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Sermon preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, by Mr. F.L. Gosden on
Wed. Evg., 4th May, 1960, after the funeral of Mrs. T. Poole.

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Text: Heb. xii. 1.

Thinking of this service this afternoon and trying to pray about it, I felt the solemnity of the many removals we have had of late months. We have buried five this year. But it is something indeed to be thankful for, and a comfort to our dear mourning friends, that of all those five that we have buried, we have a good hope of each of them. So that my mind was rather taken away from those who had gone before, and a very solemn concern for those of us who are following on; and under that exercise this word came into our mind: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us".

The Apostle was always very solicitous for the welfare of the church of God, and concerned for the final perseverance of the saints. The final perseverance of the saints is a blessed doctrine, one of our Articles of Faith. It is good to have sound Articles of Faith, but that is not enough. Paul says, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith", and in the 11th chapter we have those blessed evidences of the pilgrims who were in the faith, lived in the faith, and died in the faith. And so Paul, for the encouragement of these Hebrew saints, brings before them these worthies: "They all died in faith".

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about." It is not the world that is compassed about with this cloud of witnesses, at least as I view it. We might for a moment consider what it is to be compassed about, that is in our individual cases and experiences. And we have no need to take any larger view than Paul has given to us in the 11th chapter. You are acquainted with the Scriptures and these cases from the days of Abel and of Abraham, who was eminent in faith. But in reading the Scriptures and of the way the Lord led His people in the wilderness, have you ever found yourself to be compassed about by them? It brings us to this point, as to how we read the Word of God. And I venture to say that we never read the Word of God aright until the Word of God reads us. And then it is very blessed and very solemn. But haven't you ever felt ~~that~~ as though in your experience and reading the record of those that have gone before, you are compassed about with it, that their confessions ~~and~~ yours, their needs ~~and~~ your needs, their desires ~~and~~ your desires? Haven't you ever felt a love to them, a love to Joseph, and perhaps especially to David? Oh what a race he had to run! The Psalms, which have very rightly been compared to the lungs of the Bible, the very spiritual breathing of faith and of a living soul. I feel this is one vital way by which we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.

Then for trouble, you take the whole Book of Job. Perhaps that Book is unique in this way, that the whole of that Book regards that one man Job, his experience. It is very solemn, my friends, if nothing in the Word of God expresses and describes nothing in our experience. "Seeing therefore we also are compassed

about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight." Now this comes to practice. What really is it to lay aside every weight? Which is the greatest weight to lay aside? We might rightly say, the weight of sin. It is; but I feel that this word interprets this part of the text: "He that will come after Me, let him deny himself" - has it ever been a weight? "Let him deny himself, take up his cross" - weighty cross - "and follow Me".

And not only so, there are the entanglements of this present world, and the exhortation infers that these pilgrims have these weights and these things. Oh what a weight is a body of sin and death! What a weight is earthiness and carnality! What a weight is unbelief, carnal reason! But we are to lay them aside. How are we to do it? By reading the first verse in the 12th of the Hebrews? Thousands read it and can never walk in it. It is not reading it, or hearing it, or preaching it; it is walking in it and running the race. This comes to practice: "Let us lay aside every weight".

A runner naturally runs as light as possible, sheds all the clothes that he can, would not think of running in long skirts to entangle his legs, or heavy weights. Oh how foolish we are! An overvaluation of the things of this life is a weight, too engrossed, too covetous, going after things that do not profit - they are weights. What are we to do then? I think of young people. They may say to me, "What do you expect us to do?" Well to be possessed of a living faith will lead you into those ways of pleasantness and paths of peace. Will it destroy natural happiness? In no wise. Who enjoys the blessings of God in this life, His kind wonderful providence, His beautiful creation, the natural sun, and the beautiful flowers more than those who can look at creation and view in creation their Redeemer? Why, godliness has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

"Let us lay aside every weight." We are not to attempt to carry this world with us, my friends. But this is a Marathon race, if I might so speak, a cross-country race over mountains, deep valleys, fiery furnaces, fiery flying serpents, mighty enemies. So we need to lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us. There is one sin that easily besets everybody, every child of God, and that is the sin of unbelief; and the reason of it is because we are unbelievers in our nature. And when one is called of God, nature is not changed. That is a secret we do well to remember. Regeneration is not a renovation of old nature. It is a new creation, but the old man is there, and therefore there is a conflict between the flesh and the spirit, between life and death, between sin and grace. If we know nothing of this inward conflict, as yet we have no evidence of the life of God.

"The sin which doth so easily beset us" might also refer to constitutional sins. One may be more easily beset in one way, and others in another way. And what are we to do? Are we to say, "Yes, I will lay aside this and lay aside that?" If we have been taught of God, we shall know what we sing:

"The more I strove against sin's power,
I sinned and stumbled but the more".

What then? Paul tells us, exhorts us, "through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the body and live". Do you want some examples of

what it is to lay aside the sin which doth so easily beset us? Read the 51st Psalm. See the Psalmist there laying it aside, casting his burden upon the Lord, washing his robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb, laying it aside at the foot of Calvary. Oh that would enable us to lay aside the sin that doth so easily beset us:

"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain" - laid aside - "I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride".

