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Sermon preached by Mr F L Gosden on Lord's Day morning 5th September 1965
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton.

And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.

Ezekiel 20 v. 37

It is a wonder that the most high and holy God has anything to do with men in a way of mercy and grace since the fall, and you will be brought to feel it is a wonder. 'It will be a wonder if that most holy God has anything to do with me.' But there is a people whom He has formed for Himself, who shall shew forth all His praise (Ps. 43 v. 21); and that people you will trace throughout the Word of God, in type in the Old Testament, how He brought them out of Egypt, and led them the right way through the wilderness into Canaan. And there is that same people whom He leads from the cradle to the grave, through all the changing scenes of life, and prepares them for glory; and the text speaks to such a people: 'I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.'

Preceding the text it says "I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God" (v. 34-6). Oh, what amazing grace this is! It is a condescending mercy that the Lord will allow a sinner to plead with Him, but it appears to me to be a greater condescension for the most holy God to plead with unworthy sinners. It is a beautiful word, this: "I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face, like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness." This pleading with sinful men is very solemn. He never pleads with reprobates; He never pleads with the world; but He pleads with His people who are in the world. He pleads with His people in His dealings with them in their unregeneracy. He pleads with them in His chastening, in His judgments. His pleadings are very solemn. He pleads with them when He brings them into captivity - shuts them up in a prison house. But in all these, His judgments and His pleadings, there is this in His mind: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jer. 29 v. 11).

What a mercy it is to be one of God's people! Oh how unspeakably solemn it is if we are not! And it is one thing or the other. The Word of God is spoken to His people in a way of "exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Pet. 1 v. 4), covenant promises, covenant blessings. 'I will cause you to pass under the rod.' You perhaps noticed in the reading, in the 7th verse, we have the same thing: "I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them as at the first" (Jer. 33 v. 7), and we have the same truth: 'I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.' "In the cities of the mountains ... and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the Lord" (Jer. 33 v. 13). And that is an interpretation of what is intended in the Lord's dealings with His people in bringing them under the rod, into the covenant.

'I will cause you to pass under the rod,' and "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causet to approach unto Thee" (Ps. 65 v. 4). Now this causing to pass under the rod is the Lord's dealings with those He intends to save. Hymn 76 is a very sweet explanation of this text to my mind:

*"There is a period known to God
When all His sheep, redeemed by blood,
Shall leave the hateful ways of sin,
Turn to the fold, and enter in."* (J Kent; Gadsby's Sel. 76)

'I will cause you to pass under the rod,' as a shepherd. He has His own sheep. If they are upon the Downs, he gathers them up from time to time to see that they are all there. If they are in a field, he gathers them up so that they shall pass through a gate, and holds his shepherd's crook, his rod, so that they shall pass under it. He can then count them, and also see the mark of his ownership upon them. And when he wants to gather those sheep to one point, to one gate, he sends a sheepdog after them – not an Alsatian that shall destroy them, but a sheepdog that is trained for that purpose. Do you remember when the Lord began to cause you to pass under the rod? Oh, He has many, if I may so speak, sheepdogs to round up His people and to bring them to one point, to pass under the rod into the covenant of grace. Sometimes He will use disappointments. His people, in their unregenerate state, especially in their young days, when they are determined to have their own way, when they would resist all control, throw off all restraint, and, like the prodigal, gather all up and go into a far country (Lk 15 v. 13) – yet the Lord follows them up, unknown to them, hedges up their path (Hos. 2 v. 6), maybe brings affliction upon their loins, gives them to find disappointment where they looked for hope, adversity where they looked for prosperity, and blasts their gourds, and lays them low (see J Newton; Gadsby's Sel. 295). Oh, it is a mercy to see this evidence of covenant love, when the Lord, as it were, steps in the pathway of one of His people in all their rebellion, and declares in His dealings with them "Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6 v. 19)!

