

1057a

La G 692

1057a

Sermon preached by Mr F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
Lord's Day Evening 29th September 1963

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. James 1 v. 25

It is not easy to begin anything in the way of true religion, but it is far more difficult to continue; and I felt as you were singing those two hymns (49, 1092) there is more in those hymns than I can expect to say this evening. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out" (Rom. 11 v. 33)! And therefore we feel our insufficiency; but if the Lord will open the eyes of our understanding and reveal to us this 'perfect law of liberty,' we shall be able to continue looking this evening.

This morning we attempted in our feeble way to speak of this law of liberty, what it is; and now we would seek to speak further of what it is to *look into* it, and what is seen there by the Spirit. That was a beautiful word that we were reading just now: that "the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead" (Eph. 1 v. 18-20). Now these things are seen by faith in the Gospel.

Another thing that we would speak of as seen by faith is the Lord Jesus in all His divine beauty as King. "Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty" (Is. 33 v. 17), and this King is King in Zion. He reigns in His sovereignty and lordship over the universe; but His reign in the Church of God is different from this. His reign in the earth is the exercise of omnipotence and sovereignty, but His reign in the Church is the exercise of everlasting love, and therefore He is the King of love. He reigns in Zion, and when faith sees Him in the Gospel, in all His sovereign love, then prayer goes out for what is seen.

"Reign o'er us as King, accomplish Thy will"

(J Hart; Gadsby's 129)

in me. Oh, you will be made, as the power of this King and the word of this King comes into your heart, willing to forgo all things, to deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow Him (Lk. 8 v. 23) - if the things that are seen by faith are made a possession; and what the eye of faith sees, the mouth of prayer seeks for.

You take this sight of the fulness of Christ in the Gospel, as we look into it in 'the perfect law of liberty,' and that gracious invitation in the Psalm "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps. 81 v. 10), and this will open your mouth wide, when you look "into the perfect law of liberty" and see there a divine King, a Prophet, a Priest, see Him in whom there is a perfect fulness to be communicated to empty sinners. It will give you to open your mouth as wide as the things that you see, and the promise is "I will fill it."

'But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty' and sees there the great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ – His office as a Priest is the greatest office that He condescends to occupy for sinners, because the High Priest offered sacrifices for sins.

Paul, looking into this perfect law of liberty, encourages the saints, as he looked there, for them to look also. "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13 v. 13). Oh the effect of a sight by faith of the exceeding unsearchable riches of Christ, in everything that is provided for sinners in the Gospel!

It will have this effect also, as these things are seen – prayer. "O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me, let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles; then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy" (Ps. 43 v. 3-4). This is another effect of looking 'into the perfect law of liberty.' A beautiful hymn we were singing, when a poor sinner is bound in grave-clothes, as was Lazarus. True, he had come out of the grave, and that was a miracle. Naturally he could never have come out of the grave, because he was still bound in grave-clothes. I believe there are some (there may be some here) who are brought to that attainment in experience; they are quickened into life, but they are bound in grave-clothes. What they need is the liberty of the Gospel, and what a blessed time it would be this evening if the Holy Spirit should give that commandment, even through the ministry, "Loose him, and let him go" (John 11 v. 44)! It is only the Gospel that can liberate a sinner, and the Lord Jesus, in His condescension, His coming, His doing and His dying, undid, if we might so speak, all the cords that have bound us; the Lord has unwoven, undone, all those cords of sin, the cords of our nature, the cords of the lusts of the flesh, the temptations of the devil, of unbelief, and of death. And this is what He was doing – He was bringing "liberty to the captives" (Is. 61 v. 1).

'But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty.' Oh to trace the Lord Jesus, who is the centre, the circumference, the very sum of the Gospel in Himself! What divine beauty, what sufficiency, what divine wisdom and power, infinite merit, everlasting righteousness, unsearchable riches there are in Him, and in Him to bestow! This will give liberty – liberty to pray, liberty to confess sin, to confess Him, and to walk in His commandments. Oh, sweet liberty this is – liberty to follow Him. "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" (Rev. 14 v. 4).

