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Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, Sunday morning, 25th August 1968

"And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me ! And God granted him that which he requested."

1. Chronicles.4.v.10

This is one of those texts which perhaps are called common, everybody is acquainted with it and every minister has preached from it. But it is a full text. It is all that we know of Jabez and if this could be an honest and true obituary of us, we should need nothing more. That we know nothing more about Jabez is of no importance. His mother called his name Jabez because she bare him with sorrow and therefore, I have no doubt that Jabez knew something of sorrow, he knew something of the plague of his own heart.

But we would in the first place look at the attitude of soul, the exercise of Jabez soul which brought forth this beautiful prayer, and the important thing is to examine ourselves as to whether we have anything like the same exercise in our own souls. There was one thing Jabez had, it was a gracious dissatisfaction. You may say well, people ought not to be dissatisfied, godly contentment is great gain, but there is a dissatisfaction of faith as well as a satisfaction to faith. There is a restlessness of faith as well as the rest of faith, and the dissatisfaction that Jabez had was in everything short of a manifestation of Christ to his soul. There is a difference between ^{being} dissatisfied and unthankful.

If we really knew it we are unworthy of the least of God's mercies in creation which maintain our bodies. It is no small consideration, the fulness of creation. The Lord, He is the Creator and maintains in store that world that He called into being by His almighty Word. We have comforts and privileges and daily blessings and we should be thankful for them. But this dissatisfaction that Jabez had was of faith. The whole creation cannot reach the soul:

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
It were an offering far too small,
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my strength, my all."

So a poor soul that has been taught the emptiness of this world relative to salvation, who has been taught his universal destitution in himself of the least good, that he is destitute of a spark of spiritual life and a grain of grace, and the whole of creation cannot satisfy him.

We would speak as the Lord helps us, humbly and simply. Now let us just look at ourselves and answer the question honestly before God; Have

we got that dissatisfaction with everything in this world, ? and mark what I said, it is not unthankfulness, but to know we have a soul. This prayer comes from a living soul, not a dead one. A dead soul is satisfied with dead things, a dead world, dead pleasures, dead wealth, a dead religion. So that this prayer is the outcome of regeneration, a soul born again, a different appetite, a hunger and thirst for those things that are eternal, imperishable. Feeling the need of an authority in the soul, the authority of a kingdom, a kingdom of grace. Well, have we that ? It is important I feel to consider this background of this beautiful prayer.

"Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed", and there is vehemence in it in this word, this exclamation 'Oh'. It does not just say, 'Wilt Thou bless me indeed ?' but "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed", and this word Oh seems to me as though his eye is surveying everything else as though he would say, that will not reach the case, there is no salvation anywhere else. "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me" with an indeed blessing.

Well, we will try and look at some of these indeed blessings. The emphasis is upon the INDEED. Very similar to that word of the apostle to the Philippians, he said: "I am confident that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ". He was confident of the very thing, and that very thing is comparable to the indeed blessing, and not only is it concerning the blessing itself, but the application of it. We often use the illustration of a magnet. You take a very powerful magnet and put it up against a piece of wood, there would be no effect at all, no, but if you took that magnet and put it against a piece of steel there would be immediate attraction, a drawing power, that is the indeed. You not only see these spiritual blessings that are in Christ Jesus, in the word of God, but you need them applied, so that grace saves and righteousness justifies and redemption redeems, and the blood of Christ pardons and cleanses. You want the blessings of the Gospel made effectual.

"Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed". Well, look round at our lawful things, our comforts, what the Lord has given to us, our privileges. Can you say of them all -

"I thank the Lord for meaner things,
But these are not my God"?

