

1023
Sermon preached by Mr. F.L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, on
Lord's day evg., Jan. 8th, 1961

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Text: II Thess. 1.11, 12.

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We have throughout the Scriptures a display of the sovereign invincible grace of God. Paul says to the Corinthians, that he received that which he delivered unto the people. He experienced the Gospel that he preached, and that brought him to know his need of grace and the sufficiency of it. As we read this chapter perhaps you noticed that really in simple New Testament language it is explained by that word of the Lord in His Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven", and "it is through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom". The Apostle prays for every church. It is well worth considering, the prayers of the Apostle Paul for the various churches. Oh how solicitous he was for their spiritual prosperity and health!

The text is a prayer: "Wherefore also we pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling". And the calling is thus connected with the subject this morning: "Now the God of all grace, who hath called us to His eternal glory, after ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect", or complete, "stablish, strengthen, settle you". And this He accomplishes through a path of tribulation, so that the 4th and 5th verses of this chapter are companions to the text: "So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure, which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer". Well, if we are to live with Him, we shall be brought experimentally to die with Him, and if we suffer we shall also reign with Him. But my friends, we shall be made partakers of the afflictions of the Gospel.

"Did Christ, my Lord, suffer, and shall I repine?"

I suppose none of you would count yourselves worthy of such a calling, but at the same time I should conclude that the same people who could not count themselves worthy would be glad, thankful, for the Apostle to pray for them, that they might be counted worthy. I find it increasingly difficult to preach. You might say, "Well, after the thousands of sermons you preach, you ought to be able to preach very easily." It is very solemn; I am brought to a pass more than ever I was lest I should speak of things that I know nothing about. And are you concerned as to whether you hear of things you know nothing about? We want knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. And there is this, that when you feel that, you might say, "I only feel safe where there is prayer". You might feel too weak, too shaken; astonishments may have come into your life that have shaken all shakeable things. It is a mercy if there is anything left that cannot be shaken. And therefore you feel that you are too weak to make any assertions, but you feel safe upon the ground of prayer. Well, here is a prayer of the Apostle for the Thessalonians.

"Wherefore we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling." In the margin it is, "Vouchsafe you worthy", which to my mind appears that He will condescend to work in you by His Spirit that sanctification by which alone you can be worthy of His eternal kingdom. We shall never go to heaven unless we deserve to go

there. You might say, "Well, I really cannot receive that remark". But the blessedness of it is that all the desert and all the worthiness is in the worthy Lamb, the Substitute. We shall never go to heaven unless we have lived a sinless perfect life; but blessed be God, that life was lived by the Lord Jesus, so intimate, so real is the union between the glorious Head and the members, that all that He is, and has, and all that He has done, He was a Substitute in it all. And this is the worthiness in the text.

There is another part to this worthiness, it ~~is~~^{had} a secret, and it is in predestination: "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called". And those whom He predestinated are those whom the Father has loved with an everlasting love, whom He has given to His dear Son in the covenant of grace to redeem. My friends, this precedes all the work of grace in experience, and it is no small consideration that there are no second thoughts with God. Real religion, vital godliness, is not something that the Lord by His Spirit commences in people promiscuously, but it is consequent upon the eternal decrees and purposes of God in the covenant of grace; and that is in this worthiness - fore-known, loved, predestinated, and therefore called by sovereign grace. And this is that all-sufficient grace that Paul was brought to feel His need of, and to receive.

"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling." It is a high calling. It is a calling from death, a translation from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son. It is a translation from darkness of ignorance into the marvellous light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is a wonderful calling. Ah if we could truly say:

"He saw me ruined in the Fall,

Yet loved me notwithstanding all",

we are indeed favoured people! But we want to feel it. The hymns are written out for us; anybody can read them and sing them. But here the Apostle prays that it might go farther than that: "That our God would count you worthy of what we sing, worthy of the Gospel that is revealed, worthy of the kingdom of God, of His grace here and of glory hereafter.

Another part of that worthiness comes to the mind. In that wonderful prayer of the Lord He says: "The glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them, that they may be one as We are". You think of it! There is a glory given unto the Lord Jesus. As He is the glorious, co-equal, eternal Son of God, nothing could be given to Him. He had a glory that belonged to Him, His essential glory that cannot be communicated to a creature; but the glory that His Father gave to Him was a mediatorial glory: "We beheld His glory, as of the only-begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth". The glory of His offices, of Immanuel, the glory of a Mediator, the glory of His grace, the glory of divine mercy and of His sin-atonement precious blood, the glory of the merits of His Person. And this is in the worthiness: "The glory that Thou gavest Me, I have given them".

