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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTIST

Sermon preached by Mr F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel
Wednesday evening August 20th 1969.

But this I say, brethen, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31.

You will at once realise the importance of these observations that the Apostle made to the Corinthian church. Evidently they had been enquiring of him about the important matters of this life, with respect to marriage, with respect to buying and selling, and with respect to their sorrows and their joys. He seems to put the whole of the things of this life as though they are bound up in a volume, so that the beginning of this text, and the end of it, are like two covers of a book. The first cover is this: "the time is short." The other cover is this: "the fashion of this world passeth away." And all that is between these two covers represents the things concerning this life.

I do feel it may be profitable if the Holy Spirit gives us to pause in the midst of the conditions in the world today. And in the first place, it reminds us of the exhortation of Paul to the Ephesians: "Walk ...as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." (ch.5:15-16) O the terrible conditions in every part of the world, and the latest trouble in Ulster, where doubtless the Roman Catholics are attempting to dominate the whole country! And then there are our own troubles. But the time is short. The time is short because there is an end to it; everything that has an end is short compared with eternity. It is short because the end is sure, and it is sure because the pathway through time is uncertain; but it has a certain end. "In life's uncertain path I stand." (Gadsby's 331)

Time is a creation; time does not belong to God; Eternity is His time: "In the beginning God created," and there will be an end to creation when the angel shall lift up his hands to heaven and declare that time shall be no more. But we are in time. "The days of our years is threescore years and ten; and by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." (Psalm 90:10) This is a very real consideration. But how have we spent it? In Luke we read this: "Occupy till I come." How have we been occupied? We cannot go back, the time is short. O to redeem the time, to redeem past years! We cannot go back. Some of you may remember how the caterpillar and the cankerworm did eat up every green thing. How responsibilities and cares seemed to eat up everything else. But the Lord has kindly promised to redeem those years, and perhaps some of you, looking back, have asked the Lord to fulfil that promise.

The time is short, and it is a sowing time; it passeth on relentless, but every action in the whole of our lives is a sowing of seed. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." (Galatians 6:7,8) One or the other – how have we sown? Time is short, very short.

"But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none." Now this word "remaineth" can be applied to that which comes before that which follows. The time is short, and it will remain short, and because the time is short, let those that have wives be as though they had none. It will remain short, it could never be lengthened. That wonderful word in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 is full of instruction; it will bring us to pray with the Psalmist: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." (Psalm 90:12)

Vanity and vexation of Spirit is stamped upon all below the sun, and yet my friends, we are so carnal we live as if we shall live for ever. You are acquainted, no doubt, with the 49th Psalm. It comes right on this part of the text: "They that trust in their wealth...shall perish." Time is short, and it remains short, and I feel that we need at times to consider our latter end. Moses said in Deuteronomy: "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" (ch.32:29) But a natural man thinks about everything else except his latter end; he puts off the evil day, but he cannot put it off when it comes. "But this I say, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none." The intention here is not that wives should be neglected, ignored; indeed, the very opposite. But to my mind, this word has two applications. If we consider the time is short, the point is that every relationship must be dissolved. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, every natural relationship must be dissolved. There will be no marrying or giving in marriage. Sometimes you may consider what we should lose if we should lose our wives. And therefore let us show that tender love and affection towards them as is felt if they were taken. But the **real** intention of this is that all natural relationships must be dissolved, and that is the consideration in the shortness of time, seeing all is hastening dissolution. "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" (2 Peter 3:11) That is how it should be, seeing that it remaineth that the time is short. In the 39th Psalm the Psalmist took a view of the shortness of life: "Lord, make me to know my end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." (v.4)

"It remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none." It is to hold everything we have here with a loose hand, and it includes that important word: "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also...But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness." (Matthew 6:21-33) The apostle here is taking these people off every end, and setting before them the only right and true end. And the need of a Christian is salvation. Sometimes when we are favoured to walk with God and feel the preciousness of His presence and the sweetness of His person, faith looks forward to see the salvation of the soul. And we shall view time in the perspective of eternity. Let us look, for instance, at that word in this 2nd epistle: "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment." (ch.4:17) It may be a very heavy affliction, and it may be for years. O but if one in that condition is given to look at eternal and unseen things, the affliction will lose its influence. The time is short, and to look at these things which are unseen and eternal, will be for good. Some have known it; I wish I knew more of it.

"But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none." It's a very real, solemn meditation; we come to this point of reality, and we live in a world so full of artificial things. How artificial the world is, and increases to be! Everything is artificial, but when we come to the things of God, it is real, and nothing of it will change. So that the

apostle here is shewing the distinction between those things that are fading away, and those things that are eternal.

"And they that weep, as though they wept not." We are not forbidden to weep. The Lord Jesus Himself wept at the grave of Lazarus. We have feeling, and throughout the Word of God His divine compassion recognises and comforts those that mourn. But it remaineth, the time is short, so weep as though you wept not. It really brings in that word in the Philippians: "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known unto God." (ch.4:6) "They that weep, as though they wept not," and sometimes under a sense of sorrow, for there will be weeping for things internal as well as external. But "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (Psalm 30:5) And it remaineth, the time is short. "And they that weep, as though they wept not." You may be in adversity; a farmer may have his crops ruined; you may be walking in a solitary way of desolation; you may be walking in a pathway of bereavement and sorrow. "But let those that weep, be as though they wept not." In a few years it will matter little what we are passing through now; it remaineth, the time is short. Perhaps with some of us, in five or ten years at the most, it will matter very little to our condition in providence, but it will make an eternal difference to us whether we possess life and grace in the soul. "They that weep, as though they wept not."

