

SUBSTANCE OF A SERMON PREACHED BY MR. HEMINGTON, AT GOWER STREET
CHAPEL, LONDON, ON 8th FEBRUARY, 1891 (Morning)

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Text: "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." (Prov.xvii.17)

What a friend is the Lord Jesus Christ to His people, and to poor sinners who are brought to feel their need of Him! He is the greatest, the truest, and the only Friend that poor needy sinners will ever find able to help them and to bring them out of their misery. And, if there is anything which you and I or any of God's living children have need to be truly ashamed of before God beyond everything else, it is the little we have thought of Jesus Christ since we have made a profession of His name, and the little that we have glorified God for His infinite and boundless mercy in bestowing Christ upon us as His unspeakable gift. If we knew Christ more according to His character and work, we should, every day we live, feel that there is death in everything where Christ cannot be found. Mortal life - its relationships, its friendships, its enjoyments, its profits, and its advantages all put together - would be unsatisfying to us without Christ.

If we who have been believers in the Lord for a good many years value Christ only because He saves us from a never-ending hell, then let me tell you that our appreciation of Christ is very small, our love is very much restricted. Sometimes a poor, law-condemned, distressed sinner, in his first experience, is like the Philippian jailer when he cried, "What must I do to be saved?" That poor creature will, I have no doubt, think most about Christ as a Saviour. His mind will be turned upon his own personal salvation; and when that poor sinner is brought to a felt hope in God's mercy, he will love Christ chiefly for His great salvation. I know it was so with myself. I felt that I had a hope that I knew God as the God of grace, the God of salvation. But to the believer who, after some years of experience, is brought to know his standing in Christ - that he is in the favour of God, and can, with a good conscience and in his favoured moments, say with the apostle Paul, "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me" - to such a believer Christ should be everything in everything and everywhere. We are so carnal, fleshly, and selfish that I greatly fear it is only when we are in real trials, in deep soul afflictions - when we are in sorrow and distress of mind - that we feel we cannot do without Christ. Were we more spiritually minded, we should feel our need of Him just as much in the calm as in the storm, just as much in the sunshine of His appearing as when we are in darkness, as much when our mountain stands strong as when we are sore.

troubled through the hidings of God's face. And I must confess with shame that I have generally come nearest to Christ when trouble has driven me - when, often like the disciples in the storm and in the moment of extreme terror, I have had to cry, "Lord, save, or I perish" (Matt.viii.25).

Well, beloved friends, that is a good prayer; I am not going to find fault with that, though it could not be called a high experience. But it is far better to be in trouble, crying from the heart, "Lord, save, or I perish," than to be like the self-righteous and to be scarcely able to drag our lazy limbs to a throne of grace. Anything that makes us feel our need of Christ is better than a state wherein we think we can get on without Him. Far better to be in the valley of deep humiliation, crying to Christ from the heart, than to be on the mount of a false assurance, concluding every day that things are right between us and God when in reality they are all wrong.

When we look into the word of God, it is very clear that the patriarchs and prophets under the Old Testament, and the apostles of Christ under the New, have prospered more in soul when in trial than when at ease. And, no doubt, the servants and people of God in all subsequent ages have found it so. David said: "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord" (Psa. cxxx.1). That is where God often brings us; because, as I said before, we get into a carnal, fleshly, selfish state, and then there is little earnestness in our spirits. We like our homes and families, we feed upon creature enjoyments, and get so intermingled with these things that for a time we feel very little real need of Christ. We like fleshly things, and the Lord has to plunge us time after time into the depths, so that like David we may cry unto God, as he says: "When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I" (Psa.lxi.2).

It was the same with Job. He was stripped of everything. What a wonderful dispensation! God, in His wisdom, saw fit to afflict that blessed man in that particular way. He was deprived of his children, his flocks taken away, and his body afflicted to such a degree that he became quite a spectacle. How the dear man wanted Christ! How he longed to get to the mercy seat! How that dispensation weaned him from time things! How it weaned him from all creatures! What a noble testimony he was enabled by faith to give! While the storm was beating hard upon him, he said: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job xiii.15). As though he had said: "There is nothing of Christ in all this! What a fool I have been to make such a lot of my property! My mind has been taken up entirely with these things, and I have been weaned from my blessed Christ by the surroundings of my mortality."

