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Sermon preached by Mr, F L Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton on Sunday morning,  
22nd October 1967

"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to an innumerable company of angels. To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. And to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Hebrews 12:22-24

It is a tremendous word, entirely beyond my capacity and very opposite to my feelings before coming to the service. I know what it is to tremble before God as a consuming fire. But there was one word, the first word in the text that enabled me to venture, It is the word 'But.' The apostle in these verses has shown the contrast between the law and the gospel and how he himself did exceedingly fear and quake. "But ye are come unto mount Sion." Well that very same 'but' was in our first hymn (946 Gadsby's) the third and fourth verses:

*The threatenings of the broken law  
Impress our souls with dread;  
If God His sword of vengeance draw,  
It strikes our spirits dead.*

*BUT Thy illustrious sacrifice  
Has answered these demands;  
And peace and pardon from the skies  
Come down by Jesus' hands.*

There is the very objection contained in the text, but you may depend upon it that none ever come to mount Sion unless they have been to mount Sinai. The law is a dispensation of condemnation. It is a good, holy, just law. It reflects the glorious majesty and character and holiness and righteousness of God, and it shines with that terrible, yet true light, into the conscience of convicted and condemned sinners, and reveals death. It reveals everything that is wrong; it reveals sin, and what a sight it is, when the law, by the Spirit, shines into a sinner's heart! He will then know what it is to exceedingly fear and quake; and the law gives no hope. The law can never give liberty; it is the perfect law of bondage. It can cast into prison and will do until the uttermost mite of the debt is paid. The law can show no mercy. The law cannot give life, it brings death. But it is good. Good, holy law it is. If that was all, if all we ever know of God is as a consuming fire out of Christ, how solemn is our state. What a terrible position we are in as we stand before eternity! So that you see what a great word this BUT is: 'But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God.' The city of the living God is the church. There' is a provision made there which is not to be found in the law. Yet in a very real sense, in a very blessed sense, the law of God is in the gospel fulfilled. For the Lord Jesus did not come to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfil it and it is one of the most consoling and comforting views that faith gets of the gospel, that therein is a fulfilled and honoured law.

'But ye are come to mount Zion;' and it is called a mount because of its stability, its immutability, its eternity. Everything in mount Zion is eternal, and that is what is intended in the closing verses of this chapter. "Whose voice then", at Sinai in the giving of the law, "Whose voice then shook the earth; but now He hath promised saying, yet once more, I shake not the earth only, but also heaven, and this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." Now everything that a poor sinner is brought to in mount Zion is unshakable, nothing can shake it; and it this Rock, this mountain of which the Lord said to Peter; "Upon this Rock will I build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." And when we consider the gates of hell, all the power of Satan and evil, all the waves and tempests that dash from day to day against the Son of God and against His people, none of them will prevail. Therefore, it was a comfort to good Mote when he wrote that hymn:

*My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus' name. (Gadsby's 1106)*

Well, the apostle says here, ye are come to it, and through these three verses, this coming into it continues through it. Ye are come to all that is contained in this blessed declaration; to that blessed gospel! How he commends the gospel above the law! Not that there is any flaw in the law at all, but if we were under the law; if all mankind remained under the law since the Fall of man, hell would be full, heaven would be empty; and what glory could redound unto God in the destruction of the whole human race? It is a point I feel, that it is very solemn to be a human being; and the whole human race deserve, by sin, utter condemnation from God who is a consuming fire, and the whole human race would be consumed if it were not for the covenant of grace; but what glory could redound to God in the destruction of the whole of the human race? But God determined, determined according to His own will, to form a people for Himself and therefore He created man differently from how He created any other creature - in His own image.

'But ye are come into mount Zion and unto the city of the living God.' And there a poor sinner finds what he could never find under the law of God. The law demands but gives nothing; the gospel does not demand less than the law, but it gives what it demands; and therefore when we come to mount Zion to the city of the living God, we find there that provision which is in the fullness of Christ, a complete provision of the gospel. 'But, ye are come unto mount Zion.' Now there may be some poor sinner, sin-burdened soul who longs thus to come and nothing less will really satisfy. Here we have the church of God and the living God in the church, and all the fullness of Christ which is the Head of the Church, made available for the worst of sinners and the Holy Spirit takes of these things of Jesus and reveals them, opens them up, unfolds them brings the benefit, the efficacy, the power, the life of the gospel into a poor sinner's heart. O what a relief it is to be delivered from the law, and to be brought under the power of the blessed gospel!

