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Sermon Preached by Mr.F.L.Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton,
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"For lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." Amos 9:9.

What a difference there is between just reading the letter of the Word, and walking in an experience of it! What a difference there is in just singing our hymns, and walking through them in experience! The older I get, the more I see the importance of an experimental religion, of experimental preaching. Not preaching experience, but experimental preaching, because that alone is living. And as we heard in prayer this morning, the Psalmist prayed: "Give me understanding, and I shall live." (Psalm 119:144) And really, the life of God in the soul in experience brings that knowledge and understanding of the truth of God, of the truth and necessity of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the truth of the blessed Spirit, who alone can communicate those blessings that are in the fulness of Christ.

Well then, the text is very easy to read, but O it expresses a lifelong experience of the house of Israel, that is, all those that are called by grace, all those whom the Lord will lead forth by the right way to heaven. He does really lead them forth from the cradle. His people are immortal until they are called by grace; they cannot die. But there is a very particular and blessed sense in which they are led forth, and that "forth" there would seem to be when they are brought into the wilderness and wander there in a solitary way, and can find no city to dwell in. Then He leads them forth by the right way; and you trace that way through the 107th Psalm, and the 11th of the Hebrews, and it will give you something of a clue, a key to the text: "For lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve."

And you will find there will be a sieve wherever you go, similar to that word in Job: "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." (ch.5:7) And you will never find a place where the sparks don't fly upward. And if you are being led by the glorious Leader to heaven, you will find a sieve wherever you go. But it is the Lord that commands it. You look at the case of Job, an extraordinary case – the testimony of God concerning Job's integrity, his religion, that he feared God. And yet He gives permission to Satan to shake Job, to sift him, to bereave him, and desolate and afflict him. Not only is the Word of God given by divine inspiration, but the construction of the Bible is divine. You take the Book of Job, or Job himself. It was not that Job came into those calamities, and the Lord should say: "Well, I will make a record of those calamities." But in the purposes of God, in order to construct that part of the Scriptures, the Lord chose Job, and purposely led him in the path that He did, and purposely allowed Satan to be let loose on him, and then purposely exercised Job in his spirit, and produced those agonizing groans and cries, and then to show that the deepest calamities and trials can never separate from God. I consider the 23rd of Job as one of the sweetest testimonies to the power of living faith in the Old Testament. O my friends, it does at times, while in one sense covering us with shame, because we grumble and repine with blessings in our hands. But at the same time, it does show to us the power of living faith! For Job in that chapter makes no complaint about God's dealings. He does not seek to have restored to him that that was lost. There is no

rebellion. Indeed, his one desire is: "Oh that I might find that God that has desolated and afflicted me! Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" (ch.23:3)

But it was God who commanded, who permitted Satan. "Whence comest thou, Satan?" "From going to and fro the earth." "Hast thou considered My servant, Job?" To my mind, it was not an enquiry, or a giving Satan leave to go and consider Job, but that he already had done so. "Hast thou considered him?" Oh how choice was Job to Satan, if he could have overthrown him! "Hast thou considered him?" "Yes," said Satan, "Thou hast set a hedge about him, prospered him, blessed him; but you touch him, desolate him, touch his skin and bone, and he will curse you." Oh what teaching, what comfort the Book of Job has been made to mourning sinners! But it was with the Lord's permission. (see ch.1)

Then again, there was Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." (Luke 22:31,32) Satan does not trouble about his own. But as it was in the beginning, when the wicked sought the young Child's life, so it has been, and ever will be to the end. Wherever the Lord Jesus dwells by faith, that poor soul will be the object of the attacks of Satan.

"For lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve." And this sets forth all the dealings of the Lord with His people in a way of chastening and judgment in afflictions, losses, and crosses; and yet all is gathered up by Paul: "We know" – it is a great thing to know – "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28) For the Lord commands it. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6) Poor Job did not get much comfort in his wife. That was another mystery in Job's case that we must leave, but it is very evident. That is all we hear of her. "Curse God, and die" is all we hear of her. (ch.2:9) How different was Manoah's wife! But all these things are in the hands of God.