"Now," said Job, "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." That is God's way - to put to death everything, bringing His living children to feel that all earthly relationship and all creature good are but a bubble so far as the soul is concerned.

It was the same with the great apostle of the Gentiles. God made Paul a pattern of what He could do for sinners: a pattern, not for sinners to imitate - it is not to be taken in that sense - but that he should be an example of the sovereign grace of God in taking the vilest of sinners and causing them to obtain mercy. Therefore he said that Christ showed forth "all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting" (I Tim.i.16). Oh, what sovereign grace can do, and what a mercy to be brought to see Christ! Again he says: "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (II Cor.i.9). And so, if we are to be as the ministers of Christ to His poor, tried, and tempted people, "we are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake" - always made martyrs for Jesus' sake; this fleshly nature of ours is continually brought under the crucifying operations of God for Jesus' sake - "that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (II Cor.iv.11).

Not to go further into this point, it is clear from the word of God that God's servants and people have always prospered most in soul when they have been in trials. If our flesh were more kept under by the power of God, if we had a stronger faith, and if that faith were kept by the fear of God in living exercise, we should feel our need of Christ in prosperity as well as in adversity. And I would say, May the merciful God keep you, my dear friends, from complaining too much about your trials; and may He help you to see that He is sanctifying them to your soul so as to make you feel that the older you get the more out of heart you are with this world's wicked ways, and the more taken up with Christ. Though I feel myself to be a poor, carnal, fleshly, selfish creature, yet I can say this - that the older I grow the more sick I do get with myself, with creatures, and with the world. The nearer I get to an eternal world, the more do I feel my need of Christ.

This is a hard world. O the awful power of sin! How blasting and killing is sin to everything that it touches! It touches the eye, and there comes forth the adulterous look (II Sam.iii.13); it touches the tongue, and there come from the mouth blasphemies (Jas.iii.9.10); it touches the heart, and makes it deceitful (Jer.xvii.9). Sin touches the spirit of a child of God, and puffs him up with pride even in his knowledge of the things of God. (I Cor.viii.1). Sin touches the affections, and its influence

is like the withering blight which comes upon the tender fruit in the early spring (Song ii.15). And, if we put all these things together, it makes up our great disease, the great red spot of sin (Isa.i.18). Well might dear Mr. Hart say:

"O thou hideous monster, Sin,
What a curse hast thou brought in!
All creation groans through thee,
Pregnant cause of misery"

(154).

Ungodly men are to be heard every day yelling and howling in their sorrow and in their distress. But why? Sin is the cause of it, though ungodly men are not aware of this. God's dear children, too, are often in great distress, but they know that sin is at the root of it.

Now it is Christ (that is what I want to come to) that "is the Friend of sinners" (806); and He is constituted the friend of sinners by God's own ordination - I mean, by the ordination of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. There was a conjoint deliberation on the part of the glorious Trinity in reference to the scheme of redemption. There is an equality, a co-eternity between them. It was not as though the Father was supreme and the Son inferior; it was not as though the Father said, "We are entirely independent of Thee, the Son." No; but upon the ground of the unity, co-equality, and co-eternity of the Trinity, we see that it was a mutual compact between the Three Persons when the glorious scheme of man's redemption was entered upon before the foundation of the world. But, in regard to Christ's position in the covenant of grace, we must recognize an inferiority to the Father on Christ's part in His character as Jehovah's Servant. The Father delegated Him to the work; and therefore He was constituted by divine ordination this wonderful friend of poor sinners. And He has stood in the sinner's place, and He has borne the wrath of God. All that unmitigated wrath which was due to the church was inflicted by the inflexible justice of God upon Christ as the substitute. As the mighty God, He put death and hell behind Him; He vanquished His adversaries and delivered His people from hell and death. He delivered them not only from death and from the consequences of sin, but He delivered them from sin itself. He bore not only the punishment that was due to sin, but He bore the very sin for which He was punished. A great deal of error has at different times been sent forth by writers upon Scripture, who have tried to distinguish between Christ as the substitute bearing the penal consequences of the sins of His people, and Christ actually bearing their sins (I Peter ii.24). Of course, you or I, as an innocent person, might be permitted to go into a court of

