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**Sermon preached by Mr F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
Lord's Day Morning 29<sup>th</sup> 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**

The Scriptures bring before us the importance of considering both what we hear and how we hear it; and on the face of it, it will give a fair indication of the condition of our souls if we consider what effect the Gospel has upon us. The parable of the sower (Mk 4 v. 3-20) is very instructive and very solemn. Out of four hearers, three were wrong. Only one out of four was right; and we have two kinds of hearers brought before us in this chapter. "If any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was" (Jas. 1 v. 23-4). That is a forgetful hearer, which comprises really those three wrong hearers. There may be a combination in the part of such a man as the wayside, the stony ground and the thorny ground, but in any case the preaching of the Gospel had no abiding effect. He forgot all about it; it did him no good.

It may be a very solemn consideration, seeing that we are constantly, repeatedly, gathered together around the Word of God. Very solemn it is. I met a man lately who said to me 'I have been hearing sermons for nearly eighty years, and what does it all amount to?' I believe that it is good at times to pause, and if we have an exercise of faith we shall ask ourselves many serious questions. He "straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." 'But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein.' The difference between these two men is this: the forgetful hearer was destitute of faith. Paul makes that way very solemn: in writing to the Hebrews, he says there, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Heb. 4 v. 1-2). Faith makes the great difference and distinction between a forgetful hearer and one that continues; and those that heard the word, but faith was not mixed with it, were those who through unbelief fell in the wilderness (Heb. 3 v. 17).

'But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty.' This looking, then, is first by reason of the life of God in the soul, a living faith, and by the true light shining. It is a look with the eyes of faith under the revealing light of the Holy Ghost revealing the things of God. We would then speak, as enabled, of this perfect law of liberty. There will be something even in this expression that will be attractive to a poor sinner, a prisoner, a prisoner of hope, if there is revealed in this law of liberty a stronghold. O my friends, as we go on as helped, we shall see the reason why some look and continue, and will find that there are two reasons for their looking and continuing. One reason is the teaching of the Holy Ghost in their hearts, showing them what they are in all the ruin of the fall, and their complete and universal destitution of all that is spiritual; and by the same Spirit revealing the infinite fulness that is in Christ Jesus in the Gospel, and all the blessed, living, everlasting ingredients of that Gospel, and that connection that is made between what faith sees in Christ and that deep sense of a need for what it sees.

If we find this inward influence and exercise in our souls - that there is an attraction unto the things of Christ, and that the Holy Spirit does in a more or less degree join our souls with the Lord Jesus in the blessed doctrines of the Gospel, so as to partake of that provision, that infinite wisdom and goodness, we shall continue.

Another reason why the forgetful hearer went away and forgot was this: he needed nothing. He was that full soul that "loatheth the honeycomb." But this man is a hungry soul, to whom "every bitter thing is sweet" (Prov. 27 v. 7). So, as we said at the outset, if you examine yourself and see the attitude of your soul toward the Gospel, it will give you some indication as to which of these characters you are.

'The perfect law of liberty.' It is the Gospel. The moral law was not perfect. As we read in the Hebrews, "the law made nothing perfect" (Heb. 7 v. 19). Indeed, there were things that the moral law could not do. The real perfection of the moral law was perfect bondage. The glory of the law of Moses was to demand perfect obedience, perfect satisfaction, payment of the last mite - and if that perfection could not be rendered then there was condemnation. For the law could show no mercy. The law could give no life. It was a perfect law of bondage and death, and we shall be brought to know that before we know the law of liberty. There is a preparation for it. I believe there are some of you who not only assent to that truth, but believe it from your own experience, to prove that the law of Moses is a perfect law of bondage, a law of condemnation and death; and where this is known in experience, the text will be most attractive: 'But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty.' The perfect law of liberty is the Gospel, and the Gospel has everything in it that liberates, and the secret of it is this: "that what the law could not do" - that is, the law of Moses could not do - "in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" did (Rom. 8 v. 3). There is the secret of the truth of the text; and therefore we shall never appreciate the Gospel, never need its contents, never look into it so as to continue, unless we have by the action of the holy law of God been reduced to destitution, poverty, weakness, death, and ruin in ourselves; and that is a real experience, and that experience is a beginning of a work of grace in the heart. He turneth man to destruction (Ps. 90 v. 3), and that is a preparation for the Gospel, a preparation for salvation. The very meaning of salvation intimates that there must be a recovery. There must be something to salve. Oh then, the Lord knows what experience you may be passing through. There may be some who are now being brought to ruin in themselves, the sentence of death, the fear of condemnation, who are brought before God as a consuming fire. Very solemn! It is this which gives an experience of sinnership, an experience of sin as a malignant disease, and this is it which will put death upon everything of a carnal nature. It will indeed, even in the lawful pleasures of life. There is a period when the conviction of sin is so penetrating and so deep that you can take no interest in pleasures, in the lawful things of this life.

