. He, a *drop* of water! he is a fountain of living waters; his righteousness is of full weight; his measure is as that of perfection; his worth is infinite and eternal. Ah, then, poor, sinner, poor little drop of water, poor little bit of dust, poor little atom, poor nothing, poor less than nothing and vanity, where should your place be? Vainly contending with a fiery law, or believing in Jesus, the fountain of living waters? Where should you be, but one with him who will be full weight for you? and you will not be found wanting. One with him who will present you in the fulness of the stature of a man. One with him who brings you from nothing to something. Yea, he will bring you from less than nothing and vanity to everything and verity and will cause you to inherit durable substance. "Why say you, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord?" Why say you so? Why, your way is not hid. You see how you became a sinner, and you see how you become conscious of it. It was once hidden from you, but you see it now. "And my judgment is passed over from my God." I thought he had given me up to sin, and to Satan, and to the world, and I shall fall someday by the hand of Saul, and I shall no more behold the lord in the land of the living. I therefore have cleansed my hands in vain. I look around and see everybody happy but myself.

Why, that is a mistake; that is our infirmity; “Have you not known? have you not heard, that the everlasting God faints not?” Well, but I faint. What of that? Suppose you faint, your God does not. You think, I suppose, when you can get no farther God cannot get any farther; and you think when your strength is gone his strength is gone; and you think when you have not any, or not much love to him, he has no love to you; and you think that when you cannot see him he cannot see you; and you think that when you are lukewarm towards him he is the same towards you. No, you must not judge of matters by this rule. “Have you not known? have you not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth?” and just as he went on with creation and finished the heavens and the earth, so he will with you; he will perfect that which concerns you; his mercy endures forever; he will not forsake the work of his own hands. Then the prophet gives us to understand the infinite ability that the Lord has? “There is no searching of his understanding.” What a mercy that is! There are many mysterious things we cannot understand; we are tossed to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, driven to our wit’s end, and we cry unto the Lord, and know not what to do, nor which way to look, as said Jehoshaphat of old, when a mighty host came against him; “O, our God, will you not judge them; for we have no might against this great company that comes against us; neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon you.” Well, there is no searching of his understanding; he knows what to do; he sees all the parts that make up the whole, we see only some of the parts; and judging of the whole by the parts, we not being very well versed in this doctrine of a kind of comparative anatomy, we very often judge to the detriment of our own comfort. It is a great thing, friends, if we are brought thus to know what we are as sinners, and to receive the testimony of God as to what the saints are. What is this but having our eyes anointed with heavenly eye salve? But then there is some more encouragement for us.; “He gives power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increases strength.” There is poor Joshua clothed with filthy rags, the devil at his right hand, Joshua fainting and weak. Don’t know what will become of me if I get away from this position of standing before the angel, of looking in this way for the mercy of God; I have nowhere else to go. Who brought Joshua there? Perhaps you could not have persuaded him at this time that the Lord brought him there. Why, Joshua, it is the Lord has brought you here. Ah, I don’t see that; I have nothing but filthy garments; there is Satan at my right hand; and here I stand shivering, and doubting, and fearing, and Satan round about me, coiling round me and threatening to have me; and I think he will have me. But it was the Lord that had brought him thus far, and already he was a brand plucked out of the fire. Now mind this; he was called a brand plucked from the fire before he had change of raiment, before he enjoyed pardoning mercy, before the Lord gave strength to him, before the Lord enabled Joshua to rejoice in the Lord’s goodness. And why was he called a brand plucked out of the fire before he was thus favored? For two reasons: first, his very position, his gospel position, for such it was. He had given up all works, all hope by works, all hope by creature doings; he had left off working, and taken to waiting; he had learnt now, “To him that works not, but believes.” And he waited in the best possible position; it was after new covenant order; and therefore, he was already reconciled to God’s way of salvation. That is one reason, being plucked out of the fire of enmity toward God. The other reason why he is thus called is this, that his knowledge of his state and his reconciliation to God’s way of saving a sinner was a proof, though not to him an assurance, still it was a sign and proof, that he was also plucked from the fire of hell; he was delivered from the wrath to come. Here, then, in Joshua’s case, the Lord gave strength to the fainting, here he increased strength to him that had no might to alter his state. Now the Lord says of those that run for the prizes of this life, that “the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall;” meaning that persons who are determined to gain certain prizes in this world, and to become something very