"I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel." Well, as enabled, we will try and speak of some of the sieves in which He sifts His people. And the purpose of sifting is to separate the chaff from the wheat. It is really the same thing as the fire: "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." (Isaiah 48:10) The purpose is refining, to separate the dross from the precious metal. And that accounts for all the sufferings, and disappointments, and astonishments, and hard things that the Lord's people are brought through. The Psalmist said this: "Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads." (Psalm 66:12) It is wonderful when you think of it, that these are the people He loves: "Yea, He loved the people." (Deuteronomy 33:3) "Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." And I believe we shall find it true in principle. It is the method of grace, that it is through sufferings to glory, through tribulation to the kingdom.

The first sieve that we would speak of, really, is the conscience, and when the Lord sifts the conscience by solemn conviction. I am not speaking so much now about the beginning, the first convictions of sin, but as we sometimes sing (some of you have known what it is to be in this solemn sieve, it may be in the night season):

Here let me search my inmost mind,
And try its real state to find,
The secret springs of thought explore,
And call my words and actions o'er. (Gadsby's 1085)

What a sorting out there is! What a sifting! What a good thing it is! Do you know anything about that sieve of conviction in your conscience? There is a riddling in a sieve. It is shaken to and fro, and what a shaking there is, what a separating effect! Oh, when the Holy Spirit shines into the conscience in the quiet watches of the night, how it does bring every sin of thought and spirit to stand up like an army! Every unkind word, every rebellious thought, every lust, all pride. You see and feel a sting in each of them, and what a solemn search it is!

Well now, that is a sieve. It is a sieve that I trust I may be often in. Oh how wholesome it is! And it brings about real repentance, brokenness of heart, a carefulness, a softness of spirit, a tenderness of speech. It does indeed! It is purging. And so that is one sieve; but only the corn that is in that sieve, and not a corn or least grain will fall through it. The chaff is separated, and really sometimes you can feel the chaff removed under that searching action of God's Spirit in your heart in secret. I believe I have known it.

Another sieve is this – not only conviction, but a solemn sieve of desertion. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord...that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?" (Isaiah 50:10) It brings a consideration. I think we were speaking of it lately in the case of Asaph. He was in that sieve, and as he was shaken to and fro, it brought a sober consideration. Oh how good it is in these days of confusion to be brought to sobriety in a sieve! And he was brought to this consideration: "Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" (Psalm 77:8,9) It is a sieve – soul desertion. Job knew it. He went forward and backward, on the right hand and on the left, but could neither see Him nor find Him. Do you think that is a sieve? An empty professor was never in it. You will always find him a religious person having no doubts or fears. Oh but my friends, when you are walking in the darkness of soul desertion, it will make you search for your credentials, whether you are in the faith; that you profess and know nothing about it; whether you possess grace. So that soul desertion is a sieve. But not the least grain shall fall upon the earth through that sieve – not the least, poor sinner, for: "to Him the weakest is dear as the strong." (804)

Another sieve is Satan's fiery temptations, and oh what a lot of chaff there is to be separated from! When we are in the sieve of temptation, my friends, there is a discovery of the power of our carnal reason, and our unbelief, and deathly carnality and formality. The whole Book of Job shows this sieve. But James says: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried" – when he has been sifted – "he shall receive the crown of life." (ch.1:12) There are many kinds of temptation, but the temptations to which Job was subjected were similar to David's. You look in the 42nd Psalm. He had two things there. He was in an experience of soul desertion, and also he was under reproach: "They say daily unto me, Where is thy God?" (v.10) Oh how the devil did! And how wicked men will point to one in distress, to their circumstances which seem to contradict the very being of a God, and all the promises of the Scriptures apparently! "Where is thy God?" Oh how it could be pointed to Job, as he lay there scraping himself with a potsherd, with boils from head to

foot, desolated and bereaved! "Where is thy God? Where is there any evidence of Him at all?" What a sieve that is! Rebellion would take Job's wife's advice: "Curse God and die." (ch.2:9) His blessed faith said: "Oh that I knew where I might find Him." (ch.23:3)