Look at what liberty it gave to Ruth. There was her sister, Orpah, chained by the devil in unbelief and superstition. She had heard the same things as Ruth from Naomi, but she was a forgetful hearer, destitute of life and faith. She did not continue. She went back to her people and to her gods. But Ruth continued: "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for where thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1 v. 16). She *continued*.

'And continueth therein.' This continuing has this in it: our deep sense of a need of that which is revealed in the gospel; and so urgent is our case made by divine teaching that we are brought to that point so beautifully and simply expressed in the hymn –

"Give me Christ, or else I die."

(W.Hammond; Gadsby's 737)

When Jeremiah looked into this perfect law of liberty, he exclaimed "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him" (Lam. 3 v. 24). Now these feeble observations, as far as I know, are some effects of looking 'into the perfect law of liberty' by faith. It is a mercy to possess that faculty, the faith of God. It receives an impression from the Gospel. This same truth Paul speaks of to the Corinthians: "But we all, with open face" (a mercy to have

the veil of ignorance and unbelief removed from the heart!) “beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3 v. 18).

O my friends, is there a living response in your soul to the Gospel, both in a sense of a need for it and a desire after it? This ‘perfect law of liberty’ will issue in heaven itself, while you “look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (2 Cor. 4 v. 18). Oh, see what liberty dying Stephen had when he was being stoned! “He, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7 v. 55). Oh, he looked into that perfect law of liberty as it issued in heaven itself – and what a liberty that will be! We meet here; it is a mercy. It is a wonderful thing, my friends, and this is in the Gospel, that the glorious, risen, exalted Head of the Church takes an interest in His people here below. Indeed, by their having union with Him, their glorious Head, He is their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; and the fulness of Christ in all His benefits and all His finished work is communicated to His members as they are gathered together in the divinely instituted Church and its ordinances, and the presence of the Lord is felt, and He is seen by faith. But we meet here in infirmity, and if we have that treasure, it is but in an earthen vessel. But oh, ‘the perfect law of liberty’ will bring those who are in the covenant into a perfect liberty in heaven, with respect to both body and soul. This is in the Gospel, and this liberty is to be known – “who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself” (Phil. 3 v. 21). There are “the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb. 12 v. 23) – no infirmities. There is no night there, no need for sleep; there will never be weariness, no need to eat or drink. “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more” (Rev. 7 v. 16). ‘The perfect law of liberty’ takes His people right through life into heaven itself, so that the resurrection is one of the sweetest themes of the Gospel, and to look into that ‘perfect law of liberty’ will give you the desire with Paul, “that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3 v. 10). The resurrection power of Christ in the Gospel is the secret of being born again; and it is the secret of every reviving and all soul restoration; and it is the secret of being raised again at the last day.

Oh the liberty that derives from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, because His people are brought into eternal, indissoluble union with Him when they are born again – made possible because He took human nature, that His people might be able to take the divine nature! What a union! Oh, this is the secret of liberty.

‘Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty.’ If you look by faith, you must continue; you must continue because your needs will increase. I believe we mentioned it lately, and it will have this direction, that “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3 v. 30); and that is just what will happen as faith looks “into the perfect law of liberty.”

‘And continueth therein.’ It is difficult to continue, and yet

“The righteous shall hold on his way.”

(H Fowler; Gadsby's 350)

Yet they are the very people who are often ready to halt, who feel that they cannot go another step, nor stand the trying day. It is a paradox. The people of God are compared in the Scriptures to the poor, the halt, the maimed, the blind, the weak, the despised, the nothings; and yet they are the only people that shall endure to the end. They are ever sinking, yet they swim.

*“Tis to feel the fight against us,
Yet the victory hope to gain.”*

(J Hart; Gadsby's 237)

There is a sense in which one who is being taught of the Spirit, led by the Spirit into the wilderness, is compelled to continue, although the same character feels unable to continue another day. Peter gives us the reason. I wonder if we have this reason for continuing. There were those that did not; they "went back and walked no more with Him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go?" (John 6 v. 66-8) And that is one reason why you continue. There is none other that can save you; and you have seen Him in 'the perfect law of liberty;' and as we said, what you see by faith you feel the power of, and are put in possession of it. Therefore says David, "My soul followeth hard after Thee" (Ps. 63 v. 8), and said Jacob, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me" (Gen. 32 v. 26). '*Continueth* therein.'

