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Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton,
Lord's Day morning, 31st October 1965.

"For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth He devise means, that His banished be not expelled from him" 2 Samuel 14:14.

There are many things connected with this life that are unreal, that they will just evaporate. Many things that are artificial, especially in these days. But there are things which are unalterable, things that are real. One of these things is death; it is a reality, and the text shows that it is a necessity: "We must needs die." Death is inescapable; men naturally would escape it if they could, but it is inescapable.

It is irretrievable, because "we are as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again." And the text shows also that the sovereign God is no respecter of persons, whether it is the monarch upon the throne or the poorest peasant; there is no distinction with death. It is a great leveller; it levels all. There is only one distinction in death, and that is the distinction that grace makes.

Also in the text there is a means devised by which His people shall not be expelled from Him. So that all men without exception are inside the first part of the text, and these real things none can deny. Atheists cannot deny them. Modernists that would deny everything of a vital nature cannot deny it. It is a reality, a solemn fact. "We must needs die." The necessity of death is the justice of God. We are mortal, dying mortals, because we are sinners. "By sin came death", and it is a very solemn consideration. Men, as we were reading just now, find out many inventions; they can find out everything but God. But man by wisdom knows not God. But the necessity of death is in sinnership. Men generally are ignorant of that, and therefore it makes salvation the greatest blessing. It makes the Gospel the richest portion. The ignorance is that gross darkness that covers the people, and that ignorance has two parts to it: an ignorance of self, and an ignorance of God. If we know God by the teaching of the Spirit, we shall of necessity know ourselves, the two go together. And so, however wise man may be naturally, however powerful his intellect, however great a scientist he may be, if he has not the Holy Spirit to enlighten and teach him, he is ignorant of himself, and ignorant of God. And what an awakening that will be at last! So we must needs die, because we are sinners.

When Adam and Eve were placed in the garden, they were placed there under a covenant, a law: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17) Therefore, there are some who die three times. All mankind died, are dead in trespasses and in sins, died a spiritual death in the fall, and there are those who die in union with the Lamb, in union with the Lord Jesus, and are brought to die under the law regarding the sentence of death in themselves, and they also die a corporeal death of the body. But all death is the result of sin.

"For we must needs die, and are as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again." This is not a denial of the resurrection, but it is an assertion of the reality of death. As soon

as life has gone out of a body all the most skilful physicians turn away from that body, they can do no more with it, they cannot resurrect it, they cannot revive it, they cannot bring it to life. They are finished, all their limitations, all their skill, cannot be gathered up again. Death is absolute; and all these conclusions will cause an inward exercise. If that was all, why my friends, it would be most dismal, we should of all men be most miserable. And yet there is a mystery in it. It is only the eye of faith that can thus view the solemn fact of death, and yet see in it the opening of the greatest blessings that can possibly be possessed and experienced. We are as water spilt on the ground, it cannot be gathered up again. We were reading at the prayer meeting: "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved," at death everything is dissolved, every natural union is dissolved, every relationship is dissolved, and all material things are dissolved. All our natural riches are dissolved when we die; they sink with us, and "we are as water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again." Everything is dissolved, and this is a reality. Some of us are not far from it. Young ones may die before the older ones, but older ones must die. Well might we say:

*Pause, my soul! and ask the question,
Art thou ready to meet God?
Am I made a real Christian,
Washed in the Redeemer's blood?*

(Gadsby's 698)

So, as we have said, death is one of the unalterable realities, and the only certainty of the future. When one is brought to realise it by the Spirit, that soul will need something as real as death to meet it. And blessed be God, there is the reality of salvation, the reality of heaven, the reality of the Gospel.