'I will cause you to pass under the rod.' This causing will be made a prayer in a poor wounded sinner's heart: "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto Thee" (Ps. 143 v. 8). It would have been correct, but there would not have been the force, if the Psalmist had said 'Tell me the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul unto Thee.' Some of you may feel that; you are seeking the Lord, feeling after, if haply you might find Him. "Cause me to know" it. I had a little token of this but yesterday: I found quite a little girl down the street looking for a certain place. Well, if I told her where to go, she would never have found it, but I took her by the hand and showed her the way. If you are a stranger in Brighton, and ask for a certain address, and somebody was to tell you, and tell you to go to certain streets and certain turnings, it would not be a lot of help; and those of you who are seeking an interest in Christ, a token for good – you want Him to *cause* you. "Cause me to know." Take me by the hand.

'I will cause you to pass under the rod' – 'so exercise My sovereignty in your providences, in your movements, and so order the lot that is cast into the lap, that all the disposings of thy lot shall be according to My will (Prov. 16 v. 33), according to My grace, according to the purposes of the covenant concerning you.' And so the Lord brings to bear upon His people, in the first place often unknown to them, influences (that is, in the direction of their

lives), sometimes on very little things apparently; but it brings them just to this: 'I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.'

The thing is, what is this rod? As we have said, it may be used as a rod of correction, as a rod of chastening, of His judgment; it may be a rod of His anger, but it is not a sword. Oh, those of you who may now be passing under the rod of God's chastening, His affliction, be thankful that it is not a sword of divine vindictive justice, but a rod to correct! "Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord ... for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 12 v. 6). But this rod is the Gospel. It is that same rod spoken of in the 110th Psalm: "The Lord shall send the rod of Thy strength out of Zion," (v. 2), and that rod of God's strength is Christ in the Gospel of His grace, and it is sent out of Zion; and therefore His dealings with His people are to cause them to pass under the rod, to bring them under the power of the Gospel, the power of the truth. This is a very blessed part of experience; it is all of grace, free and sovereign grace.

"Almighty love, arrest that man!"

(J Brewer; Gadsby's Sel. 134)

In it there is the sovereign foreknowledge of God the Father. There is in it that foundation which stands sure. "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 2 v. 19). And the Lord Jesus has come to search out His sheep in the cloudy and dark day, so that it is an exercise of the love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit brought to bear upon a favoured sinner. Irresistible it is; things of salvation are irresistible, and what a mercy that is! 'I will cause you to pass under the rod.' And so the Lord eventually brings His people under the ordinances of His house, the preaching of the Gospel – brings them "unto Sion, the city of the living God" (Heb. 12 v. 22). There is His rod; there is the power of His grace; there is the authority of His word. It is there that the Holy Ghost communicates those things of Christ, and brings them into the hearts of His people.

'I will cause you to pass under the rod.' It will encourage praying parents to pray for their children that the Lord will follow them up, so hedge them in, so exercise His sovereignty in their movements in providence, as to cause them 'to pass under the rod,' and bring them "into the bond of the covenant.' There is another word in Micah which expresses the same thing: "Feed Thy people with the rod, the flock of Thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood." There is the people; they are brought into the wilderness, in the wood of this world and all its entanglements; they dwell there solitarily; they dwell alone; they are "not reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23 v. 9); and this is the command: "Feed Thy people with Thy rod ... which dwell solitarily in the wood ... let them feed in Bashan and Gilead" (Mic. 7 v. 14), that is, lead them into green pastures, the same as in the 34th chapter of this prophecy: "I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there they shall lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel" (v. 13-4). Oh, what a blessing this is! What true riches and righteousness are here! What abundant provisions God has made in Zion!