Oh there are these besetting sins. It may be pride - the pride of life. It may be the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes; may be covetousness. But the Lord will use such means as, when He corrects a man for iniquity, He will make his beauty to fade away like a moth, and you will be glad enough to lay them aside.

Then he comes to the main part of the text: "And let us run with patience the race that is set before us". I do feel, and I may have expressed it before, I have admired Paul's "Let us". And I felt that this afternoon, thinking of our dear friends who have got to the end of their race. I thought of those of us who are left behind and of you. There is such a sense of love and humility in Paul. He doesn't simply instruct these Hebrews to run with patience. He says, "Let us". "Let us lay aside every weight, let us run, let us go forth without the camp, let us come boldly to the throne of grace." He is carrying them with him, got his eye upon the prize. Oh how he does exemplify even his own exhortation in the Philippians: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus". And that is what I would in my feeble way set before myself and you. There is a mark to aim at, my friends. You might say, "Yes, but I come very, very short". And so you will; but I can say this, though you come short, never lower your aim, keep your aim at the mark. "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

There is one important thing that I would point out, and that is, the end of the race depends upon the beginning. Naturally among men it is not necessarily so. But in this race of faith - for faith is a race as well as a fight - the last is first, and the lame take the prey. But the importance is the beginning. We sing of some; "Not rightly entered on the list,

The gate and narrow way they missed,
That lead to Zion's hill".

And if we are not started right, we shall not end right; but if our beginning is the work of the Holy Ghost, whatever we must pass through, this will ever be true in our lowest moments, in our most extreme conditions, in our highest fears, this will be true: "The righteous shall hold on his way". How important then it is to consider whether we start right.

Well, what is a right beginning? There is only one right beginning, and the Lord did teach Nicodemus this: "Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again". There is no other beginning. Plenty of people begin without this, but their end will be solemn.

They climb up some other way. We might well then look at our own cases, and our religion, and our profession, as to how it commenced. It is very solemn. There were the ten virgins, five wise and five foolish. And the most solemn thing about these virgins was their similarity. There was not the slightest difference in their lamps. You would not distinguish one from the other. They were all made of the same material; they all had wicks. There was one vital difference - the foolish were destitute of oil. And I have felt that what was right with the virgins is the most solemn part of it. And there is another thing, they were all virgins. There were no harlots, no adultresses. They were virgins and their lamps were the same. What I am speaking about now is the beginning of this race. We must get right at the beginning. That sets forth people who, being virgins, keep to the truth. They would not think of attending anywhere where there is error. And there is another thing. They all made a profession, had a lamp of profession, and they professed exactly the same truths. They understood the doctrine of election and about the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. They all professed the same thing, sat under the same ministry.

"How stands the case, my soul, with thee?"

For heaven are thy credentials clear?"

Have we evidence of oil with our vessels in our lamps? Have we been called, separated? One of the first evidences of being born again is separation, and the most important separation is to be separated from our selves. You may be separated from the world. Religious people are. They have a kind of natural conversion. You might go out of the world, but the vital thing is to be made to differ from what we once were, and to be created new creatures in Christ Jesus. This is the beginning. Everything else will come right.

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." We shall have then different feet to run with, different affections, a different end, a different object, a different direction. Oh then it is a great thing to be made a real pilgrim, a wayfaring man! Abraham was called alone: "I called him alone and blessed him". He went forth, not knowing whither he went, and in a very real sense of soul experience, so the Lord's people venture forth.

"They leave the world's deceitful shore,

And leave it to return no more".

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." The sovereignty of God sets the race and the length of it. I should judge that the shortest course that any had to run according to the Scripture, was that of the dying thief. But he had a good beginning. Just how long he hung on that cross, we are not told, but it was not long. The whole of the work of grace was begun and finished, but he ran that race that was set before him. The Lord set it before him. He, with the other thief, reviled the Lord; but sovereign grace called him. He had a revelation of Christ. When he first hung there, he was ignorant of Him; but now he knew He was a King, he knew He had a kingdom, he knew He was the Lord: "Lord, remember me, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom". His faith was set upon the same Object, and all that was accomplished in that dying thief is accomplished in His people. But some have a race set before them of forty or fifty years.

But it is to be run with patience, that is with endurance, because of the nature of the course. It is a rough and thorny road; but the Lord has set every obstacle there is in life. Yes, if we had our own choice, my friends, we could very well run the race in silver slippers; but it is for the trial of faith. And we would try and speak of some of the things through which pilgrims have to run, because it must be remembered that, when one is born again, they are completely reversed. They immediately find opposition within and without, and they have to go the remainder of their life wrestling hard toward heaven against wind, and storm, and tide, and will have need of patience, that after they have done the will of God, they may receive the promises.

"Let us run with patience." And the first obstacle that a poor runner or pilgrim comes against is his own unbelieving heart. At least I find it to be so.

"Oh could I but believe,

Then all would easy be;

I would, but cannot; Lord, relieve,

My help must come from Thee."