justice and voluntarily take the responsibility of a friend who had made himself amenable to the law; but we could not take the actual misdemeanour of our friend so that his misdemeanour should rest upon us. But Christ, though He did not take the sins of His people upon Himself in such a way that sin was infused into His Person (I John iii.5), nevertheless took them upon Himself in His substitutionary office as much as if He Himself had committed them (Isa.liii.6); and He suffered all that stern infliction of justice as though He had been the guilty person (Zech.xiii.7). But His people are free from sin when they become servants of righteousness (Rom.vi.18). They were free from it, in the purposes of God, from all eternity (Eph.i.4); they were judicially freed from sin when Christ died (Rom.viii.34). The apostle says: "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Rom.v.8-11). Herein it is that the friendship of Christ and the unchangeable love of God to His people break out. "God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John.iv.9,10). How precious, how animating, how cheering! What else do you want to comfort you in life? What else do you need to meet death? Child of God, have you any cause to complain? I am sure you have not when God brings you to feel this most blessed truth: "Herein is love, not that we loved God" - not that we ever should have loved Him!

God might have spent fifty years in offering us His grace, but we should never have accepted it had we been left to ourselves. Some represent God as saying: "If you do not accept it, I shall send you to hell." And some may ask me, "Do you believe anything different from that, anything contrary to that?" I do; and I pity you and any who do not. The word of God says: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power" (Psa.cx.3). "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us." Why? Just because He would (Deut.vii.8), that He might be glorified (Isa.lx.21), and that His own Son might "see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied" (Isa.liii.11).

"A friend loveth at all times." What next? Now, my dear friends, I have no doubt you have been able to follow me in the first part of my subject, and I trust you will be able to go with me in the latter part of it. "At all times." But sometimes it

will seem to us as if Christ must love us, and then again it will seem as if He never could. Can you explain that? Perhaps I can explain it a little for you. Were we a little more spiritually minded than usual, more than usually favoured in our experience, and feeling more of the testimony of the Spirit in our consciences, we could then say: "I do love Christ; I am sure I do love the Lord Jesus Christ." Then we could drop on our knees before God and say: "My Father; thanks be unto Thee for Thy unspeakable gift. I should never have known Thee but for Thy dear Son. I should never have dared for a moment to expect to see Thy face and stand justified before the blessed God, were it not for the righteousness of Thy dear Son." Then it will seem to us as if Christ must love us. But when we get fretful, insensible, stupefied in our minds, carried away with our home, with earthly things, and feel so prayerless, it will then be very hard to believe that Christ loves us. But "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us." Herein it is, that Christ chose His people. I would to God that He would make His own children feel this more.

Look at this love in its strength and in its unchangeableness. Look at the poor prodigal, and consider what he did, to what lengths he was permitted to go. Consider into what a miserable plight and into what darkness he brought himself; but, in spite of all this, the power of God came upon him after a time. He never did anything to earn the love of Christ - everything to the contrary; but in all this the love of Christ is the more clearly shown - in its strength, purity, and unchangeableness. Love broke his heart, made him repent, filled him with shame. Love brought to his remembrance his father's house, made him feel his unworthiness of ever again being with his father and brother. Love turned him round, made him say: "I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." (Luke xv.18). But the love of Christ rose up, filled the father's heart, and he said: "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (verses 22-24).

So in all states, in all conditions, circumstances, and experiences, Christ loveth at all times. And I would say, "Lord, do help Thy children to believe it. It will take much to make them believe it." What a mercy it is (whether we can believe it or not) that Christ loveth at all times. You cannot get anything in between that. All times of darkness, trials, afflictions; all days and nights; all sweet moments and all favourable circumstances - no matter what else I might mention - there is not one

moment's cessation in His love; Christ loves His people at all times.

