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THE VOICE OF GOD

by

Mr F L GOSDEN

A SERMON

Preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, on Wednesday evening, February 14th, 1940¹

Text: Habakkuk 3 v. 2.

O Lord, I have heard Thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.

It is an infinite mercy to hear the voice of God. The Psalmist speaking of the idols of the heathen says, "They have mouths, but they speak not." "But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased" (Ps. 115 v. 5, 3).

There are many kinds of voices to which we naturally listen, voices which demand our attention: carnal voices in our hearts, voices in the world, the voice of gold and silver, pleasure, profits, houses and land, our bodies, our estates, our families. All these loudly demand our attention. But, says Solomon, as we were just now reading, "Blessed is the man that heareth me" (Prov. 8 v. 34). Oh to hear the voice of God! "The voice of the Lord is full of majesty; the voice of God shaketh the wilderness ... the wilderness of Kadesh" (Ps. 29 v. 4, 8). The prophet had heard the voice of God and was afraid. Have you?

The speech that Habakkuk heard was God speaking in His judgments. "I have heard Thy speech." The particular speech that Habakkuk heard was what God was going to bring upon the land, how He was going to "raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which" should "march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs" (Hab. 1 v. 6). Then he replied; he said, "Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention" (Hab. 1 v. 3). But the Lord showed him something worse; He showed him that instead of mitigating His judgments they would increase, and He showed him this also, that He was King of kings and Lord of lords, that "By me kings reign and princes decree justice" (Prov. 8 v. 15). He humbled the heart of the prophet and brought him to this, "Art Thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, Thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, Thou hast established them for correction" (Hab. 1 v. 12). The Lord gave him to see light in His light, to see the glory of God in His judgments; to see this also, that whatever effect the judgments of God might have materially, yet (said the prophet), "We shall not die." The truth will not die; our God will not die. "Thou art from everlasting." The Scriptures will be fulfilled, and therefore his faith recognised in this speech, this voice of the Lord, the sovereignty of Him "that sitteth upon the circle of the earth" (Isa. 40 v. 22), carrying on His undisturbed affairs; and it caused his heart to bow before Him.

¹ The chapter read at this service was evidently Proverbs 8.

In the text he is speaking of the effect of this teaching under the judgments of God. "I have heard Thy speech." Now let us look at our *own* cases. Have we heard the voice of God in such a way as to make us afraid? He speaks, for instance, in His Word; and when He causes His word to speak in our hearts we shall know at times what it is to "tremble at His word" (Isa. 66 v. 5). He may perhaps speak to us through the parables; might speak to our hearts and consciences, and walk round our souls with the parable of the ten virgins, five of them wise and five foolish. A tender conscience will tremble, will desire that his sentence might come forth from His presence (Ps. 17 v. 2); will not be satisfied until they have some indubitable evidence that they have oil in their vessels. That 25th chapter of Matthew has made me tremble; I have heard God's speech in it. You will remember that the difference in those five foolish and five wise virgins was not to be recognised externally; the difference was internal. If you heard God's speech thus, it would make you say, "O Lord, I have heard Thy speech and was afraid; O Lord, revive Thy work."

It is a mercy when the Lord's voice so speaks as that it has a gathering effect; it sounds an alarm. You feel exposed, and are again brought to seek the Lord for a shelter, to run to Him for a Refuge, to run into His name and find there "a strong tower" (Prov. 18 v. 10). Or He may cause you to tremble when you hear such a speech as is recorded in the 13th Corinthians, where you get such a description of what love is. He may speak to you from that chapter, show you what love endures, that it "is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;" it "believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Cor. 13 v. 5, 7), and you look into your heart and read -

"Accounts so very different there"

(Hart; Gadsby's, 740);

see how little you endure, how insubmissive you have been under His afflicting hand, how little you have profited either by mercies or by judgments, and you say, "Lord, I have heard Thy speech, and was afraid." This is wholesome work; it is as though the Lord is saying in your heart, in your experience, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10 v. 12).

One more thing He may speak to you from His Word (though there is much on every page He might speak to us - but that solemn word in the 6th chapter of Hebrews comes to my mind, and this will make you tremble: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance" (Heb. 6 v. 4-6). You will fear that that religion which amounts to nothing is all you possess. You will tremble, and as you read down that chapter and come to those words, "things which accompany salvation" - "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation" (Heb. 6 v. 9), you will say, "Lord, I have heard Thy speech" in this chapter. Wilt Thou bring into my heart an experience that has in it those "things that accompany salvation." It is good when the Lord sounds an alarm in our conscience, when He breaks up our fallow ground. This also has made me tremble lately, when I have felt a complete blank, a dreadful nothing, an awful silence.

