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Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at "Galeed"
Chapel, Brighton, Sunday morning 25th June 1967

"Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities; thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby."

Isaiah 33. v 20 and 21.

We have a parallel Scripture to this in the Psalms and the two together make it a very blessed and strengthening meditation. In Psalm 48 we have this: although about Zion in the text it is "Look upon Zion", "Walk about Zion, go round about her, tell the towers thereof, mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generations following, for this God is our God for ever and ever, He will be our guide, even unto death", "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities".

I have felt since the special prayer meetings for the Nation up and down in our little denomination, there has been a good deal of consideration of the conditions in the world and in the Church of God, and the text, in the midst of such conditions, so many things which cause our hearts to mourn, would be calculated by the Spirit to give us a renewed strength, to see things in the Nation and in the Church as God sees them, and I feel that the two Scriptures can well be merged. You take for instance under the present conditions among the Nations, the heads of government are visiting one another in a kind of ferment, trying to seek peace mostly where there is no peace, and the earth, the world is in a seething pot, and there is a running about - looking upon the defences of the Nations, the terrible weapons that are invented, so that man now is alarmed, frightened at his own inventions, for he realises that he has invented his own destruction.

O this blessed word, it is as though the Lord calls His peoples attention to something greater than the munitions of this world, those weapons of destruction; it is as though He would say, now you walk about Zion, you consider her defences, her towers, her bulwarks, her palaces, and tell it to the generation following. Look, "Look upon Zion". Take your eyes for the time being from the world and all its confusion and look upon Zion; there is nothing there but which comes from heaven. Zion, that place where the Lord dwells, "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved, God shall help her and that right early", and as I think we just made a passing remark here yesterday, that that blessed declaration is under the power of absolute sovereignty. God knows no condition, the Gospel is unconditional, salvation is unconditional and therefore, the mountain of the Lord of Hosts is exalted above the mountains and hills, above all the potentates of this world, above it all. As the ark did rise above all the destructive floods and tempests without, so the Church of God will ride above every storm.

Look, "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities". If we had faith to make the contrast, the contrast would be wonderful, strengthening, encouraging, full of consolation. The contrast is between the world, look upon the world; it brings to mind the 5th Psalm, the Psalmist there says "As for me, I will go into Thy house, in the multitude of Thy mercies and in Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy Temple". He shows the approach of faith entering into the house, the Sanctuary of God in the multitude of His mercies. Take the contrast, the world in the multitude of its miseries, its vanities, and so Solomon found it. I do feel that it would be well if our young people, and older ones for that matter, were to read the Ecclesiastes.

You might say, what has that got to do with the text? Well, "Look upon Zion". Solomon had a look at the world. He was the richest man, a man of the greatest wisdom, he could have anything that this world could afford him, and he made a search. I say again it would be well for our young people to soberly read and O that the Lord would show them that comparatively all in this world is vanity an vexation of spirit. Then, "Look upon Zion".

Well, we do need the Holy Spirit and the eye of faith to look at this blessed word. The distinction between what is seen in this world and what is seen in Zion is an infinite and eternal difference, and we shall prove it. If we never see anything but with the natural eye the things of this poor perishing world, if we never know anything other than the science that this world can teach us, we shall eventually know the infinite and eternal difference between the world and the things of God, the solemnities of Zion. "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities". The city of our sacred things. It is in the first place, the city of God. God is King in Zion. He reigns there. He reigns there differently from how He reigns universally. He does reign, His purposes can never be frustrated, "by Him Kings reign and Princes decree justice". His sovereignty reigns in the world and controls everything, even in the midst of confusion and wars, yet there is no confusion with God. It is a majestic line that we sing,

"He sits on no precarious throne,
Nor borrows leave to be".

But His reign, His Kingship in the church is different. It is a reign of grace, a reign of immutable love, and that reign in the church is His Kingship which His people are brought to know in their hearts, brought to pray,

"Reign o'er me as King, accomplish Thy will,
And powerfully bring me forth from all ill".

"Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities". The solemnities of Zion are the Gospel. It is the work of the Holy Ghost in the Gospel. The solemnities of Zion are all the blessed declarations of the Gospel, the work of the Holy Ghost in individuals. But the work as it is interlaced with the Lord's leadings in providence in gathering His people, and it is a consideration of these works in sinners hearts and as they are thus brought together under the preaching of the Gospel, these constitute the solemnities of Zion, it is altogether a distinct kingdom. A people that are thus gathered have a separate and distinct life from their natural life, and it is an amazing consideration.

"Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities". This respects the church of God, it is a divine institution. It is the result of the resurrection and exaltation of God's dear incarnate Son. If the eternal Son of God had never become Man, had never finished the work of salvation, had never risen and ascended to heaven, there would never have been a church. The church is the city of God, "There will I dwell for ever, for I have desired it". It is a city which has walls of salvation. Zion itself is defenceless, but the Lord has promised to be a wall of fire round about her and the glory in the midst. All the defences of Zion are spiritual. Those defences are the divine perfections and attributes of Jehovah, they surround the church. Therefore, seeing it is thus surrounded and built upon the Rock of Ages the church is impregnable, the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. But now this is a point that it would be well for us to consider in our own case, those glorious things that are spoken of Zion, the church of God, are spoken of and belong to every individual citizen of Zion. O think of it! Those of you here who belong to the Lord, you are thus under His divine protection, you are thus surrounded by His perfections, attributes, His omniscience, His omnipresence, His immutability, His omnipotence, all surrounds each one of His saints. Well, these are some of the solemnities of the church, and do you feel any attraction to them? Do you feel that they are at all connected with your individual personal case? O how important that is. It is good to meet together and it is a divine method, a divine appointment,

from the very beginning, "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be". "Gather my saints together unto Me", but my friends, although we gather together in public worship, we shall be brought to feel our need of individual salvation, as though we were the only one that the Lord Jesus came to save. Have you ever felt your need like that? ever felt your sinfulness, your sins, to be so malignant, your soul so universally defiled, your being so completely ruined, that there is nothing to add to the completeness of your wretched state. So that the completeness of the Gospel has been so attractive to you, you see that while you are such a monstrous sinner - and I have felt this, not only the size of our sins, not only they are so great, but the malignity, the vileness, the corruption of them. Well, if you feel that and then your eyes by the Spirit are turned another way and the Gospel is unfolded before your wondering eyes, you have felt the want of it for yourself. It will make Christ precious. It will put everything else where it ought to be.

Well, these are some of the solemnities. Look upon them. Look outside of Zion, what is there? Would you change? Would you give up these solemnities, these realities? The world to my mind becomes more and more artificial, nothing seems to be real especially in these industrial and commercial days, nothing seems to be real, the only thing that we can see real in this world are the works of God. They are real, they do not change. His glory in His works, the trees, the flowers, the fields, the provision that it brings forth, ~~they are~~ the only realities in this world. But O, artificial man! But, "Look upon Zion the city of our solemnities", and it will make you jealous for Zion, it will indeed.

O to allow things to enter that would visciate the atmosphere, that would almost destroy the solemnities of Zion - true, they may suit itching ears and mere superficial modern religion, but "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities".

Well, we would try as enabled to look at these solemnities. One of the great solemnities in Zion is to realise that sin is the cause of the sufferings of the dear Redeemer. It is a mystery and increases in my view and feelings, to be a mystery, that in Zion, this sacred city, and in salvation and the work of redemption and all that displays the greatest glory of God, is because sin has entered into this world. To my mind it is one of the most amazing mysteries that the entrance of that unspeakable, inexpressible thing called sin which is the absence of everything that is good and contains in it everything that is evil, which is the absence of all life, the presence of all death, the absence of all purity and contains in it everything that is defiled, corrupt and defiling, man thus fallen and that the Lord should in His infinite grace and love, displayed in the recovery, in the redemption of His people, His highest glory and that glory is in the church. These solemnities also included that work of the Holy Ghost which reveals the Lord Jesus, going forth as a strong man to run a race. Coming forth from the decrees of Jehovah in the covenant of grace to seek and to save that which was lost, and this work going on in the hearts of sinners, gathers them. Gathers them to a place where their case can be met.