"Wherefore always we pray for you, that our God would vouchsafe this worthiness to you of this calling", to work all our works in us. And this is in that worthiness - the grace of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Oh this is the essential worthiness of a sinner that makes him fit for God and heaven! And this is the sufficiency of grace, a

display of grace. Do you feel it? That worthiness of being made a new creature in Christ Jesus, a living soul. Have we any evidence that we are living souls? We have no need for anyone to tell us about our body of sin and death, our dead souls. But the Apostle, as we read this morning to the Colossians, thanks God "who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son". Now that is an inward work. It is not a notion, not a theological proposition; it is a work, an experience.

"And fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness." You look at that. What do you think of it? What do you think of it when you look at yourself? We asked that question last Lord's day evening: "How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a goodly heritage among the nations?" And when Paul prays that God would fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, what a prayer it is! David, when drawing near to his end, as I should judge, summed up this point: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever". Fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, "having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Christ Jesus to Himself". Is that goodness? Upon what ground is it done? "According to the good pleasure of His will."

And Paul prays for a fulfilment of all the good pleasure of His goodness. But the Lord Himself shows us what that is in this life. Eventually it is the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away"; but there is the promise of the life that now is, that is a spiritual life. Therefore the Lord says: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom", the whole of the kingdom. When the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon, he gave her her request to the half of his kingdom, and so did the king to Queen Esther; but the Lord Jesus gives to His people the whole of His kingdom. Therefore in the 5th verse we read this: "That ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer". Oh suffering precedes glory! It was the way the Master went, and if we are taught by His Spirit, and His love shed abroad in our heart kindles our love to Him, then we shall sing with understanding that hymn:

"Thus make me willing, glorious Lamb,
To suffer all things for Thy name;
At last be where my Jesus is,
And rise to everlasting bliss".

If we had not the Word of God - oh precious Word, what a heavenly light it is! - we should be bewildered by those things that come to us. Some of the choicest saints have suffered the most in affliction and adversity. How could Job's case be understood unless faith saw the sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost, so that tribulation in Job worked patience, and patience experience.

"And fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness." Well, all the good pleasure of His goodness is the whole of the Gospel fulfilled in the experience of a sinner. If this prayer of Paul's was answered in our case, the Lord would fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, all the goodness that eternal love has wrought out through the Person and in the sending of His dear Son, and all that wonderful and

complete work which the Lord Jesus finished, and all the victory and glory of His destroying the works of the devil, leading captivity captive and ascending on high, all that goodness that the Lord has laid up in heaven for those that fear Him, all the work of sãlvation revealed in the Gospel, the benefits of the new testament and of Christ's priesthood. Oh if He is our High Priest and offered Himself for us, then everything must follow! We were speaking lately concerning Him as the unspeakable gift, and the unspeakableness of this gift is first of all, the Gift itself, and the fulness that resides in that Gift, and this is the fulness of the good pleasure of His goodness. Oh mortal tongues are dumb at best to set it forth! Where is the world when this touches your heart, when your faith gets a glimpse of Him from whom all goodness flows? It takes in His glorious righteousness, and it is to be justified freely by His grace, to have upon us as a wedding garment His justifying righteousness. The prodigal had this prayer fulfilled. Oh it is for sinners! He came back to his father's house as a sinner, but his father immediately commands his servant to bring forth the best robe and put it on him. "Fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness" to bad sinners. All the goodness is His. No good in creatures can be found. Do we believe this from our experience? Sometimes, although one feels increasingly unworthy, it is very precious to attempt to bring forth these blessed truths of the Gospel. "Bring forth the best robe; put it on him." The best robe for the worst of sinners. "Put a ring on his finger", a token of marriage union, a token of everlasting love. There is no end to a ring. Oh if the Lord should say by His Spirit, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee", you would rejoice. "And put shoes on his feet", the Gospel of the grace of God, containing in it exceeding great and precious promises that cannot be forfeited, sweet invitations, ~~bad~~ declarations of truth, the counsels of God which nothing can frustrate.

"Fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness." I know it is great. Do some of you say, "It is too great"? I rather suspect that some poor sinner who has been brought to poverty by the teaching of the Spirit, would say, "Less than Thyself will not suffice". Have you ever felt that? Though the majesty, holiness, and glory of God in Christ is great, though the blessings and favours with which He remembers His dear people are eternal favours and embrace eternal glory, yet you would not ask something less, would you? It is a peculiar experience to feel utterly unworthy and it may be sinking lower and lower, yet I believe that that sinking feeling is consistent with the energy of faith going out unto the Lord for the greatest blessings and the highest favours that the Gospel reveals. The lower you sink, the higher you will look. The greater sinner you feel to be, the greater Saviour you will need, and the more you see yourself full of iniquity, badness, blackness, corruption, the more you will desire holiness, sanctification, and righteousness in Chrãst Jesus.