Well, can we find anything to resemble this faith in our own souls in our religion? That is really the point. "I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve." The question is asked in Jeremiah: "What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord" (ch.23:28) It is the precious wheat; and His people are compared to wheat, and because they have their spiritual existence from the Lord Himself. The secret of being a corn of wheat is in that word in John. The Lord, in answer to those who said: "Sirs, we would see Jesus" – it is as though Jesus said: "If you would see Jesus, you must see Him in His sufferings, death, and resurrection, and have union with Him there" – for "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." (ch.12:24) And the Lord Jesus, who is the Seed, in whose blessed Person of Immanuel, God with us, was all the fulness of the Godhead bodily – what a Seed that was, what potential properties, eternal properties, were in that one Seed! But it brought forth fruit, and as many grains in the ear at the harvest as the election of grace. And that is how His people become corns of wheat.

But then, if we have that treasure, it is in an earthen vessel. It is grace in a sinner's heart, and therefore among that precious grain there is much chaff. It is in the midst of nature, unbelief, carnality, sin, lust, and pride, and therefore that grain of wheat must be constantly sifted, to separate good from evil, the flesh from the spirit, life from death. Ah, this will be an interpretation to some of us in our calamities and troubles! And a great thing to remember, my friends, is that the Lord commanded it: "For lo, I command." It is He that commands the stormy sea, which lifteth up the waves thereof. And when you are in these sieves, and feel that you will be shaken to destruction, remember this: look at the Commander He has given for "a Leader and Commander to the people." (Isaiah 55:4) And He can command the north wind, as well as invite the south. Oh if we can but see God, and that the sieve, whatever it is, is in His hands, and in divine sovereignty He shakes it!

Then there are not only these sieves, but there is another sieve, and that is a discriminating ministry, if you are put into that sieve. It is a very great thing if a person should choose to sit under a ministry because it dissects the heart and sifts, because it takes forth the precious from the vile. It is intended to be a sieve. If you read the 23rd of Jeremiah, you will see the false prophets. They tell a dream of their own imagination, but, says the Lord: "He that bath My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?" (v.28) And when the blessed Spirit blows with His influence through the ministry, there will be a wind, there will indeed. I have known times and places where there has been a great thinning out among the congregation, the chaff has been blown out of the very windows. Oh what a mercy to be made manifest as a corn of wheat! It is rooted, and grounded, and stablished in the truth. And what drives hypocrites and empty professors away are the very things that stablish, strengthen, and settle faith in the knowledge of Christ. There were those who could not bear it when the Lord Jesus insisted upon nothing less than union with Him in such a way as to eat His flesh and drink His blood. They said: "This is a hard saying." (John 6:47-58) They could go so far with Him, but when it came to points – as when the Lord spoke to the young man who had great riches: "Go, and sell all that thou hast, and come and follow Me" – it was too

much for him; he was blown away, driven away, by the wind. (Matthew 19:16-22) And how powerful that was: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Matthew 16:24) And when the Holy Ghost brings to bear those precepts of the Gospel, and sets before one that yoke – for that is the yoke: "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me" – it is to take up our cross and follow the Lord Jesus. But there are many who turn back – but "what is the chaff to the wheat?"

But then there are sieves in providence, and you can fill up for yourselves in this. The Lord may have a sieve in your family, causing great anxiety and many restless nights of heart-searching. I believe David had this. He had much trouble in his family, especially with Absalom; had much conflict in his kingdom, constant warfare, driven into the wilderness, and dwelt in dens and caves of the earth. He was in the sieve, but did not fall to the ground. And when he came to his dying day, he gave this testimony: "Although my house be not so with God" – as I would have it – he had a broken heart about his house, did David. Yes he had, and the bitterest ingredient in his cup was that he knew that Absalom was a reprobate, and he loved him. It was a sieve, but he said this: "Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." And to my mind he was looking back, and saw that that covenant contained the sovereign immutable love of God, the ordering of all things by His divine sovereignty in all his pathway, and sure. And he saw in that covenant heaven: "This is all my salvation, and all my desire, though He make it not to grow." (2 Samuel 23:5)

