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DESIRING, WAITING AND SEEKING

by

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Notes of a SERMON

Preached on Lords Day evening, 16th June 1963, possibly at Maidstone.

Text: Isaiah 26 v. 8-9

Yea, in the ways of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

The text could well continue the morning one: "Therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious" (Isa. 30 v. 18). Indeed, it is something of a response to that one.

"Yea," he says. That first little word is significant. It is exactly the same 'yea' as in the 23rd Psalm: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (v. 4), as though the Psalmist would say, 'Yea, not only in green pastures and beside still waters, but when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, will I trust in Him;' and so here, not only in singing in the first verse – "In that day shall this song be sung," not only in enjoying perfect peace, but also "in the ways of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee. It is an *experimental* religion which is a *living* religion. One may study the Word of God for years, and yet be ignorant of the truth it reveals.

"Knowledge of all terrestrial things"

(Burnham; Gadsby's 771)

not only brings no joy, but it can give no life.

The judgments of the Lord here refer to His dealings with His people (that is, with His people in providence), and also to His methods. For instance, take the cases of the worthies in Hebrews 11. They all passed along the way of tribulation to the kingdom. Abram was called alone, and sent on pilgrimage, and when he was promised that his seed should be as the stars, innumerable, and as the sand of the sea-shore for multitude,¹ yet he was also told that his seed should be captives, as we read in Genesis 15: "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them for four hundred years" (v. 13), and we read there of the smoking furnace (v. 17), as if everything was reduced to smoke, so that he had sorrow and apprehension about the future. But he was also given the support of a promise: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great Reward" (v. 1).

The way of a pilgrim is an obstacle race, not a flat race, not a pathway of moss, but a rough and thorny road. If it were given to us to map out our course, to make our own tale (for "we spend our years as a tale that is told" [Ps. 90 v. 9]), we should never be in trouble, never be found in hospital, never have any adversity. For that reason Peter, after speaking of the incorruptible inheritance, speaks also of manifold temptations and heaviness.²

¹ "I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore" (Gen. 22 v. 17; see also Gen. 15 v. 5).

² "An inheritance incorruptible ... reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1 v. 4) & "For a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations" (v. 6).

“When Jesus’ gracious hand
Has touched our eyes and ears,
O what a dreary land
The wilderness appears!”

(Berridge: Gadsby’s 673)

If one is made a real pilgrim, his whole life is reversed; he has a different object, and sees with different eyes.

We have “waited for thee ...” For *Thee* – brought off every other helper, as one who has spent all on many physicians and rather grows worse; that woman who touched the Lord Jesus was brought, by faith, to the only One who could do her good. This word may interpret some of your past experience of the Lord’s judgments, which you have brought on yourself, maybe through pride. I know what that is: in 1927, through pride, thinking my position was beneath my dignity, the Lord permitted me to get out and plunge myself into ten years of trouble and mental agony.

But He can overrule our own rebellious actions, and bring us to realise what we are, and wait for Him to deliver us. Our iniquities carry us away to the ends of the earth, and we cannot get back. These experiences put meaning into such a word as “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa. 45 v. 22). You prove it *in experience*, and not because you’ve read it in the Bible. That is one way of knowing who He is. When Paul was rehearsing to the Corinthians what he had passed through in stripes above measure - “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice I was beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep” (2 Cor. 11 v. 24-33), and many more perils (v. 26-7) - yet he could say to Timothy, “I am not ashamed” – not offended that I died daily³ – “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” (2 Tim. 1 v. 12). That is how I know Him, His power to deliver, His sovereign grace, His efficacy to save and power to pardon.

The Lord chastens people too in their souls. When soul desertion and destitution meet at the same time, then you are near the brink of despair: I believe this, that such a terrible experience is unknown to dead professors: it is only known to those who have known the unsearchable riches of Christ, who are yet possessed with life, and know there is only one remedy for such darkness, and that is for Him to cause His face to shine. David said, “Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved” (Ps. 80 v. 3). There is only one remedy for His absence, and that is His gracious return. There is a very real sense in which none but the Lord Jesus can restore the soul. It is good to read gracious authors, but some of you know you cannot read away your darkness, and you cannot sing it away. But you *wait*. Psalm 40 describes it: “I waited patiently for the Lord” (v. 1). You don’t fold your hands, or go to sleep, but as the margin says, “In waiting I waited.” “On Thee do I wait all the day” (Ps. 25 v. 5). Oh, the places where some of the Lord’s people have waited! Jonah waited in the belly of hell, and Joseph waited in the pit and in prison.