"And fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness", a complete salvation. But this will not be complete until His people get to heaven. David said, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever". And so David would not be satisfied until he awoke with Christ's likeness:

"I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness". As though he should say, "And not before". But this good pleasure of His goodness is in His kingdom, and it is exclusively in the church of God. There He has made a provision that He has promised to bless. There is the provision of divine institutions, which are within the good pleasure of His goodness. I consider that Holy Scripture is a great part of the good pleasure of His goodness. It is second only to the unspeakable gift of God's dear Son, the gift of the Scriptures. And "the written and the incarnate Word in all things are the same". We only know that of God and of His dear Son by the Holy Ghost as revealed in the Scriptures.

Therefore this prayer takes in this, that the Apostle prays that everything that is revealed in this blessed Word may take effect in the hearts of His people. And so it is the kingdom of Christ here, and His kingdom is in the church. It takes in the ministry. When I think of myself there is poverty, but not in the Gospel. I cannot magnify myself, but I would magnify the office of the ministry, because it is of God's institution, and His method. Had it pleased Him He could dispense with preaching altogether. But is not there something very blessed about it which manifests His infinite wisdom? Not only grace, but the method of grace, that He should gather people together as we are gathered now, and that He has made a connection between preaching the Gospel and the salvation of the soul, that the Holy Ghost is given. My friends, the greatest gift that the exalted Lord Jesus received for men was the gift of the Holy Ghost in the ministry, as you will see by the 4th verse. And this is the goodness of God. Oh He speaks through His servants by the Spirit! If He does not, the Word will return void. And it comes to this too, that it embraces the good pleasure of His goodness in sovereign election. How does the word come to you as preached? Is there any connection between the Gospel and your experience? Is there a real connection and contact between what is declared in the Gospel and what you feel in your experience? Do you receive the Gospel in power? If you do we are warranted to say that it is an evidence of your election: "Knowing brethren, your election of God, for the Gospel came not unto you in word only".

"Count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness"; and then there is the other side of it - "and the work of faith with power". So there is not only this effectual calling and a fulfilling of the purposes of God in the Gospel, but it is through faith. And what is faith? Faith is the substance of the Gospel, "the substance of things hoped for". In the 4th of Hebrews we are shown the importance of this work of faith in the Gospel: "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it; for unto us was the Gospel preached as well as unto them, but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it". So that there is the work and exercise of faith in the method of salvation in the soul, and that is just what causes the exercise. For in His wisdom the Holy Spirit's work is such that His people are brought often into darkness and contradictions. You take the promises of the Gospel as you read the Word of God. There is hardly a promise that you find directly fulfilled. Take the case of Abraham, eminent in

faith, and the Lord called him to go out from his country and kindred, and he went out, not knowing whither he went. How did he go? By faith. You look at the work of faith in the 11th of Hebrews. It need not have been so, but it is through faith, that there might be an exercise of the soul, and a knowledge of who God is; brought to extremities, into depths, like Jonah into the belly of hell, through faith. Although salvation is finished and the fulness is in Christ Jesus, it is not automatic. It is through faith, and those who are being taught of the Spirit will prove that they go through death into life, through darkness into light, through an experience of hell into a sweet hope of heaven.

Through faith - but the work of faith is to be completed, for God is the author and finisher: "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. We lose sight of this. "By grace are ye saved" - that is absolute, and those that are saved by grace will be saved. But the manner and method of it is through faith. Therefore it is through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom, and it is in that path of tribulation, a thorny rough path, that we are taught to profit. You look inside, look back; where have you learned most? How do you know that that grace is sufficient? Haven't you been brought to utter weakness? Is not the pathway cast up through the 107th Psalm, and the 11th Hebrews?

But here is the prayer, and what will be the end? "Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." "The work of faith with power." And this is one purpose of the preaching of the Gospel, as Paul points out to the Ephesians. There was the gift of the ministry: "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith". A very gracious word that is, as I have felt it, standing and looking upon a few people here the Lord gathers together. The unity of the Spirit is the same teaching of the Spirit in every soul, in every nation, every tongue. The Spirit teaches the same, and the unity of the faith is that blessed Object upon which faith is fixed. The unity of the faith takes in the different circumstances, The trial of your faith may be very different from the trial of the one next to you. Whatever pathway you are in, whatever doubts and fears, temptations of the devil, trials in circumstances, or persecutions you may endure, yet "looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith".

"That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you and through Him, and it is all according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore the whole is covered by the morning text: "My grace is sufficient for thee", for your soul, for salvation, to take you to heaven, to fit you to be there; in your circumstances, and in your trials. Oh may that grace reach our hearts and take us safely through life into heaven.
