

Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at Galeed, Brighton, on Lord's  
day evening, 25 March, 1962

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Text: Isaiah lxiv. 1.

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

The Apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians says concerning the Old Testament saints: "We having received the same spirit of faith, as it is written, I believed, therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak". What a mercy to have any God-given ground to know that we possess like precious faith with those that have gone before! If we have, we shall understand the Word of God and believe the truth from the heart. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." And we shall be compassed about from time to time with the great cloud of witnesses from Adam's day to this.

You will notice in the chapters that we read (Job 23 & Psalm 77), and indeed they but represent the changing scenes and conflicts in the pilgrim's pathway through out the Word of God - but you will notice in those two particular chapters that Job could not be satisfied with anything, or be comforted by anything but God Himself. In reading the Word of God, does it at times read us? Does it express in our measure what is going on in our experience?

The church in this chapter needed an illustration, a display, of the power of God. In the opening of the preceding chapter we have a dialogue between the church and Christ. The Church asks a question: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength?" The answer is: "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save". Yet you find the same church in the 15th verse in trouble: "Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of Thy holiness and of Thy glory; where is Thy zeal and Thy strength?" Christ has been showing the church His zeal, His strength, how that He had trodden the winepress alone; and now the church says, "Where is Thy zeal and Thy strength?" Does it interpret something in your experience? Because this prayer in the text, and that urgent appeal in the 15th verse of the preceding chapter, are from those who have known the Lord, known His zeal, His love, known what His presence is. What a mercy, and how it does manifest the wisdom and goodness of God, not only in the inspiration of the Scriptures, but in the divine constitution of it, the way it is constituted to show forth the fears, the downsinkings, the darkness, the shadows of death, the many deep places, and the unbelief, the backslidings of His people. Oh it will be made a living word to us if we have like precious faith! And it will speak for us. Have you ever been brought into such conflict in your soul as to look up, it may be from the very belly of hell, or with Jeremiah from the low dungeon, and plead with the Lord to look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of His holiness?

It is the same thing as the text. It needs great faith for a polluted sinner in the midst of all his scattered things and broken bones, in the midst of all his unworthiness, iniquities testifying against him, to ask the Lord to look from heaven, the habitation of His holiness and of His glory. Why, my friends, it looks to be the very height of presumption. But do you know what it is to be shut up to it? To whom else can you go? And does not faith see in that heaven, and that habitation of holiness and of Him who is the glory of heaven, that nothing less than Himself, what He is, and what He has

condescended to become and to accomplish for poor sinners, nothing else will reach our case?

"Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that Thou wouldst come down!" Well, when a sinner is thus exercised in the midst of trouble, he will have known something of purging and weaning, and will have walked in obedience to that word in John: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; for all that is in the world is not of the Father, and if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him". But here the church, and so an exercised troubled sinner, asks for nothing from this world.

"Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens!" You will see the sweet harmony, that one faith, one Spirit, one teaching, one hope, as in the case of Jabez: "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed!" The same thing. We are unworthy of common blessings, everyday supplies, but a sinner who is lifting up his soul to God, to whom eternity has been made a tremendous sound, who knows what it is to be pursued by conscience, wrath, and law, will know there is nothing here can do him any good. It is a blessing indeed. "Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens!" Let men rend the earth, as they will and they do: "Surely there is a vein for silver, and gold where they find it". The whole world, in these solemn days of commercial corruption and deceit, rend everything in order to some personal advantage, and yet it is all vanity and vexation of spirit. Oh it is a mercy to be weaned from this poor, crazy, noisy world! It is a mercy to have it spoiled so as to see the world as God sees it, full of dimness and anguish, sin and death, covered with darkness.

"Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down!" Well, is this urgent cry in any of your hearts? Our opening hymn concerned searching (1085), and it is good to search our hearts, to commune with our own heart upon the bed, and be still. Can we look up unto God and honestly say, "There is nothing here can satisfy - nothing"? Can we look up unto Him with a believing heart in faith and say - not merely repeat, but feel our heart go out and confess: "Thou, O Christ! art all I want; All in all in Thee I find"? I know that word in experience. Have you ever audibly or in your heart, by the Spirit, made that confession, "Thou, O Christ! art all I want"? You will go to heaven, and you will have all you want and all you need here; for "all things are yours, because ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's". Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, not the earth!