"A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." What shall I say to this? I will say it is surprising, wonderful. Oh, surprising grace! Oh, marvellous Christ! I will say, "How sovereign is the love of God!" (206). "A brother born for adversity" - that is to say, born in order to impart help to His people in their adversity. Consider how blessedly He helped poor Jacob in his adversity; and so I might speak of all the Old Testament saints, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Gedeon, Barak, Samson, Jephthae, David, Samuel, and all those mentioned in Hebrews xi. If we turn for a few moments to their history and trace out their lives, we shall see how they were helped by Christ under heavy trials.

Asa and Jehoshaphat

The other day I very much enjoyed going over the history of Asa and Jehoshaphat. I had been reading a little book which was reviewed by dear Mr. Philpot in the G.S. for 1856 (pp.58 - 66). It was written by some unnamed lady, and it is a beautiful exposition of that part of God's holy word. Most instructive it is to read the Old Testament scriptures concerning the reigns of the kings of Israel. Asa was a good man, and yet in him what blemishes, what departures from God! Still, we find that when he was brought into great straits and difficulties, the Lord put into his mouth a most wonderful and precious prayer: "Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, Thou art our God; let no man prevail against Thee" (II Chron.xiv.11).

Then we find Jehoshaphat, when he saw a great multitude come up against him, saying: "O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee" (II Chron. xx.12). Then Christ appeared as a brother born for adversity, and said by the mouth of His prophet: "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you" (verse 17). As though the Lord had said: "Leave it to me, Jehoshaphat; I will myself accomplish the work." I have many times been struck in reading about those kings - how they walked in the fear of the Lord, pulling down altars (II Chron.xiv.3), destroying idols (xv.8,16), and giving advice to the nation in reference to the worship of God (xvii.7-9). And, whilst there

was this acknowledgement of God, He defended them when they were attacked by enemies who attempted to make inroads upon their borders, and He repelled them by giving His people the victory.

Yet, "there are many devices in a man's heart" (Prov.xix.21), and, for a remarkable illustration of our text, let us look briefly at a part of I Kings xxii. "And it came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel" (verse 2). And so we see that good and blessed man Jehoshaphat, even when he was in the height of his prosperity and had no fears at all, makes affinity with that wicked king Ahab (II Chron.xviii.1), and he goes and pays him a visit.

"And the king of Israel said unto his servants, know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is our's, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?" What a crafty man Ahab was! When he saw an advantageous moment, he tried to get as much as possible out of Jehoshaphat; and so he began, in a very subtle way, to suggest that Jehoshaphat and he should go up to recover Ramoth-gilead by conquest, as it had originally belonged to Israel (I Kings iv.13).

"And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead?" Now, mind, you see here that Jehoshaphat is drawn from the Lord: "And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses. And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king" (verses 4-6). Ahab, you see, consulted his false prophets, and they had prophesied victory for him. But Jehoshaphat saw through those crafty prophets, and said to Ahab: "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might enquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the Lord; but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" (verses 7,8). But Jehoshaphat would have him called: he said, "Let not the king say so." So the prophet of God came. He spoke at first rather ambiguously (verse 15). But Ahab detected that Micaiah did not entertain any favourable prediction for him. Then Micaiah said: "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace." (verse 17) Ahab exclaims: "Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil" (18). And after Micaiah's faithful testimony (20-25), we read that Ahab said: "Thus saith the king,

Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace. And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead" (27-29).

Now, says the crafty Ahab to Jehoshaphat: "I will disguise myself, and enter into the battle; but put thou on thy robes." What a deceitful man Ahab had been, shaking hands with Jehoshaphat and saying, as it were, "You and I will be friends", and yet going into the battle in disguise.

"And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely it is the king of Israel. And they turned aside to fight against him: and Jehoshaphat cried out, And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even" (32-35).

Christ, you see, is a brother born for adversity. In that very wrong step taken by Jehoshaphat, Christ went to him, helped him, and brought him back in peace to his own country, though he chastised him severely afterwards. And God, in His mercy, will chastise thee, my hearer, for thy sins. Yet, He says: "Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail" (Psalm lxxxix.33).