Then there is the opposite: "They that rejoice as though they rejoiced not." In a time of prosperity be joyful. The last three verses of Ecclesiastes chapter 5 describe two gracious men that died: one was a poor man, and the other was a rich man. It is very instructive, and it says concerning them both that they "will not much remember the days of their lives." When this poor man dies with the grace of God in his heart, he does not much remember his poverty, and as he is dying does not say, Oh I have had a hard time, I have been opposed in everything, everything has failed. He does not remember much because he has been a praying man. It was said concerning the rich man who had the fear of God in his heart, "he shall not much remember days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart – it was not his riches, he was a praying man, and his riches were not his treasure as with some, but he saw those unsearchable riches that were in Christ. And so in this text there is an exhortation not to be overwhelmed with either sorrow or joy. It remains, whether you are in sorrow or joy, the time is short, we are hastening on. I have sometimes thought that a very good motto to go on a clock would be: "Occupy till I come." Oh to look for the coming of the Lord Jesus, for faith to distinguish between the things of this poor world and the things that are eternal, to know it by the power of the grace of God in the heart! Then you would be able to walk in this word: "The time is short." It brings to mind the opening verses of the 3rd Philippians: "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." It is a conclusion and a finality, as though Paul would say, You reckon that all the sufferings and pains, bereavements and sorrows, reckon them all up and faith will come to this conclusion: "Riches and honour are with Me," (Proverbs 8.18) when we see how everything else will sink, losses will be no longer, joys will be no longer. Brethren, reckon up your prosperity, all your comforts, and you will come to the same conclusion: Riches are not in these things, but riches are in the Lord.

"But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not." These are hard sayings, my friends; it would not be hard if we were not carnal. When the life of grace enters into a soul, then he is

blessed with a spiritual mind; but his carnal mind is not eliminated, it is still there – and how we have to prove this: "They that buy, as though they possessed not."

Well, my friends, the possessions of a worldly man are everything to him. You take the thing in reverse. I often think that to reverse a matter explains it. Supposing now, instead of living by faith we live completely in and upon the world and material things, and are without God, without hope, in despair, would it make much difference to you if you could have all you coveted, all that this world calls good and great, and be destitute of life and salvation? If we were asked which shall we have, life or death, what should we say? How the things of this life would be put in their right place! We should live for eternity. Paul says: "Reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13) If we are encumbered with our possessions, if we have treasures here upon earth, how could we run with patience the race that is before us? "And they that buy, as though they possessed not." Be prepared to let everything go. It is only faith that can walk in this path. "And they that buy, as though they possessed not." Now it is a sweet place to be brought, to walk in this exhortation so as to be willing to lie passive in God's hands, to give everything up. You will have to be brought there, and if you are brought there, Christ will be precious; He will be so precious that He will not only be the one thing needful but He will be the object of our first desire. Oh there is a reality in vital godliness, but you cannot serve God and mammon. You are not promised two heavens, one here and one hereafter. No, "But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none." Whatever your interests are, whatever you possess, whether you are married or unmarried, it remaineth, the time is short, and soon we must pass the gloomy vale, soon we must shut our eyes upon all earthly objects.

"They that weep, as though they wept not." Well, when we see light in God's light, you will see no cause to weep except for your sin. I believe I can say that I have not got a trouble except self and sin. If it were not for self and sin I believe I could endure anything. Oh, if we had not our self and sin! But we have, and we are influenced by it. But, blessed be God, the mystery of redemption is greater than the mystery of iniquity. "And they that weep, as though wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though possessed not."

Of course, the fear of God comes in this, and we do need to be kept tender in the fear of God on every occasion and transaction. A worldly man does not buy as if he possessed not. Paul tells us how to discharge our duties: "And they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away." We have to use the world, we must use it, and the Lord has given everything necessary in the world for our use. Oh His majesty, His glory is manifested in His work. And look at the fruits of the earth, as the seasons revolve – but God gives the increase and life – it is given us to use. "And they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away." Oh how the things of this life are used by covetous men, how men will create a famine when there is plenty! They abuse God's gifts to enrich themselves. "And they that use this world, as not abusing it."

Well, when we look at a character like this compared with that one in Peter: "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" there is the alternative. And if we are thus looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus, we

shall hold things according to the things in the text, because the time is short, eternity is long. "And they that use this world, as not abusing it." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:15-16) Oh how beautiful the scriptures are! We have no excuse; my friends, the scriptures are given by inspiration of God, and are sufficient to thoroughly furnish a man. It teaches us how to live and how to die in peace. But it remains, the time is short. "And they that use this world, as not abusing it." Well, if we should examine ourselves by the Word of God, how should we stand? If any of us should come short, what then? Well, ask the Lord to enable us to redeem the time that may be left to us, give diligence that we may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless. Oh it is a mercy to redeem the time, especially as you are getting toward the end. You may remember years when you read the scriptures in a very careless way, and now you desire to meditate in His laws day and night. Oh the treasures of the Holy scriptures!

"And they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away." Oh what teaching this is! But it is only faith that can receive this teaching. I do think a lot about our young friends in this terrible world with so much immorality. "The time is short." I do feel persuaded more and more that a meditation by the Holy Spirit upon our latter end will teach us how to live, for "as the tree falls so it will lie." Where is our treasure? "The fashion of this world passeth away." Everything is passing with it, the passing of time is relentless. Things here seem very great, but viewed in the light of Jehovah how small! "We walk by faith, not by sight."

Well, I have felt to-day that it may be profitable to us to re-consider that the time is short, and death is ever on the road. David says: "There is but a step between me and death." (1 Samuel 20:3) Sometimes the younger ones are taken first. I have noticed lately, with the disasters that have occurred, how many children have lost their lives. "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36) So the apostle sums the whole thing up: whatever you are passing through, whatever your possessions are, whatever your poverty is, the fashion of this world passeth away.

Amen.