Sometimes there is much wandering about, especially those that are called by grace from either atheism or a false religion. How some have wandered about feeling they want something that this world cannot give them and they are led about in some cases from place to place until they are brought to Zion, and yet you know, my friends, you may have been born and brought up under the truth but you will need as much separating as those that are brought out of the world. Have you ever known the difference? I have told you many times of the first 14 years of my life, I sat in the back seat of this Chapel. I neither knew nor cared anything for what was going on, but I believe I do remember when I first was brought to Zion, the city of the living God. O to enter in, as we have mentioned the Psalmist, "As for me, I will come into Thy house, in the multitude of Thy mercies and in Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple", O what an entrance that is! To enter then into the solemnities of Zion and

those solemnities are in your heart, the beginning of a work of grace personally, and it begins with a solemn conviction of sin. It must be so. Who needs the Gospel but a sinner? and how can you be brought to need it unless you are brought to know yourself as a sinner? I believe there are very few people would understand what we sing -

"A sinner is a sacred thing,
The Holy Ghost has made him so"

and from that very knowledge of sin by the Holy Ghost there is the life of God. It is a very great mistake to think that faith only comes into the heart when one is brought into the liberty of the Gospel. Faith is in the heart under the condemnation of the law. "We had the sentence of death in ourselves", in the margin there it is we received the sentence of death. Well, what receives it? not a carnal mind. O my friends, the labour that there is in a poor convinced sinner under the law is a labour of faith although that sinner can see nothing but condemnation, reads the Word of God and reads nothing but condemnation, yet there is the life of God in that soul, and further, it needs faith to receive condemnation.

"If my soul were sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well".

But a sinner thus taught will never be left there, never. I have said before, and I feel it might be a word of instruction, that the law of God in its action in the consciences of His people is different from that in a reprobate. The law in the conscience and heart of His people is made a schoolmaster. It does not give mercy. The law knows nothing of mercy at all. It is just, holy, good, but such is its action in the conscience and heart of one who is predestinated unto eternal life is this, that it shuts up that sinner to absolute helplessness and despair in himself, then the Holy Ghost opens a door of hope to that sinner. Beautifully I feel it is expressed by Paul in the 7th Romans, why that 7th chapter, we see the exercise of faith in a convinced sinners soul, and it brought him to a wretched man, shut him up to own his wretchedness. But then the Holy Ghost comes and reveals Christ: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death", not what shall delivery me, but WHO, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? and if that was the end we would be in despair, "But I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord". Now that for substance takes place in every convinced sinners heart. If there is one here convinced of sin and you see nothing but condemnation and condemn yourself, self-condemned, the time will come that the same Spirit that has revealed God in His law, will reveal God in Christ, and you will join with the Apostle: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord".

Now that is one of the solemnities of Zion that is not known anywhere else. Do you sometimes feel it? a sacred solemn hush in the very place? Feel the presence of the Lord, the influence of His Spirit. "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities."

Then there are some blessed solemnities in Zion. For instance, there is the solemnity of the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. It has a solemnising affect, a sobering influence. upon the soul, and that love of God is manifest in the Person of Christ. Paul had such a persuasion of it that he declared that nothing could separate us from the love of God which love is in Christ Jesus, and you will see that loved traced out from the very beginning, when He came, it was an act of love: "Lo, I come, in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will O my God". That was love flowing out from God, through Christ into this poor, wretched, sin-corrupted earth, to reach those whom He loved with an everlasting love. O the solemnities of the love of God in Christ flowing, flowing through the Person of His dear Son! Love was in every action. In a two way sense this solemnity of the Love of God can be traced. Beautiful word that opens the 13th chapter Romans: "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them