You take the case of Naaman, he was a great man, in an honourable position, but he was a leper. All his honour and his greatness and his attainments and his authority meant nothing to him at all, all the time that he was a leper. Perhaps some of you have known in a measure what that is. There are things that the Lord has given you, and we should be thankful for them, and enjoy them, but we may have known what it is for the burden of guilt to so weigh upon us, upon your spirit, that you may go into your garden, of which you are very fond, but you are a sinner, a sinner; and perhaps some of you have known what it is when the Lord has mercifully lifted upon you that light of His countenance, blessed your soul, drawn near to you in His gracious presence, you have gone into your garden, are among the blessings that God has given you and you can thank Him for them and enjoy them because you have in your heart a blessing indeed. It sanctifies the whole of His kind providence. They are sanctified by the word of God and

prayer. Well, may the Lord help us to come to particulars. "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed". If you have the grace of God in your heart, the love of God will cause you to seek the good of His dear people and the good of our fellow men, but there is a sense in experience when the need of salvation is so personal that it must come to you. You remember the sheet that was let down from heaven, and Peter said, it came even unto me, where he saw there a type of the whole of the Church, the election of God carried up again into heaven, it came even unto him. "Oh that Thou wouldst bless ME indeed". The first blessing, that is if the Lord should ask you, "What wilt thou that I should give thee?" I wonder what kind of responses we would give. Sometimes a consideration of these simple yet important things does discover the condition of our soul. It may be many a time you are not prepared to give a reply at all, so carnal, so earthly, but if the Lord should come this morning and say unto you, "What wilt thou that I should give thee?", what would you say? Well, I think that the first thing I would ask Him to give me is life. Life seems so important to me. To be a living soul. That is, to be born again. If you never have this indeed blessing, and indeed it is an indeed blessing, we shall never have any other. The channel through which all the blessings of God flow is through the channel of election, "According as He hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world." So that the first blessing is to be born again. Of that Thou wouldst bless me with eternal life in my soul, nothing to take its place. You may acquire a knowledge of the truth, but if we have no life, our knowledge is dead, although it may be correct. I think that is an important statement to make. We could, by dint of study and natural intelligence acquire a knowledge of the whole system of salvation, and be correct, and be dead, destitute of life. But if we have a spark of life, my friends, our religion will be living, and everything grows out from that life, because it is an incorruptible seed deposited by the Spirit in the soul. It is a secret and in the beginning of it it is unseen, but what a mercy to have that blessing indeed! O I have desired it, I need it myself and I have desired that that blessing might be deposited and be made manifest in many of our dear young people, because it is irresistible, you cannot resist life, no. "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed".

Then, to be blessed with a living faith. Faith is the gift of God. Faith is not something that is developed from some natural quality, it is a gift of God, it belongs to the new creature, the new man of grace. Faith. It is the eye of the soul, it sees unseen and eternal things. It lives upon an unseen God. It is the hand of the soul, it ~~receives~~ receives from the Lord those blessings of grace from His right hand. Faith is the feet of the soul. For, we walk by faith, not by sight. "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me" with a God given faith. Then a good hope through grace, what a blessing that is. A good hope needs a good foundation. There is a false hope as well as a false faith; but hope and faith walk together under the influence of the Spirit. Faith is the premier grace. It goes forward on its wings under the influence of the Spirit and rises, looks within the veil, it brings back a report, a good report of the good land, and hope hopes in the report that faith brings back and therefore, "Faith becomes the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of unseen things". Oh what a blessing is faith and hope! Faith has to do both with things present and future; hope has to do with future things, and it is an anchor of the soul. Its anchor is in the Rock of Ages. In the cleft of the Rock.

If there was no cleft in the Rock faith would never hold. If an anchor was to merely go down on a smooth rock, it would not hold, it needs a cleft in the Rock, and faith anchors in the wounded side of a suffering Redeemer. Hope. "Hope is an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and entereth into that that is within the veil". O faith brings into the heart at times a little of heaven ! some of you perhaps have known it. O the sacred influence of the truth, the sacred communications from an exalted Redeemer, having got the victory over sin and death and hell, risen victorious over the grave, ever lives, every moment, night and day, ever lives to make intercession for His people. Faith sees Him, approaches Him and brings back into the soul messages, and hope, hopes in what faith reveals.

"Oh that Thou wouldst bless me" with life, and faith, and hope and love. If we have no love we have no evidence of being the Lord's. The Gospel is a Gospel of love. God is a God of love, and love is a mighty influence. It was the love of God that would not withhold, but would send His only begotten Son into the world that sinners might be saved by Him.

Now have you any evidence that you have these blessings indeed ? Have you any evidence that you love the Lord ? because it comes to my mind that Jabez called upon the God of Israel because he knew Him. You will never call upon God if you are ignorant of Him, you will never really pray to an unknown God, and if you know Him, you will love Him. You cannot know Him and not love Him. These are close points and questions when they reflect upon your own case and your own condition, your own soul. "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed".