"For we must needs die, and be as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again." It is very solemn to view death, even the death of a saint. I shall not forget looking at the lifeless body of my dear brother; his works had finished, his many, many labours, but nothing could be gathered up again. Therefore, what manner of persons ought we to be while we live? I have thought this (I wish I did not know it) how often we may be irritable and rebellious and unkind, but when one has gone, they are as water spilt upon the ground, and cannot be gathered up again. We may have many poignant remembrances and regrets. O you may long; it may be, if you could have half an hour with one that you have lost, so that you could retrieve some of the things that you have said. But we are as water spilt upon the ground, it cannot be gathered up again. Then "What manner of persons ought we to be?" I could start with the pulpit: what manner of preachers ought we to be in view that we shall soon be as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again? What manner of hearers ought we to be? What manner of husbands? What manner of wives? What manner of children? What manner of servants? What manner of masters? "Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved" – finished, so far as this life is concerned. What we have said cannot be unsaid. What we have done cannot be undone. "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person." This shows to us His heavenly dignity, His divine sovereignty, and that blessed testimony concerning Him in our hymn: "He sits on no precarious throne, Nor borrows leave to be." (4)

And with respect to His work, it is asked: "With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him?" (Isaiah 40:14) It brings us before the eternal God and eternity. "Neither doth God respect any

person." O if some of our proud people should but just realise that it is in God that we live and move and have our being! It is of God. He permits us to live. Our lives are sin-forfeited while we live. There is something very blessed, to my mind, in a consideration of these things. I know some of you dear young people might say, 'I really do not see that there is very much attractive in that text.' There is everything, every attraction in it! "We must needs die" whether we will or no. But O, this does make way for eternal life, and this, which in itself is the most dismal consideration, makes way through the blessed Spirit the goodness and grace of God, for that change which is eternal blessedness.

"Neither doth God respect any person." He does not ask permission for anything that He does. He works according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. "None can stay His hand, or say unto Him, what doest Thou?" O it is great to stand in awe of this eternal God. "Neither doth God respect any person," and He does not respect any merit in any person. And there is another way He does not respect persons, a very blessed way to my mind:

*The vilest sinner out of hell,
That lives to feel his need,
Is welcome to the throne of grace
The Saviour's blood to plead.*

(Gadsby's 527)

And He will not respect the sins of that sinner, but He will "regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise his prayer" – and so it will be at the end.

"Neither doth God respect any person: yet doth He devise means, that His banished be not expelled from Him." And this belongs to the Gospel. If it was only a fact, and only reality in the first part of the text, well my friends, we should have no Scripture. We may as well close the Chapel. "For we must needs die" is a fact, and that death is final. And that "we are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again, neither doth God respect any person." If that was all, why, it would leave the future in a blank. But here is the Gospel: "Yet doth He devise means that His banished be not expelled from Him." "His banished" – His people, when Adam fell, were banished from Eden. A terrible word that was of God: "He drove out the man," we read, from Eden. "He drove out the man" – and in Adam He drove out the whole human race from Eden's garden, and there was an angel with a flaming sword to keep the way to the tree of life. And the human race have never been able to get to God through Eden since. But we sing a beautiful truth concerning that banishment:

*But banished thence we flee to thee,
O garden of Gethsemane.*

(Gadsby's 153/1)

And this brings us to the electing, sovereign love of God. While the whole of the human race fell, while they all were banished and turned out and expelled from Eden, yet the church of God in the covenant of grace was preserved in Jesus Christ. They are His banished. They were given unto Christ by the Father in the covenant to redeem. And although God, who is infinite in knowledge, knew that man would fall, yet in the covenant there was provision made for the church of God, who equally fell. The church of God were no better than the world; and we shall feel it when we are convinced of

sin, and we shall have to say: "Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" "But the end is not yet." "Yet" I like that "yet" – there are some blessed "yets" in the Bible. Although "we must needs die," and so far as this life is concerned, everything when we die will be dissolved, and we shall be "as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again," yet that is not the end. No! The best hope that an unbeliever has is that eternity shall prove to be an oblivion; the best hope is that death shall be an annihilation; but their expectation will be cut off. But the expectation of the righteous shall be granted. So this death of the Lord's people is not the end: "Yet doth He devise means, that His banished be not expelled from Him." And what are those means? The means of grace. And what are the means of grace? It is the gospel. And what is the Gospel? It is the power of God in the heart unto salvation. And what is the power of the Gospel in the heart unto salvation, but the power of the Person of God, the eternal Son and the authority, benefit and effect of His sinless life, His vicarious sufferings, His ignominious death, and His glorious resurrection. That is the means that Word devised. I think there is a hymn, I know that hymn fairly well but I cannot remember to repeat it, but this is the verse:

*Grace first contrived a way
To save rebellious man,
And all the steps that grace display
Which drew the wondrous plan.*

(Gadsby's 201)

That is the means devised. It was devised by the glorious Trinity in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge. And this device was in the covenant of grace. There are all the decrees of Jehovah, all the counsels which are the foundation of the church where the Lord Jesus was set up from everlasting in the covenant of grace, where He was appointed to every office that He should assume. There, when He was appointed to be the Mediator between God and men, the appointed Substitute for sinners, where He was appointed to be the Way, the Truth and the Life. This is the means devised in the covenant of grace. O what a view faith has of this at times! It overwhelmed David in a blessed way. You may know what it is to be overwhelmed with sorrow, overwhelmed by a sense of your guilt and your own sins, overwhelmed with difficulties, sorrows, responsibilities, but David was overwhelmed with the covenant of grace. It is very blessed at times when the things of God swallow up the things of time, when the blessed covenant mercy and sure mercies of David swallow up all your misery. And David had come nearly to his end: "Although my house be not so with God; yet hath He made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow." (2 Samuel 23:5) O this blessed device of eternal wisdom, love, goodness, and grace whereby "He devised means, that His banished be not expelled from Him."

It is singularly expressed: "That His banished be not expelled." To be banished is to be expelled into exile; and so we were – O but "The redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head." (Isaiah 51:11)

So this is salvation, means. The means in the first place is the gift of God's dear Son. This is His ransom: "I have found a ransom." (Job 23:24) The salvation of sinners could not be effected by a naked act of omnipotence from heaven; and this, I feel persuaded, we shall be taught in our own souls, and there is a blessedness in it. It would be a good thing if the Holy Ghost exercised our souls

in this means, devised that poor sinners shall not be expelled from heaven. They were expelled from Eden, but they shall never be expelled from heaven. And this will make Christ exceedingly precious, and it is all of free and sovereign grace. A sinner, in salvation, is absolutely passive, he contributes nothing to it. His life from the dead spiritually is a real resurrection, and it is the immediate effect of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. O that blessed Ransom! I have more and more admired that description of it in the 33rd Job: "Deliver him from going down into the pit: I have found a ransom." Infinite wisdom and sovereign grace found that ransom, and "God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son" – the only means whereby His people could be recovered from the ruins of the fall; the only way by which His banished could be brought back unto Him, and reconciled unto God through Jesus Christ.

When we, in our feeble way, try to unfold this Gospel and this great salvation, there is such a blessedness in it that you will feel the vitality in your own souls. The method of salvation is blessed, it is a sovereign method. Had God been pleased to use any other method, He could have done so. Had He been pleased when He called His people by grace to eradicate sin, He could have done so. If He had been pleased that His people should be princes in this world and occupy thrones, He could have done so. But it was not His method. And have you not felt the wisdom of it in the exercises of your soul? And sometimes in your saddest moments, and when you have been brought to pass through darkness and through deep waters, you have seen the wisdom of God, how therein He has manifested His immutability, His divine sovereignty, His faithfulness and His power, which you would never have known had you not been brought into a position, wherein the display of these divine perfections were attractive to your faith.