God speaks in His silence. There is a *silent* silence and a *speaking* silence. Oh, may we never be among those to whom the Lord never speaks! One of the marks of being a child of God is that they hear God's voice. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10 v. 27). Has the Lord spoken to you and made you tremble by His silence? Has He said in substance, He "is joined to idols: let him alone" (Hos. 4 v. 17)? 'I will fill him with his ways;' "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways" (Prov. 14 v. 14). Sometimes the Lord will allow you to be filled with your own ways until you are sick with His smiting. "I have heard Thy speech" in Thy silence. Of all the ways by which the Lord speaks to cause one to tremble, I know of nothing that will make a tender conscience tremble more than to be

awakened to the silence of God. We are deaf to His silence often; there is a stillness, a calm; our consciences become crusted and insensible; nothing penetrates them. We get into a light, trifling spirit; our carnal heart imperceptibly lets in idols; and this carnal, God-dishonouring spirit is diffusive, so that our conversation becomes carnal, communion with God is suspended, and He is silent. He may be silent in the ministry, so that it becomes ineffective. When you are brought to hear His speech in this, it will make you tremble; it will bring you to this: "O Lord, be not silent to me: lest, if Thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit" (Ps. 28 v. 1).

The Lord intends the ultimate good of His people - their salvation; and all His dealings are just and good. But although salvation is free, He will give us repeatedly and continually to learn that it is not cheap; it cost Him His own heart's blood.

This speaking, this voice of the Lord in His judgments, in His chastenings, by afflictions, though painful, is profitable. He does not deal so with *any* nation.² Here we learn some of the secrets of the Lord that are "with them that fear Him" (Ps. 25 v. 14). He speaks to people in their afflictions, lays them upon a bed, gives them time to reflect; He does not bring comfort to them immediately. He may take you round your heart while lying on your bed of a night, take you round the Scriptures, hide His promises from you, show you examples of those "whose carcasses fell in the wilderness" (Heb. 3 v. 17), and make you tremble, give you to feel your frailty, show you your pride, speak to you about your independence when you were in health, show you your great privileges, show you the provision He has made in the Gospel, and yet at the same time show you your bare branches and fruitless profession, make you fear lest you should become like those who fell in the wilderness, show you the barren fig tree, walk you up and down in the 15th chapter of John: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away" (v.2), and you will fear being taken away.

"O Lord, I have heard Thy speech, and was afraid." He may speak to you of your need, show you how frail you are, that you are a poor, blind creature of a day and "crushed before the moth" (Job 4 v. 19), show you eternity. He speaks. "O Lord, I have heard Thy speech, and was afraid.

But blessed be God, this fear to which He brings His people is His work, and it drives them closer to the throne of grace. It brings you to this, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts" (Ps 139 v. 23). 'I don't know them, Lord; my mind teems with thoughts; I cannot order them, I cannot restrain them; do come into the midst of my thoughts and turn out all that is dishonouring to Thee, and bring even my thoughts into subjection to the obedience of Christ.'

But the effect of this merciful speaking of God in His judgments is this; it will cause this prayer to come out from the midst of it: "O Lord, revive Thy work." May He so sanctify the present judgments in the nation to us. My friends, we are in exceedingly solemn times. We are feeling the inconvenience and the dislocation; that comparatively is but a little, but oh, the spirit, the principalities and powers, the power of darkness and the god of this world, the solemn permissions of God in this judgment! He is speaking in it, and He listens for a response to His speaking. In Jeremiah 8 it says the Lord "hearkened and heard." He had threatened judgments similar to what are upon us today. "I hearkened and heard" - to see what was the result of my judgments, to see what effect they were having - "but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?" (v. 6). There was no repentance. And the Lord doubtless is listening to us individually, those of us who profess His name, to see what His dealings are doing for us and in us, what response there is in secret, if He has touched our families, dislocated our business, whether it is bringing us in secret before God. It is one thing to lament inconveniences; it is one thing to fear bodily harm and even death; but that is not what He is waiting for. What the Lord is listening for in these

² "He hath not dealt so with any nation" (Ps. 147 v. 20).

speaking is this, to hear repentance and confession of sin; and oh, blessed be His name, when He speaks by these things directly to His people, He produces in them that repentance and godly sorrow. It is a purging; it is like a frost; it is like this severe weather: when the thaw comes the earth will be broken and crumbled, and that will be good for the land. So His judgments break the heart when they are sanctified, when God is in them. I would just say this, the whole inhabitants of the nations are under this judgment, my friends, but to *their good* God is not in it. He is in it in a way of righteous indignation against *them*, but to *His people* He is in it for their *good*. When Daniel asked the question, "O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?" the reply was this: "Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried." What about the others? "The wicked shall do wickedly" (Dan. 12 v. 8, 10). Neither mercy nor judgments will make any difference to *them*. Do they to *you*? Oh, it is a solemn thing to be unaffected either by law or gospel, mercy or judgment. It was that which was complained of in the gospel. "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented" (Mat. 11 v. 17). *No effect*. But here the prophet was affected by this speech.

