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Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, on 23rd February 1964

"Him declare I unto you." Acts 17:23(last clause).

This morning I attempted to declare this great God, as indeed He is declared in the following verses speaking more particularly of His glory in creation and in providence, His divine sovereignty and Lordship that governs the earth and all that are upon it:

*All our times are in His hand
All events at His command. (Gadsby's 64)*

It is indeed a blessed thing to know this great God by divine teaching and revelation. You will feel that, even if you do not feel that you know Him for yourself, you will realise that that is a blessed people that do know Him, to whom He makes Himself known; otherwise there is no object in life except ourselves. You may depend upon it, if grace has not made this great God the object of our faith we have only one object, and that is ourselves. It must be one thing or the other. Whatever people may pretend, if they are without God and without hope, all their pursuits in life must be selfish. All that they do must be to satisfy themselves give unto themselves and unless grace prevents will die unto themselves and in themselves. It must be so. Unless the Lord reveals Himself; and if He does He will also bring us into a condition to deeply need Him.

We concluded with speaking of the sovereignty in determining the times appointed and the bounds of their habitation. This is true of all men, even those who think they are their own, who think they can do as they like and appear to do so, yet all are under the control of divine sovereignty. But the sovereignty which is over and sustains His people proceeds from sovereign love and it flows through the covenant of grace. Therefore, in this determining the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation, it is particular with regard to His people; because providence and grace go hand in hand, you cannot separate them, and it is a very bad sign if you can - it seems that some people can. Professors have a kind of a rule for their religion and a separate rule for their life; but you may depend upon it, that if we are being led forth by the right way through the wilderness to heaven, we shall prove that we cannot separate what God has joined together, and so the exercise of our minds will embrace both our pathway and our soul's salvation and welfare.

At the moment I am thinking of this in connexion with this point - "And hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation."(v.26) The work of the Holy Ghost in their hearts in His divine teaching, bringing them to feel their deep need of salvation and desire after it, leads them about and will produce, even in the leadings of providence, the acknowledgement of God's purpose. "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me."(John 6:37) And so they are brought to seek Him and to ask their way to Zion with their faces thither ward. We have an illustration of this in Solomon's Song, "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, and where Thou causest Thy flocks to rest at noon." (S of S 1:7) Now this inward working and seeking the Lord in connexion with our movements is a very blessed evidence that we have the Lord as our guide and the Holy Spirit as our divine teacher. So He hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation, and it is very blessed to notice this. I dare say many of you have noticed it in reading

obituaries, the way that the Lord has led His people. How He has called them out of the world and some singular instance of how He has brought them under the truth, and seen how that it has been the interlacing of the movement in providence together with the exercise of soul. 'Him' this great God, who rules, governs, directs all things in this world, but in a particular way His dear people 'declare I unto you,'

"That they should seek the Lord if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."(v.27) He is near to all in His omnipresence, O but His nearness to His people is different! They are a people near unto Him, and you will see the connexion here between this determination of the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord if haply they might feel after Him and find Him. Now that might interpret some of your cases. I do not want to preach myself – it would be a poor affair if I did; but cannot some of you remember how that you were brought by providence into a certain district and at that juncture of life when you were seeking the Lord; how you were drawn to a place of truth and how you entered there and sat in the pew anticipating the service, seeking the Lord if haply you might feel after Him and find Him?

It is a beautiful expression. It may interpret just the exercise of some soul. You see the very words -'that they should seek the Lord if haply they might feel after Him and find Him.' It would do no damage to the literal rendering of that verse if it should say 'That they seek the Lord and find Him.' But you look at this - that they should seek the Lord if haply they might feel after Him and find Him. It is there that you see the work of faith. Vital religion is not automatic; you don't just go to a Chapel and sit in a pew and find Him, But O the inward searching, the Holy Ghost producing an aching void that nothing in the world or all the world together could fill. And to go with that aching void, believing that the Lord Jesus is findable and if you can find Him for yourself personally, you would find in Him an eternal inheritance in whom also you would have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Therefore you sit in the pew under the preaching of the Gospel and you feel faith in your heart feeling after Him if haply you might find Him. It means this: Who can tell? Who can tell? Well, it is good when there are such exercised hearers; they are living souls. They may not feel they are, but O, this life can never be suppressed. And this feeling after if haply they might find Him is the very fibres of faith's root striking down after a scent of water, O you must have Him! How some of you would sing if this evening you found Christ and He is found by His finding you. It always goes together and He is first and He knows them that are His.

Upon this point it brings in that word in Hosea, -These who seek the Lord if haply they might feel after Him and find Him; "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord that His going forth is prepared as the morning." O a blessed meeting. 'Him declare I unto you' in His goings forth from the covenant of grace knowing those that are His; and the Holy Ghost knowing too who to visit, how and when to call by grace and the Holy Spirit setting these seekers upon seeking the Lord and feeling after Him, In the covenant of grace the goings forth of the Lord Jesus are timed. The covenant ordered according to every case and it is prepared as the morning so that as Gadsby records: (no.76)

*There is a period known to God,
When all His sheep, redeemed by blood
Shall leave the hateful ways of sins
Turn to the fold, and enter in.*

So that His goings forth meet with a poor sinner following after and they seek the Lord if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us.