'He, being not a forgetful hearer.' Well this word – I would not water it down, but this forgetting is something different from having a bad memory. I believe there are some people who, if you were to ask them tomorrow what the text was today, would have forgotten it; and yet they would not be forgetful hearers. There may be some people who could remember the text, and a good deal said about it, but it was never registered in their hearts. I do not encourage forgetfulness, my friends, but there are many who have the infirmity of a bad memory, but the truth is in their heart. And I will venture to say this, that if you have looked 'into the perfect law of liberty' and have tasted, handled, and felt the good word of life, and had some sweet influence upon your heart of the mercy, grace, and love of God in Christ, you may forget the text, but you won't lose the influence of the text. This is the important thing.

'But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein.' It is difficult; there is so much opposition, especially within. I feel that the most powerful opposition and enemies are in a man's heart. His enemies are the men of his own house (Mic. 7 v. 6), his own heart. How difficult it is to continue when under the power of unbelief and atheism, when under the power of a carnal mind and earthiness, when you are drawn aside by some vain jangling, or when like Asaph you are turned aside and are rebellious when you see the prosperity of the wicked (Ps. 73 v. 3), and perhaps a full cup of affliction is given unto you. Very difficult to continue – to continue when all your circumstances in providence seem to contradict the Word of God, seem to contradict what you hope He has spoken to you. It is difficult to continue in the midst of contradictions, but His people will. Faith may be moved from its object by some violent temptations, but it will never rest until it is brought back to its centre, its object, and it is a mercy if we continue, because we possess that living faith which

*"lives and labours under load;
Though damped, it never dies."*

(J Hart; Gadsby's 236)

'And continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work.' This is not the work which free-will people set about, but in the Gospel there are some responsibilities. "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life" (Rev. 22 v. 14). There is a doing of the work by walking in the precepts of the Gospel. It is a doing of the works according to Peter: "Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity" (2 Pet. 1 v. 5-7). So there are the works of faith, and those works of faith are by love; and that love comes through what is seen and felt in the blessed Gospel, seeing the Lord Jesus in His infinite

condescension, especially as He is viewed upon Calvary's tree, that sacrifice which He made, and which was the culmination of His work. It was the last act of obedience that He rendered to the law; and if you, by faith, see Him giving liberty to captives as He was bound to that accursed tree, and see Him bow His sacred head for you, and hear His voice say "It is finished," oh, you will gladly do His commandments, and hear that same dear Man say in your heart, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14 v. 15). And 'he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work.' "Faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2 v. 26), and

*"In vain men talk of living faith,
When all their works exhibit death."*

(J Hart; Gadsby's 256)

So it is the inward working of the Holy Ghost, who works all our works in us, and gives us "to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2 v. 13). "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy" (Mat. 11 v. 29-30). But it is a *work*, and a part of that work is doing these works of faith. 'This man shall be blessed in his deed' – "shall be blessed in his doings."

He 'shall be blessed in his' looking. The final way that this man will be blessed is in his looking, is in this way: the Lord Jesus, when He shall "appear the second time, without sin unto salvation," it will be "unto them that look for Him" (Heb. 9 v. 28). Well, the great point is, are we looking for Him? Do we look for Him when we read the Word of God? What a HIM He is! Everything is in Him. Oh to have a right conception of God in Christ! Everything in creation He is the fulness of. It would greatly humble us if we believed it; it would men in general, because it brings us to realise this truth, that it is in Him that "we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17 v. 28). His faithfulness is round about Him (Ps. 89 v. 8) as seen in creation, in the seasons, in the harvest. "Day unto day," indeed, "uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge" (Ps. 19 v. 2), and oh to realise that "the lot is cast into the lap" (Prov. 16 v. 33), relative to providence, and to look back all the way the Lord our God has led us, and to be enabled to trace His hand, to be able to see where He determined that we should not be our own, and gave us to learn "that the way of man is not in himself" (Prov. 21 v. 8)! 'This man shall be blessed' in his looking, as he sees the divine sovereignty and lordship of Christ in the world and in providence, and sees the abundant grace, the plenteous redemption, the unsearchable riches, heaven – the inheritance that the saints have in Him, that mansion that He has gone to prepare for them in heaven. It will indeed enable him to be a doer of the work. And 'this man shall be blessed in his doing,' for he shall possess the Gospel in all its saving benefits. And what a blessing it is too, when looking into this 'perfect law of liberty,' that there is a transformation – "changed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3 v. 18). It is the greatest attainment, to my mind, in experience this side of heaven. The Scriptures mention it, and what the Scriptures mention is attainable by faith. Some have known it in a measure.