But the judgments of the Lord are also His word. In Psalms 19 and 119, the Scriptures are called His judgments. “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether” (Ps. 19 v. 9). It refers to His methods, His wisdom and discretion. “Yea, in the ways of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee.” It is a great thing to be a waiting soul, because in such a soul there is hope. You’ll never wait for a thing you have no hope of obtaining, and you’ll never wait for a thing about which you know nothing; so there is knowledge of Him, that when He comes He will bring all His fullness. Jeremiah knew it; in personating and representing His people, he says concerning the death which had come upon them, “Though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name’s sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee” (Jer. 14 v. 7). Though they had hewed themselves out cisterns, broken cisterns, which could hold no water,⁴ yet Jeremiah pleaded “for thy name’s sake.” In the next chapter, Jeremiah was brought so low with the case of the people, and God’s anger, that he said, “O Lord, thou knowest: remember me and visit me” (Jer. 15 v. 15). This was a sigh divine, from one who knew there was only one deliverer: ‘Lord, Thou knowest; I don’t.’ *This* is waiting for the Lord in His judgments.

The Lord knows our thoughts afar off, and we wouldn’t wish it otherwise. Neither did David. He said, “If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there

³ “I die daily” (1 Cor. 15 v. 31).

⁴ “They have ... hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer. 2 v. 13).

shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me” (Ps. 139 v. 9-10). He will draw near. The Lord not only knows but remembers. He will perfect that which concerns us; yet it would be little remedy to be known and remembered unless we say with Jeremiah, “Thou knowest: remember me, and visit me” (Jer. 15 v. 15). “Visit me with thy salvation” (Ps. 106 v. 4). So the Lord has provided for His people who must pass the path of tribulation, the means of grace - instituted the church of God where His ways are: “Thy way is in the sanctuary,” said Asaph (Ps. 77 v. 13).

One of His methods is preaching. That is one provision wherein we wait. Have you waited? If you have, it will take up this judgment in its various bearings. You come from circumstances which bewilder you; you come into chapel; you stagger, and sometimes the blessed Spirit conveys something of the Lord Jesus to you, which brings you to the latter part of the text: “the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee,” and you get a sip of that strong drink, and you remember your misery no more, and are amazed to find you can sing,

“Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given;
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heaven.”

(Toplady; Gadsby's 340)

What a mercy to have such a soul with living desires which the Lord will fulfil – for He *does* fulfil the desires of them that fear Him. They are spiritual desires, though of course there are the needs of the body, and lawful natural things – but in this particular case, it is the *spiritual* desire of a *living* soul. At the conclusion of that Psalm 119, after all those professions and prayers, David says, “Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me (v. 175).” Beautiful ending! Mysterious prayer! You might understand it if the Psalmist had said, ‘Let thy mercies help me,’ or ‘Let thy love help me,’ but he says “Let thy *judgments* help me” in my afflictions and persecutions. Shall tribulation, persecution, famine or nakedness, peril or sword separate from Him who has loved us?⁵ They cannot; but we continually need to pray. At times you realise the truth of what Hezekiah said in his affliction: “By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit” (Isa. 38 v. 16), and as faith goes against the wind of opposition, you rise, like a kite pulled against the wind. So haven't you found the trial of faith has made Christ precious, so that He has become the centre of your being and the end of faith?

“The desire of our soul is to thy name.” His name is just what He is, and he is Wonderful. “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9 v. 6). In the night seasons perhaps (the Lord makes much use of the night season, when he opens the ear to discipline,⁶) when the curtain of night is drawn over the earth, and all is still, you can understand that word, “I cry ... in the night season” (Ps. 22 v. 2). You'll find there is just that in His name which fits your case; then it is that experience meets its opposite. You always pray for the opposite to what you feel. Who prays for life must feel death; who prays for strength feels weakness. Who prays for help but he who feels his helplessness? And who prays for the bread and water of life but those who hunger and thirst for it? And in this there is a desire of the soul. You lie on your bed, and you need wonders done for you. You may feel to need a real religion; many things you desire to say. “With my soul have I desired thee in the night.” Be thankful for that desire and need, and “whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule” (Phil. 3 v. 16). Press on; if you have such a need, it will be accompanied by a desire after Christ. In Psalm 142, David says, “I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living” (v. 5). I'll never believe a gracious soul feels the need of Christ but has no desire after Him, because the two things go together. A person needing a refuge will flee from the storm to a place of refuge, which is Christ.

“... to the remembrance of thee.” This is the remembrance of faith more than the faculty of memory. Jonah said, “I am cast out of thy sight; yet will I look again toward thy holy temple. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord” (Jon. 2 v. 4, 7). But he was in such darkness and destitution, he could only *remember* the Lord. He had no comfort of His presence, and no light of His countenance; but he had the faith of God's elect. He remembered God was omnipotent and

⁵ “Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Rom. 8 v. 35)

⁶ “He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity” (Job 36 v. 10)

omniscient, and that was a comfort. My friends, in the night seasons, those of you who are tried and feel you have lost what you feel it is necessary to possess, search your heart and see if you find there a sense of need of Christ because of what you are and because of what you believe He is.

Another thing: can you do without Him? Have you a substitute for Him? Can you say,

“Thou, O Christ, art all I want”?

(C Wesley; Gadsby's 303)

One who can say that will go to heaven, I believe. I do indeed. The Lord grant us such a night, a night for Him to fulfil our desires and grant us sacred communion with Him.

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