Then we need to be blessed with that greatest blessing in experience, of the forgiveness of sins. I think perhaps the 32nd Psalm is one of the most blessed upon this point. "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile." O look at that condition and see whether there is a blessing indeed in it ! and look at the person who is thus blessed, what a wonder he is. Sometimes I look at these blessings that have been conferred upon His people and I have coveted them. Those beatitudes that we read just now. If all of those spiritual qualities were wrought in the soul at one time, what a blessed person, what a blessed state you would be in ! and do you ever desire it ? "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed" with forgiveness of sin. It was a sheet anchor to David, and it is only suitable to sinners. "If Thou shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand ? but there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared". What then ? "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope". O the blessing of forgiveness ! we must have it, it is fatal to stop short of it. I sometimes think that there are some people who feel that it is such a great blessing that they will never know it, and they almost seem content to stop short there, if they can have other blessings, and leave that as it were on the shelf because it is too high, more than they can expect. But that is fatal my friends. There is not a sinner that will ever be found in heaven but those who are forgiven their iniquities. But there are great encouragements for those who are thus troubled. You take

for instance that word in Micah: "Who is a God like unto Thee that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgressions of the remnant of His heritage, He retaineth not His anger for ever because He delighteth in mercy". Now those of you who know your own sore, who know what we have been singing, O wretched man that I am, look at such a word as that; there is forgiveness with Him, He passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage, and there is only one reason why He can pass by the sins of sinners, and that is because the Holy law of God did not pass by Him. "Awake O sword against my Shepherd, against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts, smite the Shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered, and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones". That is the only reason He can pass by and pardon sinners. Ask Him for this blessing, my friends, O ask Him for forgiveness, it is the only sting that death has, death has no sting beside, and

"If sin be pardoned, I'm secure,
Death hath no sting beside".

It is a wonderful experience to have the sting of death extracted before you die. "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed"; you can see the soul, the faith of the dear man as he looks at everything else and turns away his face and says, if Thou wilt do it, it will reach my case, and what is this blessing indeed in one word? Salvation. It is all in there, salvation, and I thought too, during the week, what a wonderful prayer this is for every occasion. I thought of our dear young people as they start out in life, for the fear and grace of God to so exercise their hearts that they should start out with this prayer, "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it might not grieve me", what a blessed going forth that would be! and so really with regard to our movements in life and especially important junctures of life. As you look back you will find that there has been some providences of such importance which are outstanding, and it is well to watch movements in the providence of God, but if you commence and proceed under the influence of this prayer, you will go safely. O think of it! I do not know what your position is, what your future is, what your movements are, but O you look at this prayer, to pray before you go out, to pray in all the changing scenes of your life: "O that Thou wouldst bless me indeed" where I am going, and that Thou wouldst enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me to keep me from evil. Ah my friends, it may seem a common text to some people, but I should be thankful if my religion was contained in this one text. Some could write volumes and not have this secret in it, for here is the secret of the Lord. "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed"!

Then you need Him to bless you in your soul with the graces of the Spirit such as humility. It is a beautiful grace. It is a grace which is the gift of God but it is wrought in the soul by discipline, by experience and the Lord empties a soul from vessel to vessel and turns his strength into weakness, his wisdom into foolishness, and gives him to realise that without God he can do nothing. It takes his pride away. I feel that pride is one of the most sad tokens, pride is the saddest evidence of ignorance. "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed" with humility, with the tender

^fear of God. I do not know how many times the fear of God is referred to in the Scriptures, but it is very clear that those that fear God are under His special notice, and have very special promises belonging to them, and what a great grace that is, especially in these days. The crookedness, the corruption, the deception, the confusion that is in the world. To have the fear of God, but what is more my friends, to have the fear of God in the midst of a deceitful and desperately wicked heart and the various evils within of unbelief and carnality, that heavenly light shines in the conscience, 'An unctuous light to all that is right, and a bar to all that is wrong". "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me" with the fear of God"!