I feel almost to tremble to declare that in a measure, years ago, I have known it – to so look 'into the perfect law of liberty' by a God-given faith, and to be so joined unto the Lord in the Gospel, as to see that His grace has saved, His redemption has redeemed, His mercy has swallowed up our miseries – even has swallowed up our hell. And we have had a good hope that mortality is swallowed up of life, and death shall be swallowed up in victory (2 Cor. 5 v. 4; 1 Cor. 15 v. 54). Oh what liberty! It goes right to heaven! And "this man shall be blessed" in his looking, for he shall be put in possession of everything he sees.

We have this in type when the Lord went to Abraham after he was separated from Lot. God said unto Abraham, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look ... northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (Gen. 13 v. 14-5). The Lord gave him faith to behold the boundless inheritance of the saints. He looked by faith into this perfect law of liberty and was put in possession of everything he saw – and isn't this to be blessed in your looking? O you looking sinner, longing, needy sinner, as you sit before the Lord, and we try to unfold this Gospel, for you to be put in possession of the whole of it is for you to be put in possession of Christ. He 'shall be blessed.'

'He shall be blessed' too, in this sense, by reason of union, and the Church being the bride of the Bridegroom: he shall be blessed with "the spirit of adoption ... and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8 v. 15, 17). Don't you think that is being blessed in your looking, to be brought into eternal relationship unto God in Christ? I was thinking this afternoon, the angels are blessed creatures. They are sinless creatures; they have never known sin, know nothing about redemption, but, my friends, redeemed sinners in heaven are of a far closer relationship unto God than angels are. They are His bride. Well, my tongue cannot speak of the glory of the Gospel, but I love it; I need it.

'This man shall be blessed in his deed.' He will be blessed here, for godliness hath the "promise of the life that now is" (1 Tim. 4 v. 8), and oh, what a blessed life is the life of faith, the work of the Holy Ghost in the soul! What a blessing it is to be created a new creature in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5 v. 17)! What a blessing it is to have all things made new, to have new eyes that can see new things, to have new affections that are set upon things above (Col. 3 v. 2)! Oh the blessings that accrue to poor sinners who are in union with the Lord Jesus! It will make Him precious. You will love Him in His matchless condescension, and

*The more His glory strikes your eyes,
The humbler you will lie. (see I Watts; Gadsby's 475)*

Well, if this is so, what a solemn position it is to be a forgetful hearer, one that has no interest in what is revealed in the Gospel, no interest in that which is declared, who could go back and walk no more with the Lord Jesus!

If the text should come to us, I wonder whether we should have that continuing faith. We have either got a faith which has eternity in it – the eternity of Christ – or we have but a temporary faith, a natural religion. Our religion, even if it is absolutely correct and orthodox, may have its seat in our natural faculties. If so, we shall never continue.

Oh, I do pray and trust the Lord may get right into the hearts and consciences of those that truly fear Him, but fear to presume! Poor sinner, can you do without Him? Answer for yourselves. Can you say 'I don't want Him. I am independent. I have nothing that I need Him to do. I desire not the knowledge of His ways' (Job 21 v. 14)? How do these questions affect you? Doesn't it bring out of your very heart a desire after Him? You stretch forth the hands of your faith to embrace Him. Well, may the Lord manifest Himself to such, and make Himself so precious that they may be willing not only to look 'unto the perfect law of liberty,' but to continue therein, and be 'a doer of the work.'

Amen.