unto the end". Now that applies to the Lord Jesus. He loved them that are in the world, and therefore He came into the world. His love would never have reached His people if He had never come, but He loved them to the end of His life. He loved them in His incarnation. He loved them so much as to be a Substitute for them. He loved them so much that upon His sacred head all their sins were laid. He loved them in temptations, when He was tempted in all points like as they are. He loved them in the ignominy, reproach and shame that He bore. It was for the love of His people. He loved them when He was grovelling in Gethsamane, love filled His heart, then upon Calvary's Cross. The love of God, a sacred solemnity this is, and that love also flows to them personally. He loved them to the end. He loved them when they were born. When a baby is born whose name is in the Lamb's Book of Life, what a wonderful child that is. He loves them to the end. Loves them in all their unregeneracy. Loved them when they wandered as far from God as sheep can run. He loved them so as to come and seek and save them in the cloudy and dark day. He loves them in all their movements in providence, His guidance, His control over them is in covenant love. He loves them to the end. He loves them in death and He will love them right into heaven. "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities".

What do you think of it ? or rather, What think ye of Christ ? Everything is in Him, everything comes from Him and all that comes from Him will go back to Him. "Look upon Zion". Beautiful exhortation in these days. Do you not feel it ? You look at the newspapers where we must get the news from this world, look what a state it is in, then immediately take your eyes from those things and look at the text. "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities". It will soften your hard heart, you will say then with understanding,

"There my best friends, my kindred dwell,
There God my Saviour reigns".

I don't wonder that David said, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in His temple." It is a separate life, a separate kingdom, a separate portion, all satisfying portion, and my friends, if this portion, this treasure is in us, it will be in an earthen vessel but how it will sanctify everything in this life. If we are possessed of this kingdom we come to Zion, into the Sanctuary, and if I might so speak, with reverence, I would not speak an improper word if I knew it, the soul becomes re-charged. Re-charged with fresh contact with God in Christ. You take this kingdom with you wherever you go, into the office, or into the fields, or into whatever vocation it may be, it does not hinder you from being a good servant or a good master. Would it make this world any worse if this grace and kingdom were in the hearts of our parliament ? O the richness of it ! to have this treasure in our souls

"Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities". Of course, there will be the solemnities of exercise. We shall have as many changes in our soul as there are in the seasons. We shall know seed time, mercy if we do spiritually, but if we do, we shall know spring time, and harvest, summer and winter, day and night, cold and heat. While we are here below there will be changes and in these changes there will be many solemnities. Backslidings, the solemn backslidings, indifference, the tremendous power and influence of unbelief, earthly, carnally so, deadly, and we shall need recovering grace, and therefore, we shall know the solemnities both of backslidings and of recoverings.

You take the solemnities that we read of in Hosea, that last chapter in Hosea: "O Israel, return unto the Lord Thy God, ...take with you words, and turn to the Lord, say unto Him, take away all iniquity and receive us graciously, so will we render the calves of our lips". Now look at the response of divine love and grace - "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from him", Do you know this solemnity ? "I will be as the dew unto Israel, he shall grow as the lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread and his beauty shall be

as the olive tree and his smell as Lebanon". So that we shall see some of the beauties of the Lord, of His divine grace and compassion in restoring our soul. "He restoreth my soul" is a sweet experience but none will know it unless they are brought to need it, brought to faintness and weakness in soul, brought far off by backslidings, but soul restoration is a sacred solemnity.

Says the church by Isaiah. "O Lord, I will praise Thee, though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away and Thou comfortest me. "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities; thine eyes shall see Jerusalem, a quiet habitation". Now look at the contrast again. Look at the world, there is no quietness there anywhere, there is no peace to him that goes out or to him that comes in. Sin has made everything restless, and the wicked are like the sea, it casts up mire and dirt. I cannot help feeling this morning the contrast, and I would press upon you, for the comfort of those that have faith, you look at the contrast of both those texts: "Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem, a quiet habitation", and you may have felt to have come to Zion, the city of the living God, as you enter into this Chapel, there is a spiritual quietness, and this quietness is because the Lord said, "This is my rest for ever". Not a dog moves its tongue in Zion, it is a quiet habitation because of the finished work of salvation. "Here will I dwell". The church is the terminus of all the Gospel, it is the terminus of all the streams that flow from the river of God. It is the terminus of redemption and therefore, a poor sinners heart is the terminus of God's redemption, of His love, when it reaches a sinner's heart, there it rests.

Amen.

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