We would look at some of these heavens. It ultimately and primarily refers to heaven, where the Lord Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God. He has entered there with His own blood. He has entered there with that humanity that He assumed in order to those relationships that He has made with His church, in order that He may still execute those offices that He occupied when here. He is still in heaven what He condescended to become. And that is the first intention of the Spirit: "Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens!" What closes them? What makes the heavens as brass? Why, this same prophet tells us a little earlier in the chapter: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you that He will not hear". And that was the case in the chapter. That is a solemn experience, and we shall know it. But the mercy is this, that

the iniquities of His people, while they separate between God and their souls, cannot alter Him, the immutability of His sovereign love. His hand is not shortened that it cannot save - nothing can alter that. Neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear - iniquities cannot alter that. Oh but He does hide Himself, hide His face from you! It is then when the Holy Spirit convinces of our backslidings, of our base requitals. For says He of His people: "They have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters". That is one. Oh to forsake that blessed full Christ and what He is, all the spiritual blessings and divine favours, the ingredients of salvation - to forsake it! The other sin is to "hew out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water". Well, when a backsliding sinner is thus convinced, it will bring this prayer of faith: "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens!"

He is still the great High Priest above. He has not to offer another sacrifice, for He perfected for ever by that one sacrifice upon Calvary, them that are sanctified. But still the merit, and virtue, and efficacy of His priesthood is in His intercession in heaven. "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens and come down!" What a poor sinner is asking for is for the Holy Spirit to take of the things of Christ afresh, and for the benefit, the fruits of Christ, the fruits of His Person as Immanuel, the fruits of His finished work, that they might come down in fresh manifestations to the soul.

Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down!" He is promised in the Psalms: "He shall come down as rain upon the mown grass". My friends, anything of a spiritual nature to benefit our souls must come down. I have thought of the blessedness of that wonderful Psalm 133. Perhaps some of you have noticed that everything in that Psalm descends. "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended." "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens!" says a poor sinner in the wilderness, thirsting for God in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. It is a great thing to have this evidence of life in the soul.

I thought the second hymn was to the point (941): "Here in this world of sin and woe" &c. Are we strangers and foreigners to that language, or have we some hope that we are fellow-citizens with the household of God, having the same deep needs in our hearts, the same conviction of sin, need of the same mercy, the same atoning blood of Christ, need of the same righteousness?

Another heaven is the Word of God. This is a heaven; it is the land of the living. The Word of God is from heaven, contains all heavenly doctrines, the Gospel which "points to heaven and shows the way". Now haven't you at times felt a need for the Holy Ghost to rend these heavens and come down, bring the immortal blessings, and divine favours, and sure mercies of David recorded, and bring them into your heart? My friends, the Word of God will do us no good unless the things that it says are accomplished in our experience in our salvation. It is then a good prayer in opening the Word of God: "Oh that Thou wouldest rend these heavens and come down, open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law! Very sacred it is when the Word of God drops by the Spirit as rain, when it distils as dew and

softens the heart, and brings humility. "I will be as the dew unto Israel"; and the effect of that distilling of the Spirit is, "they shall grow as the lily", grow in humility in the valley. "Oh that Thou wouldst read the Holy Scriptures and open my understanding", as He did the disciples, that they might understand the Scriptures!

Many years ago there was a middle-aged woman that was brought under a very great temptation and distress, and she said to me: "I am not going to read the Bible nor the hymns any more". I said, "Why not?" She said, "I don't understand them". I could see that she was under temptation, and said to her: "Don't try to understand it. Ask the Lord to do what He says. As for instance, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'. Don't try to understand it, but ask the Lord for the same mercy." Why my friends, when the Holy Spirit reads the Scriptures and opens them to the understanding, you will see just what you need. You will see the Gospel table spread.

"Oh that Thou wouldst read the heavens, that Thou wouldst come down!" Then again, the church of God is as the heavens. It is where He dwells. The Lord Jesus, who is the Sun of Righteousness in the firmament of the Gospel, is in the firmament of the church. He is the fulness of the church, and so Paul writing to the Hebrews encourages them and says: "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem". Finally it will be heaven itself; but my friends, the church of God is a glorious heaven where He works. He is the Sun, the church is the moon, the ministers of the Gospel are the stars in His right hand. In the church He dwells and will for ever, and has promised to bless the provision.