'But ye are come unto mount Zion and unto the city of the living God.' It is the only place where God dwells in this world - in Zion. His omnipresence fills the universe, it fills all things; but that general omnipresence is different from that special gracious presence that He manifests in the church of God; and what a vital thing this It is the most vital thing, to find in a church, among a people, the

presence of the Lord Jesus. If He is not with a people then it is not the church of God. O what a great thing to seek the presence of the Lord with a people bringing everything that they can possibly need or desire. A sacred place is the church of God, "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved-God shall help her, and that right early." But there may be times when some of you by a sweet surprise, by rare occasions have really felt that you are brought to mount Sion and unto the city of the living God. You will feel it if ever you have His presence in your soul, if ever He rends the heavens and comes down and there will be an ardent desire and prayer for this manifest presence if we are ever brought to feel our need of what Christ has, and what He is. This teaching of the Holy Spirit will continue and it will increase. Therefore, from time to time when we are brought into darkness and a sense of fresh desolations, where the life of God is there will be no rest, no satisfaction until He comes. O how vehement is the cry from a poor sinner's heart under the hidings of the Lord's face! "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, let the skies pour down righteousness, let the earth open and bring forth salvation together;" and nothing less can really raise you up from your desolation. But you will come to Sion, you will feel that drawing of which we were speaking lately, "Draw me, we will run after Thee." And in Sion, this city of the living God, this heavenly Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit so unites His people to the living Head that there will be a mighty attraction. The life of God in the soul, is wonderful, and in Sion which is the city of the living God where the living in Sion are gathered together, where the living Holy Spirit quickens sinners into life, there is a power, a heavenly power which is unknown to a natural man. Now have not some of you found this? 'But ye are come unto mount Sion and unto the city of the living God.' There is something in that expression that is so attractive to me; and who feels the attraction? Those that have known what death is in their soul; who have feared death. Death is a terrible thing, not only corporeal death, but spiritual death.

'Ye are come unto the city of the living God,' among His living People, and at times you will feel the vitality by the Spirit of this living God in your soul. It may be only just a passing sacred heavenly light and influence, but when it is there, you will be able to say 'I have come to it, it has come to me.' This is contact, and contact because of union; union because your names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life; union because you were given unto the Father in the covenant of grace. So you see the contact in this city of the living God cannot express the glory of Christ in the church and you will never know the glory of Christ in the church unless in a measure you know the glory of Christ in your heart, and that by the Holy Spirit revealing Him.

'Ye are come unto mount Sion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.' Everything in the church is heavenly. His people are born of God, they are born from above, their treasure is above, their hope is above, and their righteousness is in heaven. In the church the doctrines are heavenly doctrines, they come from heaven, the heavenly Jerusalem, and there are times when the Holy Spirit so brings near to you the gospel in all its benefits and power and beauty and life that you feel that the heavens are opened according to that word in Malachi: "Prove me now herewith saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it." 'But ye are come unto mount Sion,' and you see the power, the consolations of this word 'but.' O the contrast! I wonder if there is a poor trembling sinner here in whose conscience the terrible light of the law has shined or is shining, discovering to them the evil, the wreckage, the corruption that is in their nature. If the Lord is thus teaching you He will never leave you at Mount Sinai, you will never be left there. Those who are brought to tremble before the majesty of God at Mount Sinai will sooner or later come to Sion:

"They shall come and sing in the height of Zion" and flow together to the goodness of the Lord." O the opposite! the thunder, the terror, the demand of the law, and then to be brought to mount Sion to hear the joyful news of the gospel. O it would indeed be a blessing if the Lord should so work amongst us, and that His work should thus appear to set poor captives at liberty. I believe that here are some in whose heart the Lord is thus working. But as it was in the case of Lazarus when the Lord called Lazarus forth out of the grave, he came, he lived, he came forth out of the grave, but he was bound with grave clothes, he had no liberty, He was alive but had no liberty; but the same powerful voice said, "Loose him and let him go." O how I have desired that some of you who have the life of God in your souls but seem to be bound with grave clothes, that the Lord would bring you to Sion and that that perfect law of liberty in your heart would proclaim, "Loose him and let him go."

'But ye are come unto mount Sion unto the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem.' It is nothing to do with this poor sin-cursed world. You breathe a different atmosphere, and it gives strength to faith. Why there are times when you sensibly feel the wings of your faith spread under the power, the descending of the Holy Ghost upon you, spread her wings and you rise, rise above the influence of natural things and it is a transformation, it renews the spirit of your mind; there is a translation, it translates you in your experience for the time being away from all natural things and you worship God in spirit and in truth. O this brings heaven before your eyes; this brings the Spirit of God and the things of God near to you. It is very sad when we become so carnal that the heavenly things of the gospel seem to be far off and the things of this time state seem to be very near to us. It is the wrong way round! But still, when the means of grace is sanctified and you 'Come to mount Sion, the city of the living God and the heavenly Jerusalem,' the influence at times goes with you. There are two things, I believe, in the exercise of soul that the Lord's people know: They know this sadly, that in the midst of their spiritual experience, natural things and the things and cares of this world come in and spoil everything; but on the other hand, have you not known what it is to be, in the midst of the responsibilities and cares and anxieties of this life and these heavenly things are by the Spirit brought into your heart? It gives wisdom; gives wisdom in our natural matters, gives wisdom to handle things as in the sight of God. O it is a strength when we are delivered from under the terrible power of the holy law of God and are brought to mount Sion the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