Now, if things are working well in our experience, by the mercy of God we shall be brought off from every other person to our own case, and this will be it: "O Lord, revive *Thy* work." You will see that you had almost gone, your "steps had well nigh slipped" (Ps. 73 v. 2); you will see that the worldly spirit in which you were walking, the carnality and death that were in your spirit, the hardness of your conscience - the Lord might have left you in it. But in His mercy His voice has shaken your wilderness. "The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve" (Ps. 29 v. 9). It may be that one who is labouring to bring forth the Lord Jesus as the Hope of glory is given faith to take hold of His strength (Isa. 27 v. 5). "The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve." He speaks to them, shows them His glory in His judgments, His majesty. A great thing to believe that this awful God is ours! Then this will be the prayer, "O Lord, revive *Thy* work." "Create in me a clean heart, O Lord" (Ps. 51 v. 10). "Clear me of those things which Thou hast discovered in me. Purge my conscience from dead works to serve the living God; bring me into an exercised condition of soul; grant that this calm, this death, that I feel may be broken, and that there may be a gracious godly movement in my heart towards Thee. Draw my thoughts from earth to heaven;

"Detach from sublunary joys;"

(Toplady; Gadshy's 991)

increase my faith; revive in my heart the power of faith whereby I may live and walk by faith. Grant me the fear of God, that it may regulate my life in the family, in the church, and in the world. Come, Lord, and revive in my heart the spirit of prayer; deliver me from the formality of my prayers; lead me in green pastures and beside still waters (Ps. 23 v. 2) - "O Lord, revive *Thy* work!" You will be glad for Him to do anything, so long as it is His work.

There will be this also: you will perceive that all reviving must come from Him. This might be said with regard to this very fear, this alarm, these discoveries of decays and declension, of a wilderness state. The very fears that this has wrought is a beginning of the reviving, a recognition of the need of it; and you will begin with your heart. That parable of the ten virgins has shaken me much these last two or three days. You will want that oil in your vessel - 'Lord, revive that; I fear lest I should have only the lamp of profession.' I think that one of the greatest things that causes people to fear is this, that in the scriptures there are examples of a similarity, the nearness in externals to which one may be to the real thing. It was said concerning Mary, "One thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10 v. 42). And on the contrary we have the voice of the young man who came to the Lord and said, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The Lord replied, "Thou knowest the commandments." He said, "All these have I kept from my youth up." Then the Lord said, "Yet lackest thou one thing" (Luke 18 v. 18-22). He *lacked* the one thing that Mary *chose*; and you will say, when the Lord has thus revealed to you and caused you to

hear His voice, 'O Lord, revive Thy work in my heart; oh, make it manifest that I have the oil of grace in my vessel.' You will see this also, that the lamp of the foolish virgins had a light; it was a complete lamp. You will perceive this also, that they were virgins, all ten of them, pure virgins, so that they would not listen to anything but the truth; you would not find them in a place of error; they were virgins (in the externals). The lamp had a wick, which might represent the tongue. But this was the thing, my friends: if there is no oil in a vessel, and you light the wick, there will be a flicker for a short while. I have thought of this, and oh, how it has made me tremble! If we are merely correct about the truth, and yet outside of it, if we are orthodox without grace, then on every occasion when it is necessary to be religious, to speak of an experience, we shall have to kindle a spark on our dry wick, having no grace within; we shall light a fire and walk in the sparks of our own kindling³ (Isa. 50 v. 11). Then when that little flicker is out, and the occasion passed, "if we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" (1 John 1 v. 6). The Holy Spirit is not in such like a "well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4 v. 14), but just here and there as occasion demands, you light the dry wick with sparks of your own kindling. Solemn profession to have a dry wick - to have just a correct and orthodox profession upon the tongue!