Oh that Thou wouldst read then the heavens of the appointed means of grace! You will feel it to be a heaven if the Holy Spirit should favour you so that the sanctuary was made a Bethel by the presence of the Lord. It would be the very gate of heaven to your soul. But you know what it is for the heavens to be rent, of the means of grace, the church of God, the ordinances of the church, which are His Word, the institution of the preaching of the Gospel, and prayer, and praises. Those are the provisions that God has made, and He is in them. But you may come and go and get nothing, feel that the heavens, the appointments of God in His church, are sealed, everything is shut up. But what a mercy, my friends, if you have no alternative, no substitute! Job had not: "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" Even to his godly friends, who misunderstood and therefore misrepresented him in trying to comfort him, he said, "Miserable comforters are ye all; I want God. Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" If you come to a service like that and the Lord answers your prayer, it will be a blessing to the minister. If you come and pray the text: "Lord, Thou hast instituted the church, the Holy Ghost has gathered together a people, predestinated and therefore called the church in which the Lord displays the wonders of His grace, oh that Thou wouldst read these means of grace, every part of the service, and come down!"

It is a great thing to have a living people; a great thing personally - for we must come to our own cases, to have a living soul. If anything has made me tremble, it is that word to the Church at Sardis: "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead". Have you ever feared it? Have you ever feared when God is silent to you in the ministry, in His Word, and at the throne of grace? But when such

is the case and you have no comfort and no internal influence of the Spirit, how are you to know whether you are living or dead? Well, you look at the Scriptures and see what faith has done in those circumstances. Here it was so with the church. The Lord had hidden His face from them, and it brought forth this prayer: "Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens!" When the Lord was silent to David, he said, "Unto Thee will I cry, O Lord, my Rock! Be not silent to me, lest I become like those that go down into the pit". But look at the opposite - Saul. God was silent to him. He did not cry back to God. He sent for the witch of Endor. Oh if we look at the Word of God and then into our hearts, we shall know how we stand before God! You take that dear woman with family trouble - her daughter grievously vexed with the devil. The Lord was silent to her. How is it that she did not do the same as Saul? Why did not she turn away offended? She had like precious overcoming faith.

"Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that Thou wouldst come down!" I feel to need it, and nothing but that which is from heaven can do me any good. It comes to my mind - if that is really your condition, is there not a strong inference that your treasure must be in heaven? Therefore although you may almost tremble to say so, yet it has in it the same faith with Asaph: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee". A great thing to say. Why my friends, if we examine ourselves honestly and the Lord searches us as well, we shall be brought to some very close quarters. I had a very solemn thought come into my heart last night during the several hours I was awake: "We are either daily preparing ourselves for hell, or the Holy Ghost is preparing us for heaven; and there is nothing between the two". And if you believe it, you will say: "Oh rend the heavens and come down!"

"That the mountains might flow down at Thy presence." These mountains are those which separate, mountains of separation; and the greatest mountain in my experience is myself, a body of sin and death, a corrupt nature, a deceitful and desperately wicked heart full of hypocrisy, presumption, and pride. And I believe that if the Lord would cause that to flow down at His presence, every other mountain would go with it. I tremble at myself, and have not another enemy. Oh to have some little inkling of the deceitfulness of the heart! I sometimes feel my very sincerity is hypocrisy, and my humility is full of pride. But oh for these mountains to flow down! I have known it. It is great when self flows down at the presence of the Lord. You will be a wonder to yourself.

Another mountain is the world, and there is only one thing that can get the victory over the world: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith". And the way that faith gets the victory over the world is by a view of that which is infinitely better and diametrically different in its nature. That will eclipse the world and get the victory over it. And you will see the kingdom of grace in your heart and a little hope of eternal glory, and the Lord's presence is in that. The world will flow down beneath your feet.

You may have too mountains of difficulty, impossibilities in your circumstances, things that are unmanageable in your family, afflictions in your person. Well, in a word, what would level them so that you could say, "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain". What would do it? Why, for the Lord to rend these

heavens, and speak to your heart a word with power, such as He did to Jeremiah: "I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, is there anything too hard for Me?" He declares His divine, and absolute, and universal sovereignty. He makes that gracious challenge, as much as to say: "Poor sinner, surrounded with mountains, passing through deep waters and fiery temptations, is there anything too hard for Me?" Try it, and the mountains shall flow down at His presence.

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