'And to an innumerable company of angels.' There were three things that God created more particularly - He created angels, He created beasts of the earth and He created the human race; and in each of those departments of His creation He declares His glory. There was a multitude of the heavenly hosts when the Lord was born: "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men." They declared His glory. Although the angels will never understand redemption, they have never needed it, yet it is evident that the angels are interested in the church of God below and I say this from Scriptural premises for the angels in heaven rejoice over the repentance of one sinner. They are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those that shall be heirs of salvation. The ministry of angels is very precious. But the Lord has been pleased thus to manifest His glory in the angelic nature, as the angels sang in the heavens to men on the earth when the Son, took into union with His divine Person, human nature, and was born a babe at Bethlehem

'But ye are come unto mount Sion, unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn.' Of course

really, ultimately, the full realisation of this precious word will be in heaven, but not exclusively and as we have sometimes said, so I believe that in experience of these three verses you will know as much of heaven here below as it is possible. They are exceedingly blessed if you look at them and the Holy Spirit unfolds the glory of Christ in them. There is everything that is not in this world. It contains all the things of God; it contains the whole covenant of grace. It is endued with all the love of God; it has in it all the vital influence of the Holy Spirit.

'To the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven.' What a congregation! It will make us jealous of the honour and glory of God in our midst, in the church, and if we are gathered together by the Holy Ghost - and only those who are thus gathered constitute this city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, only such are the general assembly and church of the firstborn. O the importance of it! Only those that are born from above, born again, those called by grace because they are predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son, and being predestinated they must be called by an effectual calling; and the Lord leads them about in their unregeneracy: "The Lord's portion is His people, Jacob is the lot of His inheritance, He found him in a desert land, in a waste howling wilderness; He led him about, He instructed him." Wonderful thing to be brought under that leading of the Holy Spirit in the days of our unregeneracy. Brought to feel the need of Christ, brought to feel our need of a refuge, and how He has led some of His people here and there and brought some of them out of a false religion, brought them from the very gutter of profanity and brought them, as we read in Ezekiel:, "I will cause you to pass under the rod and bring you into the bond of the covenant." I will cause you to do it. Like a shepherd, he has a field of sheep and he has a good sheep-dog, and he means that those sheep shall he gathered to a certain gate so that with his rod he can count those sheep. He sends the dog after them and it goes round about those sheep and constrains them to go to that particular gate; they are caused to go. So the Lord in His dealings with His people, when they do not know it, brings to bear such providences, overturns, overturns their projects, hedges up their way and causes them to pass under the rod, causes them to come under the vital preaching of the gospel into the bond of the covenant, and they are the people that make up the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven. What a congregation! I do not wonder that Moses felt the responsibility when he said to God,"-Consider that this nation is thy people," that is where the responsibility lay. If he was simply leading a tribe of men it would be no responsibility, but their names are written in. heaven. They are loved of God, chosen of God, There is an inheritance reserved in heaven for them. It is a responsibility to guide that people through the wilderness. Blessed people! I have thought sometimes, if I never prove to be one of them I do love them. They are the excellent of the earth, and they meet together, meet together as we are now, I can but believe that there is amongst us those who constitute the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.

I know, as I said at the outset, it is a tremendous subject. I would not venture into it presumptuously, I say it is only that one word 'but' that really enabled me to venture. You see what it says, "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness and darkness and tempest. But ye are come unto mount Sion." Everything there to save you, to do you good, to heal your wounds, to save your soul, and I would once more refer you to this coming and you will notice that it runs right through to the 24th verse. It would be a great thing if there was a response in some of your hearts. Those of you, who long to come to Sion, feel the attractions of it.

May I come? You would seek of the Lord; 'Bid me come unto Thee.' if you could but hear His voice there would be a response:

*Lo! glad I come: and Thou, blest Lamb,  
Shalt take me to Thee as I am;  
Nothing but sin I Thee can give;  
Nothing but love shall I receive. (Gadsby's 144)*

Blessed exchange you get at Zion! It is just here where the Lord gives beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. O how some of you would rejoice going home if you had a sweet surprise! Fear you would never know it, but if the Lord should thus draw you and bring you into this blessed assembly, give you to feel the vital atmosphere of the heavenly Zion and the life of the living God that dwells in the midst thereof. You would go on your way rejoicing. You would say I have come to it, because it has come to me. That is the only way you will come to it; and those of you who are seeking the Lord according to the promise, will find Him, and you will prove this blessed contact that is in these two verses.

'To the general assembly and church of the firstborn which is written in heaven, and to God the judge of all.' This is solemn, God who sees you through and through, under whose eyes we stand exposed exactly as we are; that God by whom actions are weighed. It is God, the judge of all. A righteous judge He is, and are you willing to come to Him? David was: "Search me O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." You will desire to come to the judge of all. David said: "Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence let Thine eyes behold things that are equal." He did not want the verdict of other people, you cannot depend upon it. It is a good thing with the Lord's people when you feel a union, but you cannot depend upon the verdict of the greatest of His people. You would not; you would rather come to the judge of all. You want to be right and you will feel that, even when under the blessing of the Lord you will feel it because of a jealousy that there shall be nothing left in your spirit that is offensive to God. You will want to be brought to the light and as you feel His blessing and His presence, it will be as though you will want the Lord to so shine and to judge of your case, because your heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, and when He does, He will send forth judgment unto victory for His people.

O may the lord favour us this day to come thus unto mount Zion, to the city of the living God, and to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Amen.