If the Lord shows you this you will tremble, and you will say, "Lord, revive Thy work." Let Thy grace reign in my heart; leave me not destitute of "those things that accompany salvation." Oh grant that the fear of God may be manifest. Lord, here is my heart.' Ah, you look at that oil - the prayers that come out of a heart thus exercised; look at the Psalms, "Unto Thee do I lift up my soul" (Ps. 25 v. 1). Here it is, Lord, with all its infirmities and carnalities and sins; here is my soul, and here is my desire also; "All my desire is before Thee" (Ps. 38 v. 9). Lord, bless my soul; "revive Thy work in the midst of the years"; "leave not my soul destitute" (Ps. 141 v. 8) of grace.' You will not omit this, although it is painful; 'Lord, revive the work of conviction.' I have prayed more the last twelve months for conviction than ever before. 'Lord, convince me of my sin; give me to feel the sting of each sin.' It is exceedingly solemn, but if you are given to see not only the consequences of sin, but the nature of it, that it is only sin that separates God from your soul, you will desire that it might be constantly searched out and discovered and taken away. "Take away *all* iniquity" (Hos. 14 v. 2).

There will be this also: 'Lord, revive repentance in my heart - sweet repentance; allow me to repent; bring me to Thy footstool.' Next to pardon and communion with God, repentance is the best thing. If my little experience is anything to go by, I feel that when the Holy Ghost produces real, godly sorrow in the heart, there is in that repentance an element of pardon. It is not a hopeless thing. 'Revive repentance, Thy work of repentance in my heart; revive prayer, revive in me the grace of humility.'

What has the Lord done in a soul like this? I believe He has done this: He has come into the midst of such a case as a Spirit of judgment and a Spirit of burning. "Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15 v. 2). This prayer is the labour of faith, hope and love in the soul; it is the root striking downward; it is hearing the voice of Christ, feeling after Him if haply they might find Him.⁴

"Lord, revive Thy work." There is something about these two words, "Thy work" which attracts me; I so need it. In the Philippians the apostle says this: "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1 v. 6). What the apostle was confident about in those godly Philippians was this, that the work was the *very thing*, not something like it - "being confident of this very thing" that their faith was the very thing, a *living* faith; that their hope was the very thing, a *good* hope through grace; and that is what you will need. "*Thy* work." 'Lord, Thou knowest what work I need to be wrought *in* me; do work it. Thou knowest what I need to be worked

³ "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled" (Isa. 50 v. 11).

⁴ "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him" (Acts 15 v. 27).

out of me; purge it out, Lord; come and make me wholly thine. "Revive Thy work in the midst of the years." In the midst of the years, Lord; do it now!' You perhaps look at your age, your position, and your frailty. 'Lord, do it in the midst of the years in *my* case!'

"In the midst of the years" might mean this also: in the midst of the years of this affliction, before this judgment is over. 'Revive Thy work in the midst of these years, in the midst of these judgments, in the midst of this affliction,' as you may be laid upon a bed - 'in the midst of this affliction revive Thy work.' You will feel this, that you need to "redeem the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5 v. 16). "Make haste, O God, make haste" (Ps. 70 v. 1)! "Revive Thy work in the *midst* of the years."

How this applies also to the church of God at large. Some of you might feel this with regard to this cause. You have heard God's voice. A tremendous thing it is to have had such a pastor as God gave to this church for over fifty years; and now, it may be, and doubtless is, in the hearts of those of you who fear God with respect to this, 'Lord, we have heard Thy voice in the removal of such a ministry. Oh, revive Thy work in the midst of Galed, and in the *midst* of these years!'

Then with respect to eternity, the psalmist in the 39th Psalm said this, "O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more" (Ps. 39 v. 13). Give me another token for good (Ps. 86 v. 17); confirm me in a good hope;

"Shine upon Thy work of grace,
If it be indeed begun."

(Newton; Gadsby's 283)

"before I go hence, and be no more."

Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and he was satisfied when he took up not only in his arms, but in the arms of his faith, the incarnate Mystery. "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation" (Luke 2 v. 29 - 30). Some of you can say that, cannot you? If He would give you to take Him up in the arm of your faith, you could say, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." When Jacob saw the wagons sent by Joseph, he said, "It is enough" (Gen. 45 v. 28); and so with you.

"Revive Thy work in the midst of the years; in wrath remember mercy." Oh, it takes you out of yourself. It is well to be taken out of self:

"Nothing in my hand I bring."

(Toplady; Gadsby's 143)

'Lord, I have no *claim* upon Thee to revive the work, but in wrath, which I deserve, remember mercy.' "Let thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand, upon the Son of man whom Thou madest strong for thyself" (Ps. 80 v. 17). "In wrath remember mercy." Amen.

Source: Typescript from F J Wilderspin, Hove.

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