"Yet doth He devise means," and that means by the incarnation of His dear Son. The law must be fulfilled by the nature that broke it, and therefore, "What the law could not doGod sending His own Son" did. (Romans 8:3) He being God as well as man could deal with God and with man; could be a daysman betwixt two. O the mystery of this constitutes salvation, whether we are conscious of it or not; it needed the whole of this salvation in all its completeness in order that we would not be expelled from God in heaven. All the power is Thine, "Thine is the, kingdom, the power and the glory," and so it is through the means of a Mediator, a Substitute, a Redeemer. And the means derived its power, its authority, over the devil, destroyed his works of death, derived its authority from the Person of Emanuel, God with us. And therefore you will see the importance of union unto the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is great, I say, the method of it is blessed; the work of the Holy Ghost working this means that was devised, in your experience, is a blessed life, a blessed portion. O the mystery that the Lord should get to Himself eternal praises through the redemption of poor sinners!

"Yet doth He devise means, that His banished should not be expelled from Him." But then there are other means, not different, but exercised according to His sovereign method. There is the means of grace, the church of God. That is a device which the Holy Ghost uses in order to the conversion of sinners, and that will make the services exceedingly blessed and very solemn. O if this was realised more than it is, there would not be that superficial, light religion in all its activity. O that the Lord would open the eyes of poor sinners that are engaged in cheerful, social religion that has really no root in it! I know what it is, I have been there, when I went away from this Chapel, and from the ways of truth, carried away by social religion, my intense love of singing and music. O I have thought of young people that have been allured by those things, because I have been there myself. But

these things are not real, they are not real; there is reality in the text, both a reality of death and a reality of life, a reality of sin and a reality of grace.

"Yet doth He devise means," and so He has devised, instituted divine worship, the church of God, and He has promised to bless that provision; it is His institution, the whole means in its application is the work of the Holy Ghost. Quickening sinners into life gives them to feel that they need to know something different from what this world can teach them; gives them to realise that they must possess something different from what this world can bestow upon them; gives them to realise that they are lost to all eternity unless saved by grace, so that they begin to live by faith. And that beginning of a life of faith is when they receive the sentence of death. Then they begin to feel after, if haply they might find God. They begin to attend upon the services differently from how they did before. The Bible becomes a new Book, the hymns become new hymns, because they have a new nature that can only live from heavenly life; and therefore, He doth devise the means of grace. And one main thing in the means of grace is the Holy Scriptures; everything that is wrought in the heart of a sinner is according to the Word of God. He does nothing but what is according to the Scriptures, and what a revelation it is of the purposes and counsels of Jehovah.

What should we know without this blessed revelation? What a gift it is! And it is a devised means, for by the Holy Ghost, when it enters, it gives life: "The entrance of Thy words giveth light," and it giveth life, giveth understanding to the simple; it reveals the things of God, it reveals the Gospel, it reveals heaven and shows the way there. O what a means is the Holy Scriptures, that His banished should not be expelled from Him! It reveals the Lord Jesus, a new and living way to God, which He consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say His flesh. When faith sees this blessed consecrated way through the flesh of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, sees Him walking out this way in everything that He did, in all that He suffered in His perfect obedience, in the satisfaction He rendered unto the law – O this blessed means!

"That His banished should not be expelled from Him." "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:34) Well, the time is coming when we shall either be expelled from Him, or we shall hear that wonderful word: "Come, ye blessed of my Father." "Come," as we have said before, belongs exclusively to the Gospel; "Depart" belongs to the Holy Law of God. And we shall hear one or the other of those two words. Either "Depart, ye cursed" – and there will be no respect of persons then – it will be no use for a graceless preacher then, when he comes to the end to say, "Why, I have prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have done many wonderful works." The Lord will say unto him: "I never knew you. People may have known you, people may have admired you, but I never knew you at all. I never saw you in secret mourning over your sins, bemoaning yourself thus. I have never seen you crying for mercy. I have never known you, though people might have done." Expelled!

But O, there will be some to whom He will say: "Come." "Come, thou blessed of my Father, wherefore standest thou without?" Well, my friends, the text is very solemn and very blessed. O may those removals which are constantly taking our friends from us, be sanctified to us. I believe that our dear departed friend, Miss Piper, is inside the last part of this text, that she was in that blessed device, that covenant of grace, that she should not be expelled from Him. Amen.