But now, if the Lord should help us, we desire to declare this great God more particularly relative to salvation. Jude sets Him before us in the blessed Trinity. Concerning His people, Jude says, "Sanctified by God the Father, preserved in Jesus Christ and called."(v.1) Called by the Holy Spirit - 'HIM', that glorious Jehovah, 'declare I unto you.' But who is sufficient for this? I feel His majesty so great and His glory so infinite, and myself so insignificant and sinful that it shrivels one up. O how we should like to get into a little corner out of sight, and to hear an able minister declare this great God in Christ and to feel that inward seeking the Lord and feeling after Him if haply we might find Him and possess Him!

Well then, He is to be declared because He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures, the everlasting Father. His work in salvation is the sanctification, the setting apart the election of grace; "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father."(1 Peter 1:2) This is a doctrine at which nature stumbles; nature hates it, but what can you substitute for it? "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God" and that brings us to consider the fall. Man was created upright in a perfectly innocent creation and he lost the image in which He was created. He fell into ruin and death, into enmity against God and, therefore, God owes no man anything at all. Salvation then must be suspended upon the poor will of a fallen creature or upon the divine sovereignty of Jehovah. Ah my friends, if the Lord convinces us of what we are, we shall not quibble at the blessed doctrine of election. We shall wonder that there is ever a sinner saved at all and it is only by the everlasting love of the Father in election that any are saved from the ruins of the fall.

But in order to the salvation of His people there had to be found a ransom, Therefore, we would declare unto you the Son of God, declared to be the Son of God with power. This was from the love of God. "He so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son."(John 3:16) He could not give more; less would have been insufficient. A different gift from this, the holy law of God, the justice and perfection of Jehovah would have refused. So it pleased the Father that in His beloved Son should all fullness dwell and everything that is made known unto His people is made known through His Son.

*Every grace and every favour
Comes to us through Jesus blood.* (Gadsby's 180)

It as much pleased the Holy Spirit that in Christ should all fullness dwell as it pleased the Father and this is beautifully set out especially in the 16th John. The Holy Spirit speaks not of Himself, but His work is to take the things of Christ and reveal them to the hearts of the Lord's people. The work of the Holy Ghost is to work in the heart that salvation that Christ has wrought out. 'Him declare I unto you.' Emmanuel, God with us. The devil ever aims at the Holy Child Jesus. They sought to destroy Him as soon as He was born, but they never could and they seek to destroy Him now. O how solemn is the departure from the faith, even of our religious leaders! My friends if we are not built upon the foundation of Emmanuel, the eternal God in human nature, then we are built upon the sand. Therefore, there is to be declared His virgin birth. It is a mystery that the infinite and almighty God should take into union with His divine Person, human nature, that human nature prepared by God; "A body hast Thou prepared Me."(Hebrews 10:5) a holy thing, conceived and born of the Holy Spirit. There is something exceedingly sacred in it and it is intimately connected with salvation. It is unthinkable that God's most holy blessed Son, who was the brightness of His Father's glory

and the express image of His person, should take human nature in the ordinary way of generation. Does it not appear to you to be revolting? Perish the thought! And yet there was a real human nature and by that condescension the Son of God was brought down to this world. Had He never come down into this world my friends, it would be as disastrous as if the sun was blotted out from the heavens. All would be death and chaos and darkness and confusion. 'Him' the son of God incarnate, 'declare I unto you.'

Do not some of you feel to love Him in the need of Him? There could be no union, no access, no way to God but for this. In that human body there was a fullness of the Godhead, so that what the Lord Jesus did in His human nature, human nature did; but divinity accomplished the miracles. When the Lord's hands touched the blind man's eyes, it was His human hand that touched his eyes, but divinity opened them and how you will feel to need this. O that we could lift up this Son of Man! He stooped, He was infinitely rich, the earth and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein are His, yet for our sakes He became poor. He had not where to lay His head. He came and learned obedience by the, things which He suffered. A real Man. How can we pray to any other than to a real Man? 'Him declare I unto you.'

His righteousness is to be declared. We need a righteousness; a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, and this righteousness of the Lord Jesus embraces the whole of His life, every thought, every action, by which He magnified the law and made it honourable; Rendered infinite satisfaction to the law of God. He did the will of God fully. O the righteousness of Christ is very blessed to a poor sinner who sees in himself every wrong, all perverseness, all vileness and sin and to have set before such, the glorious righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ! It is a glorious dress and when imputed it justifies as well as pardons. It sets a sinner in the sight of God - sinless. Very sacred it is to receive the pardon of sins through the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ: "In whom we have redemption, through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." 'Him' the Redeemer, 'declare I unto you.'