"Oh that Thou wouldst bless me", too, with a spirit of prayer. It is a great blessing to have the prayer of faith in the heart. Prayer is the most important thing in experience, in fact the whole of experience is prayer if you come to look at it. The exercise of your soul, wherever it takes you, when you are brought under the chastening of God for your instruction, into darkness and distress, affliction and weakness and sorrow, when you are brought into disappointments. When your way is hedged up in providence, you will find that prayer is a golden thread that runs through everything. O leave not my soul destitute of prayer ! it is a blessing indeed. "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed".

To be blessed too, in bringing forth fruit. Fruitless trees give no evidence of life and the church of God is compared to a garden, trees of His own right hand planting, and "By their fruits ye shall know them". It has been painful to me when I look back at my life, how unfruitful and unprofitable my life has been; and you cannot go back my friends. If you could you could not do anything with it. Just to step aside for a moment, a gracious soul once corrected me, and I like being corrected, I said to them, if I could go back many things in my life I should like to undo; he said to me, what good would that be ? it would not blot them out. "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed" with the tender fear of God, and bless me indeed with fruitfulness. "They that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of the Lord, and shall bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing". Well, look at it, you have got to look at these things. Are you fruitful ? Do you bring forth the fruits of the fear of God, of humility ? Do we bring forth the fruits of patience, of godliness, of temperance, of lovingkindness, of charity ? "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed".

Then we shall need a blessing at last, when we come to die, but my mind turned to that terrible character of Baalim. He did not want a blessing indeed but his eyes were opened to see the goodness of Israel, the Lord's people, and he said, "Let me die the death of the righteousness, let my last end be like theirs", a good prayer, but it was not the prayer of faith. That wretched man would have cursed God's people, but he could not. "I have had commandment to bless, and He hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it". So that these blessings indeed are irreversible blessings. No Baalim can turn them into a curse. So we shall need a blessing indeed when we come to die, and what will that be ? Why, to die in the Lord. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth", blessed people. But Baalim, he wanted both worlds, he wanted everything that his flesh craved after here, it was very solemn that his eyes were opened to see the blessedness of the Lord's people and yet to have a devil. Baalim, he was a partaker of the Holy Ghost really in this sense, that the Lord put

a word in his mouth and he had to go and speak what the Lord said, he could not say anything else. But O to have this last blessing, dying grace, but there is this, I believe it my friends, there is a connection between how we die and how we live. You cannot separate them. Some people think that they can live as they like and then somehow or another they will get to heaven, but their expectation will be cut off, and therefore, we may well look at this part of the text and see if it is in our life: "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed" while I live, bless me with Thy Holy Spirit, to guide me, to teach me, to quicken me, bless me with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, bless me with Thy upholding power, "Hold Thou me up and I shall be saved". Bless me through life and be with me in death.

"Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast", that is, enlarge my experience. He could not enlarge his own. There is a line, a degree of faith, of experience, that the Lord gives to each of His people they are not all the same, and if you attempt to enlarge your coast by acquisition, you will find that it will be dead branches, and when trouble comes those branches will be broken off, when the storm comes you will have to cast overboard that which you have acquired that does not belong to you. What does belong to you of a spiritual kind? well, God's testimonies. The Psalmist said, "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies, O Lord". My friends, seek testimonies, and when you get them stick to them. I do feel to need to be kept, to be kept especially in the ministry to my own line of things and not attempt to go in the line of other people. I have got a very bad memory, but I have often been thankful for it in this sense, I could never remember anybody elses sermons to repeat them if I wanted to.

Enlarge my experience. "Grow in grace and in a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now just in conclusion, for I cannot keep on much longer, the apostle writing to the Philippians said this, "Whereunto ye have already attained, walk by the same rule, mind the same things". "Whereunto ye have already attained". Now I want to find those dear people that are fearful of presuming. How much have you attained to? "Whereunto ye have already attained". Well, you may say, I do not know that I have attained to anything. Have you attained to the text? "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed". Have you attained to the publican's prayer? "God be merciful to me a sinner". Have you attained to Job's desire?, "O that I knew where I might find Him". Well, do not cast it away, no, stick to those testimonies, it is a testimony of your deep need of what there is in the fulness of Christ, "Walk by the same rule, mind the same things", the rule that the Apostle walked by, mind the same Object, he walked by faith, the Object was God in Christ.

Amen

(¹ranscribed verbatim and not edited for publication).