There are many sieves in providence, because everything is changing. Providence is mutable. The covenant of grace never guaranteed providence, it never guaranteed success, health, strength, happiness here below. I have thought of that word, and feel warranted to interpret it in this way, in the 24th Psalm: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For He hath founded it upon the seas." That is, the whole of His providence is not upon a foundation; it is upon the seas; it rises and sinks. We may be secure today, and we may be exposed to danger tomorrow. We may be in health this week, and in hospital the next; rich this year and poor the next. But the point is this, that while providence is mutable and changeable, the purposes of God that run through them are unchangeable, and His purposes are ripening fast, and He is carrying on His undisturbed affairs right in the very midst of our disturbances. So the great thing, my friends, if you are in the sieve, is to be enabled to see by faith that the sieve is in the hands of a sovereign God. He holds the sieve, and shakes it, and holds it so that not those who are the least grain shall fall to the ground. No, because "of all which (My Father) hath given Me I should lose nothing." (John 6:39)

Oh how Paul makes a challenge as he sets before us the various sieves: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall persecution?" That is a sieve. "Or distress?" Sometimes the Lord shows His people hard things, and gives them the wine of astonishment to drink. "Or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded." Oh to have the persuasion in your heart, and the persuasion of experience of having passed through these sieves! You have proved the immutability and the sovereign love of God. "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,

shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35-39)
Not the least grain!

Oh Paul knew it! He had a sieve, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. He would have got out of it if he could. Of course, we should get out of it if we could. Indeed, we should never get in it. But the Lord commands, and then we shall be in the sieve. But oh my friends, look at the Commander, and His blessed hands that hold it. Some of you may be in such circumstances that you fear you will never survive to the end – but you will. Not the least grain shall fall. Of course, they **do** fall. David fell, Peter fell – but not out of the hands of divine grace to the earth. None will, because the Lord has said it. "The righteous shall hold on his way." (Job 17:9)

Well then, another sieve comes to my mind – solemn bereavements. And when I think of these, there is a case I remember in 1942 of a family that I knew and greatly esteemed. They had one son, an only child, and he was killed in the Air Force. What a sieve! And my heart ached for him, and as Job's friends, I went to see this sorrow-stricken couple. Oh how I did pray that their faith might not fail, and blessed be God it did not. Some of you may have come into a calamity of some kind, and it is a sieve. When you are first in the sieve, you may find a lot of chaff, and the language of it will be: "Why this, and why that?" And ifs, and buts, and doubts, and fears will be like so much dust, as when a sieve is shaken. But I will tell you what the Lord has discovered in all your confusion. He will show you this: that His shalls and wills are infinitely greater than your ifs and buts, and you will prove at last that His shalls and wills have and will prevail. "For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve; yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth."

No, you may fear that you will fall to the earth. I have feared it. And perhaps I can speak of a sieve that some of you don't know anything about, and that is the pulpit. That will sift a man. The Lord knows how to put one into a pulpit in a sieve, and they will fear that they will fall to the earth. We read of Satan coming among the sons of God to worship – and you may know what that is – and to have Satan in a pulpit, it will be a sieve. Well, the Lord uses these things to keep us where we ought to be. You take away the sieves and fires, and what sort of religion and faith should we have? Sometimes, my friends, I see such wisdom and goodness in God in His chastenings, and in His methods, that for a moment I truly can say:

"Choose Thou the way, but still lead on;
Nor leave me till I say,
'Father, Thy will be done.' (Gadsby's 307)

Oh may then any of you who are in a sieve, who have come into calamity and trial, be given to see the Commander. He has commanded it. And there is another thing. Don't forget – He commands deliverance. He not only chooses His people in the fire, but He chooses the fires for them to be in. They are not only in the sieve, but He commands the sieve; and in His own time He will demand deliverance.

Amen.