'And I will cause you – *cause* you - to pass under the rod,' bring you to feel that this world is a wilderness, give you to realise that there is nothing but death, destruction and despair out of Christ. Do you believe it - when the blessed Spirit opens not only a sight and sense of what we are in our ruined state, but opens before us this good land? I believe that

in experience there are two influences brought to bear upon His people that cause them to approach unto Him, that cause them 'to pass under the rod,' and you will feel those two influences more or less all the days of your life. You will be *driven* under a sense and sight of what you are, by a realisation of this world and the wilderness and what it is – realise there is no refuge, no safety, no shelter beneath the sun. That will *drive* you to Christ. On the other hand, you will be *drawn* – drawn by some manifestation of the glory of Christ in His Person and the all-sufficiency of His fulness, and the invincibility of His grace and the divine merit that is in His sin-atonement blood, and the perfectness and beauty that is in His justifying righteousness. As you feel about in your own soul, don't you feel for the most part there is with you, in all your exercises and dealings with God, and God's dealings with you, those two things? You are *driven* out of self; you cannot stay there, driven out from the world and all its confusion and chaos; and you are *drawn*, as you hear His voice in the Gospel, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God and there is none else" (Is. 45 v. 22).

Now these are the influences. 'I will cause you to pass under the rod,' under the power of the Gospel. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined" (Ps. 50 v. 2), and also "The Lord shall send the rod of Thy strength out of Zion: rule Thou in the midst of thine enemies" (Ps. 110 v. 2). Oh that the Lord would send the rod of His strength out of Zion here, that it might cause some to pass under it, and bring them into the bond of the everlasting Gospel! "The Lord shall send the rod of Thy strength," Christ's strength, "out of Zion," to rule "in the midst of thine enemies." When this rod rules in the midst of His enemies it rules for their good: "Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies" (Ps. 45 v. 5) – arrows of conviction that bring them down to the earth as poor ruined sinners.

'And I will bring you into the bond of the covenant,' the blessed covenant of grace. If we look at the opposite, it may show us the blessedness of this covenant. You remember Simon the sorcerer, that hypocrite who deceived the apostle and was baptised by him: when his hypocrisy was discovered, "Peter said unto him ... Thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8 v. 23). Well now, that is just the opposite to the text: 'I will cause you to pass under the rod' – under the blessed influence of grace, under the power of the Gospel – 'and bring you into the bond of the covenant.' The "bond of iniquity" is to be bound in chains by sin, "by the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2 v. 16), to be "taken captive by him [the devil] at his will" (2 Tim. 2 v. 26). It is to be bound by all evil under the dominion of sin. To be brought into the bond of the covenant is to be brought under the power of the covenant of grace. The bond of the covenant is the strength of the covenant, and what is the bond of the covenant but the everlasting love of the Father? And what is the bond of the covenant but the covenant grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? It was *covenant* grace. And what is the bond of the covenant but the power, the quickening power, the sanctifying power, of the Holy Ghost to guide - to guide a poor sinner into all truth; and therefore these two things go together.

'I will cause you to pass under' the power of Christ in the Gospel, and bring you into the security, the bond, to be secured by the everlasting love of the Father, to make manifest in you your election of grace, of God, and bring you under the influence of all that the Gospel contains, so that it shall become "the power of God" in your soul "unto salvation" (Rom. 1 v. 16; 1 Pet. 1 v. 5); 'I will bring you under' that.

Well, when you come to look at the context, and how the Lord did bring His people into the wilderness, and pleaded with them as He pleaded with their fathers in the land of Egypt, there will be an interpretation as you look back to the way that the Lord led you. "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness ... to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no" (Deut. 8 v. 2). Oh, what a proving time it is – and yet all in wisdom! We have to acknowledge from day to day, as we view the sovereignty of God, ordering all things, permitting what is His will, forbidding what is not His will, hedging up as well as opening doors before us – we shall have to acknowledge "the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for Him" (Is. 30 v. 18).

'I will cause you to pass under the rod.' It is a mercy if we can trace a beginning. I don't mean the day or the year at all, but if you can trace a change in your heart, when those things that once you despised and hated, now you are caused to approach unto, to realise that this world is a city of destruction. Oh, with what joy you hastened to the place –

"With joy they hasten to the place"

(J Newton; Gadsby's Sel. 1001)

which once they did avoid! In my little experience I do believe I can trace when the Lord caused me to pass under the rod, the chief of sinners - and how then we were brought under the roof where the Gospel was preached, and that powerful, inward sensation in our souls, hungry, and thirsting for the living God. How we did, as we sing,

"Seem to breathe a different air."