Oh how beautifully does Bunyan trace out this race in his Pilgrim's Progress! There you get these two beginners - Pliable like the wayside hearer, stony-ground hearer. A quick growth: "Immediately they receive the word with joy". Oh said Pliable, "If these things are really to be had, let us mend our pace". But said Christian, "I have a burden on my back". Pliable had no burden. But the first thing they encountered was the Slough of Despond - doubts and fears, ifs and buts.

"If unto Jesus thou art bound,

A crowd about Him will be found,

Attending day and night."

And yet the mystery of it is, the more that this living faith is opposed, the more it thrives; the more battles it fights, the brighter is its shield and its sword; the more it has to bear, the stronger it becomes. When you look back, would you say what Paul confesses to Timothy, speaking of the way that he had come, what he had endured, how that he had received forty stripes save one, how that for days and nights he had despaired even of life, yet he says to Timothy: "I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day". As though he would say, "Timothy, I know Him; I know His omnipotent power, for He has told me. I know He can raise the beggar from the dunghill, for I was brought low and He helped me". Oh it is a great thing, and one of the purposes for this method of grace, that we may know Him whom we profess. Now you look at it, and see how you came by your knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Was it not first of all in the conviction of sin bringing you into a state of wreckage, and ruin, and death in yourself, making Christ and His great salvation, His precious sin-atoning blood, His glorious righteousness, attractive to you?

"Let us run with patience." And this running is soul exercise. Every time that, under a sense of what you are, you are constrained to run unto Jesus Christ in what He is and what He has, you are running the race. Every spiritual upward glancing of an eye is a

running of the race. ~~for/so~~ Every going out of self unto Him is a running of the race, and you will find that it is against all the opposition of the world, and the flesh, and the devil.

But this is the comfort of it - "Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses". Yes,

"Of that mighty multitude,

Who of life were winners,

This we safely may conclude,

All were wretched sinners".

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." And it is very blessed at times to watch individual runners in the exercises of their souls. You look along the course. I have no doubt that those of you who are real pilgrims are in different places in the course. Some of you may be upon the Delectable Mountains, enjoying the favour and the comfort of the Sun of Righteousness, and have a glimpse of the Celestial City. Some of you may be in the Castle of Despair almost, walking in darkness and have no light. Some of you may be passing through fiery trials, bitter disappointments, serious losses. "Let us run with patience." It makes no difference to the end. "Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him." And one of the greatest comforts and blessed truths of the Gospel is this, that it is completely unconditional: "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out", not for any reason whatever. There are no conditions at all.

And you look at these runners that are brought before us in the 11th chapter. Yes, you could go to David, and in his lowest moments, when in the cave pursued by Saul, you might say to David, "It shall be well - well with the righteous". You could look down at Daniel in the lions' den and call out to him and say, "It shall be well with the righteous". You could look down into the belly of hell and say to Jonah, "It shall be well with the righteous". "In every state secure."

"This only way can pilgrims go,

And all complain, as thou wilt do,

Of crowds that daily come."

But it is through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom. Yes, he will, must enter. That is the blessedness of that text, which perhaps sometimes is not realized to the full comfort of it. We must enter into the kingdom, though it is through much tribulation. Oh how Paul, in the 4th chapter, did encourage these Hebrews:

"Wherefore let us labour to enter into that rest", and among other incentives to labour was this - /Seeing therefore that some must enter therein. When faith hears that, faith says, "I will labour to be one of the 'must'." One said to the Lord, "Are there few that be saved?" The Lord ignored his question, and really came to this exhortation of Paul: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate. Whether there are few or many, you strive to be one of them". "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

Yes, divine sovereignty has set the race before us. Would you rather have the management yourself? There is one declaration of Scripture that is very blessed, yet in the experience of it is a very severe exercise, and it is this, "Ye are not your own".

Writing to the Corinthians Paul says, "What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" Ye are bought with a price." Oh what a mercy it is if the Lord should say that to us in His dealings with us, "Ye are not your own".

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus." Oh if we look to Jesus, we shall be safe. If we take our eyes off Him, we are gone. That case of Peter often comes in to the support of a sinking soul. He said, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water". He did not say first, "Lord, make a calm, and then I will come". The storm was still raging and the waves dashing against the ship. And he commenced to go to the Lord safely on those waves, until he took his eyes off the Lord, and then he began to sink. "Looking unto Jesus." Oh do you know what this is in soul experience, this constant labour and struggle of faith to get toward Him? Oh see how Job was running this race, even when he was in the experience of darkness and destitution, and when the Lord was hiding His face. Job says, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" And so you can see these blessed runners, and hear what their faith says as they run; and therefore if we, by the Spirit, are compassed about with this great cloud of witnesses, it will give us some indication as to whether we are in the footsteps of the flock or not.

"But these all died in faith", and so we see His people in life see some of them running the race set before them. And in visiting His people, entering into their trials and their conflicts, and then at last we are called upon to carry them to the silent tomb, the end of the race. But the one important thing ~~is~~, my friends, this evening is this - the beginning. Oh may the Lord assure us by His Spirit that He began our religion, and not we ourselves. If we began it, we shall finish it. If we began it, then we have a false faith, and false hope, and false comfort, and we shall have a false end. Amen.

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