wonderful, that they shall faint and come short, as they all do; for no man under heaven did yet in this world attain everything he wanted to attain to; because the mind has no plethora, and therefore let a man attain to whatever greatness he may, that greatness increases his desire for another step in the same direction, and then when he has gained that step it increases his desire for another; and it is but vanity, at least, comparatively, when it is all attained. "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Now there is another representation of this calling in 2 Peter 1, "According as his divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory and virtue." I take the glory there to mean the gospel, our salvation, everything included in the word *gospel*; and the word *virtue* there in the original simply means *power*. He has called us unto glory and power; that is, he has called us to the glory of eternal salvation, to a power by which we shall attain it; because God becomes our strength, and therefore in calling us to glory he has called us unto his gospel, to himself as our covenant God; he is our glory, and he is also our strength, "Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." The word *lust* there, like the word *lust* in many other scriptures, signifies earthly desires; and so, the world, the world desires itself, and seeks itself, and lives upon itself, and seeks after nothing beyond itself. But, says the apostle, you, the Lord having thus called you, have escaped this; that is to say, you who once desired nothing but this world, you whose desires were once confined to the range of mortal existence, you have escaped this scene of corruption, and you are brought to look out into another world, and to see that that is a better world, and to desire that better world, and to seek it; you are brought to see into a better country and to desire that better country, and to seek it; you are brought to see into that better covenant, that better way, that better life, that better blessedness than this world can afford, and so brought to seek it. Here, then, you see your calling of God, having your eyes thus anointed with heavenly eye salve.

I will now notice very briefly *five things which you can see very clearly from or in that light into which you are thus brought*. First. We can see the suitability of Jesus Christ to our necessities, and so brought within that scripture, "This is the will of him that sent me, that everyone which sees the Son" if you are called by grace, you will see that, "sees the Son," so sees him as to be attracted by him. "I," said Christ, "if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me;" "everyone which sees the Son, and believes on him, may have everlasting life." You will, therefore, see the person of Christ in what he has done. Secondly. You will also see your election of God; for if the Lord had not chosen you, he would not have called you. Hence you read, "Whom he did foreknow he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, and whom he did predestinate he called;" so that you may look back from this light of your calling, and see your name in life's fair book set down. Third. You may look forward and behold that glory that awaits you in that Paradise, in that inheritance, in that glorious city where the saints with unbounded delight and pleasure shall forever dwell. And then, fourth, you will also see in this light the certainty of your going there, that the Lord will preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom. And then, fifth, there is another thing you will see, and that is the gratitude that is due to this God. You will say, Oh, how shall I yield up myself, body, soul, time, gifts, all I am and have, sufficiently unto him, if this be my happy destiny? Instead of being left in blindness, where I once was, "whereas once I was blind, now I see;" he has enabled me to anoint, as it were, my eyes with eye salve; I see my calling, and in the light of that calling I can see all things. And I know what your prayer will be; it will be that set before us in the Hebrews,

“Let us have grace;” Lord, give us grace; “let us hold fast grace,” as the margin reads it; meaning, let us hold fast the gospel of grace, the economy of grace, that order by which grace reigns; for without faith it is impossible to serve God acceptably. Let us then hold fast grace, that we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. My hearer, what is our desire? Is it not a sweet thought, when Sunday morning comes, that we have a house of God to go to, a minister to speak to us, a gospel to hear; that there is a Jesus Christ who is infallible in his perfection, and that his interest in us is infinite and eternal? What is our desire? Is it not to walk in wisdom’s ways, to honor and serve and glorify God, and that more and more. We must soon leave this world, like our respected Prince, taken yesterday, as you are all aware, into eternity; high as was his position, it is all gone, dashed down in a single moment; so uncertain are the things of this life. But, bless God, the things of God are not uncertain; his kingdom remains, his love remains, his name remains; there our citizenship remains, there our life remains, there our royalty remains, there our sonship remains, there our blessedness remains. “Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” This the Laodiceans did not, not until the Lord chastened them, taught them to buy of him gold, white raiment, and anointed their eyes with eye salve; and then, when they saw their calling, and from the point of their calling saw these other great things, they would go on to serve God, reverence his holy name, and glory in his holy ways.