(J Newton; Gadsby's Sel. 1001)

How we found that in Zion which we could never find anywhere else, and that which alone could satisfy our souls and give us real joy! And here we are, if this is the true house of God and part of Zion. I believe it has been for generations. I have been tried and troubled about my own position. Oh, I should indeed mourn if I was a cause of any damage to the truth! But yet, my friends, we have the Gospel here, and I believe we have here those who are led by the Spirit, who attend upon the services because they need what the Gospel contains for their own souls, those who are seeking "first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness" (Lk 13 v. 28), to whom Christ has made Himself precious (1 Pet. 2 v. 7). Some He is precious to because they need Him, and long to find Him; to some, it may be He is precious in the possession of Him. But oh the completeness, the sufficiency, the perfection of salvation revealed in the Gospel! It is complete, and it is finished, and His people are brought under it. In that expression, do you feel that you have been brought under it? If you are under it, it is above you – I mean in this sense, that everything in the covenant of grace comes from heaven. It is very sweet, to my mind, to sit down under His shadow, as under His rod. "I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste" (Song 2 v. 3). It is a wonderful thing to be brought there; and when you contrast such a favour, such a position, such a provision, such a Gospel, such a rod, such a divine power, and look outside into the world, it will lose its attraction; you will say

"This world is not my home."

(Gadsby's Sel. 948 from Matlock's Sel.)

'I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will and bring you into the bond' – the bond – 'of the covenant.' That is a beautiful expression: the bond of it – the *bond*.

"Fenced with Jehovah's shalls and wills,"

(J Kent; Gadsby's Sel. 76)

bound by the immutability of the decrees and purposes of Jehovah in the covenant of grace – the bond of it, secured by it. “I will be a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst” (Zech. 2 v. 5). Oh,

*“How happy is that little flock,
Who, safe beneath their guardian Rock,
In all commotions rest!”*

(C Wesley; Gadsby's Sel. 137)

- all commotions in this world, whatever may come. Habakkuk felt the security of this covenant after he had complained of the Chaldeans and all their ruthlessness and cruelty. He said “Art Thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine holy One; we shall not die” (ch. 1 v. 12). He saw more reason for hope in God than for despair as he looked upon the Chaldeans. The bond: the security, the sovereignty, the omnipotence, the immutability, the omniscience, the omnipresence of Jehovah, with a person, with a church. This is the bond. ‘I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.’

That word in the 25th Psalm is very important: “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will shew them His covenant” (v. 14). You look at the security of this covenant as you read in that chapter: “If ye can break My covenant of the day, and My covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season, then may also My covenant be broken with David My servant. If My covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then will I cast away the seed of Jacob” (Jer. 33 v. 20-1, 25-6). Oh the divine faithfulness and sovereignty and immutability of God with regard to His people! They enter into it.

Some of you long for this, but you look at what the Lord calls His people to. Oh the contrast from what He calls them out from! ‘I will cause you to pass under the rod,’ and bring you into everything that is in the covenant of grace – *bring* you into it. It will be yours. It is ordered, in all your life, in all your pathway. I know you might be in such a place and case; you look back at the deep places you have been in, almost despair; you might say, ‘It does not appear as though I am under the protection and in the bond of the covenant,’ but you are. Oh, some of His poor people have been brought to the very belly of hell: “The pains of hell gat hold upon me” (Ps. 116 v. 3). I know what it is; but you are in the bond of the covenant, and nothing can sever you from it.

What is it to be in the bond of the covenant? The Lord says in the 10th of John, concerning His sheep, that they are in His hand, and no man shall be able to pluck them out of His hand (v. 28-9). It is in the hand of omnipotence, in that hand of divine sovereignty that orders all their way, and in His covenant He will lead “them forth by the right way” (Ps. 106 v. 7), to heaven.

Amen.