He, by His coming, made it possible for His people to have such union with Him and He is such a substitute that all His holiness is theirs, so that He is their sanctification. How attractive is sanctification to a polluted sinner, to wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. It was the desire of the Apostle for the Thessalonians, "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly." Have you ever bowed before the Lord realising what you are and yet by faith beheld what He is, and believing that what He is can be transferred to you? Have you ever gone to Him and emptied yourself out at the throne of grace of all that you feel, and asked Him to bring into your heart all that He is? The Apostle says, "that I might know Him," and that is a point of this verse, These Athenians were worshipping an unknown God, and the desire of the Apostle was that they might know Him.

It is just the same thing Philip and the Eunuch. He was seeking the Lord if haply he might feel after Him and find Him, reading the 53rd Isaiah. "Of whom doth the prophet speak? and Philip preached unto him Jesus" - declared Him (Acts 8:34,35) - and you may depend upon it, preached *into* him the Lord Jesus. And that is what we need for the Holy Ghost to preach the Lord Jesus right into our hearts, so that all the virtue of His Person and all the benefit of His blessed life and death might take effect in our very being in a way of salvation. 'Him declare I unto you.'

Then there is this again, there is a declaration to be made concerning His offices. He could never have been appointed to an office if He had not taken human nature. Deity could not discharge an office. It is a truth that needs to be rightly spoken, but I believe it, that while God is omnipotent, salvation is not a naked act of omnipotence although there is omnipotence in everything He does. Therefore there was a need in the covenant of grace for these offices of Christ and His characters.

‘Him’ the great High Priest, ‘declare I unto you.’ If those priests of the Levitical dispensation in their sacrifices could have taken away sins, would they not have ceased to be offered? They would for they made nothing perfect. Not all those sacrifices could take away a single sin. On the contrary, they made a remembrance of sin every year. So that these sacrifices instead of expiating sins made a remembrance of them; "but this Man, when He had offered one sacrifice for ever sat down at the right hand of God, henceforth expecting until His enemies be made His footstool."(Hebrews 10:12,13) One sacrifice, because whatever Christ did had eternal virtue and validity in it, never needed to be done twice; what is done is done for ever. Therefore He is a great High Priest. He has that in His Person which alone can satisfy the law, and by the life that He lived He satisfied the law for His people. ‘Him’ this great High Priest ‘declare I unto you.’

O what should we do without him? It is upon that ground that the apostle encouraged poor sinners to come to the throne of grace; "seeing we have a great High Priest that is entered into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us come boldly to the throne of grace."(Hebrews 4:14,16) Have these things any place in our experience? Do you know Him? That is a great point here - "for as I passed by and beheld your devotions I found an altar with this inscription, ‘to the unknown God’; whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.’(v.23)

We might just for a few moments consider whether we know the Lord. If we do then He will have entered into our pathway and into our experience in some of those ways we have hinted at. How shall we begin? Shall we begin like this? Are you completely ignorant of Him? Some poor fearing soul might say ‘I really am.’ Well, I will not try and convince you that you are not, but I will say this, what do you come to the services for? If you feel your ignorance of Him, I would ask another question: Do you need Him? Can you really say, ‘No, I don't need Him’? Well if you can say that it is very solemn, but if you need Him, you know Him. You can never need one of whom you have no knowledge. But I would add this, do you desire Him? There are plenty of people that would gladly be saved from punishment and from hell, hut these people may have no desire for Him and no place for Him in their heart and no time for Him in their lives, but can you join this with your need and say you desire Him? O to possess Him! O to have that secret of the Lord which is with them that fear Him! O that He would manifest Himself to me and remember me with the favour that He bears to His dear people: Can you say that much? If you can, you know Him.

I know these are for the most part negatives but they are some blessed negatives. Yet you will never be satisfied with them and my best advice to you is to gather up all your negative evidences and take it to the Lord and ask Him to make them into positives, He can, He can. You look at the blind man who was cast out of the temple, and the Lord found him, He began with a negative: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God? Who is He Lord that I might believe on Him? It is He that talketh unto thee. Lord, I believe" His negative was turned into a positive; "Lord I believe." And what was the evidence of the nature of his faith? Did he say,

Lord I believe, and turn and walk away No! "Lord I believe, and he worshipped Him" he worshipped Him. (John 9:35-38)

O it is a great thing to have any evidence of the knowledge of this great God in Christ. And there will be by the Holy Spirit, His blessed work in the soul, And there will be another evidence as to whether your knowledge of Him is right, if it is, He will be the one thing needful you will say, with David, "One thing have I desired, That will I seek after."(Psalm 27:4) He showed the loving nature of his desire by seeking after what he desired - therefore do you seek this Lord? Do you come again into this 27th verse, to seek the Lord if haply you might feel after Him and find Him?

This is very blessed, especially in secret. I have thought of it sometimes in the middle of the night! I often think about the young people. O my friends, have you ever known what it is for your anxious soul of a night to feel after if haply you might find Him?

O may the Lord make His Word a comfort and strength unto His dear people, both in their pathway in providence and in their soul's salvation.

Amen.

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