I have often thought of the case of Naaman. He was a man of great authority, and a man who also had great possessions, but in the midst of it we have this: "*but* he was a leper" (2 Kin. 5 v. 1), as much as to say, of what use was all his authority and all his advantages and all his treasures, seeing he was a leper? And some of you who have been brought under that solemn condemnation of the law of God have found that it has spoiled everything to you in this life. You may look at things and be thankful for them, '*but* I am a sinner.' Well, when

the blessed Spirit sends out life and truth from the blessed Gospel and creates living faith in the heart, gives you eyes to look another way, then you see the beauty and blessedness of the text: 'But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty.' It will deliver you from all your bondage. It will "say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves" (Is. 49 v. 9). It will give you to understand Isaiah when you have your captivity turned and your eyes taken off from yourself and your ruin, your weakness, and your sin, and turned another way, to behold the Lord Jesus in all His grace, in all the fulness of His life and infinite merit and justifying righteousness. You will sing with Isaiah, "O Lord, I will praise Thee: though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away and Thou comfortedst me" (Is. 12 v. 1). Oh, what a translation! The law, with respect to the Lord's people, is made a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ. It is not so with regard to the wicked. No, it executes its solemn condemnation. But to those who are in the covenant of grace, it is made by the Spirit a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ (Gal. 3 v. 24). It shuts up every other way of escape, kills every other hope, and brings them where it brought the apostle: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And he had the answer: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7 v. 24-5). He was looking into the perfect law of liberty.

'But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty.' And there is another thing, as I have felt: you will be glad that it is spoken of as a *law* of liberty, because where there is law there is authority, and therefore it may be read, 'But whoso looketh into the perfect *authority* of liberty,' and this authority in the Gospel is Christ Himself; and the Gospel is greater than the law of Moses. Christ is greater than Adam. They are truths that have kept me from sinking more than once, because when your eyes look out of sinking self into this perfect law of liberty, and behold One that is greater than yourself, greater than the devil, whose grace can abound and subdue every sin, whose precious blood can cleanse the blackest soul, oh, what a translation it is!

'Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty.' It is a *law*, and it is a law in this sense: it proceeds from the covenant of grace, and the covenant of grace is a *law* of grace; it is a covenant authority, so that this law has, in the first place, the authority of the sovereign love and will of the Father, everlasting love; and that love was set upon a people whom He foreknew, a people whom He chose; and therefore there is in the Gospel the law of sovereign election. Really election is the channel through which every mercy and blessing flows. Very beautifully that is expressed in the Ephesians after declaring "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," but it was according to a rule, an authority: "according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1 v. 3-4). And "whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty" sees this divine law of everlasting love; and in the covenant this authority was such that it devised means whereby the election of grace should be redeemed, gathered back unto God; and this authority and government was placed upon the shoulders of the Lord Jesus Christ. "The government" – the authority – "shall be upon His shoulder" (Is. 9 v. 6); and the authority of this blessed Gospel is spoken of as a key: "and the key of the house of David will I lay upon His shoulder. So He shall open, and none shall shut, and He shall shut, and none shall open" (Is. 22 v. 22).

Oh what a law of security! What a foundation! What a hope! 'Whoso looketh into' it – we look into it because it is revealed in the glass of the Scriptures. We look into it when

we meditate in His Word, look into it in the ordained means of the preaching and hearing of the Gospel.

Now, as we are in our feeble way trying to open this law of liberty, are there not some of you who are looking into it, not merely to study it, but looking into it as a hungry man would look at a banquet, looking into it as a sinking man would reach forth unto a lifebelt, looking into it as a pursued and exposed man would flee to a refuge? There would be a connection between your condition and experience and what is revealed in the Gospel.

‘Whoso looketh into the *perfect* law of liberty.’ It is *perfect*. There is something that really sends a sacred thrill through the soul in this very word “perfect.” An imperfect, ruined sinner can look at it, and as we may see presently, not only to look at it and come away, but to see the invisible things of God. When faith looks at them, faith takes them away. When Christ looks at a sinner, He looks into him something of Himself, of His power, of His grace, of His righteousness, of His love. It is important to emphasise the secret, which is union with the Lord Jesus, made by the Holy Spirit when one is born again. But that alone is the faculty of faith, the graces of the Spirit implanted in the heart. The perfection of the gospel derives from Christ Himself, and the mercy of it is, it is perfection in human nature. “It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness” of the Gospel “dwell” (Col. 1 v. 19). Everything is committed unto Christ; and therefore it shows the importance of His Person. It is not the perfection of an angel; that is *created* perfection, for angels are creatures, but it is the perfection of God the incarnate Son.

Oh to be united unto Him! Who can express what perfection is as beheld in the divine Son – the perfection of God! And to realise that this perfection in the Mediator, communicated by the Holy Spirit from the fulness that is in Christ Jesus, will be the very life and substance and strength of a poor sinner. ‘Perfect law of liberty’ – and there is a looking into it! Absolute perfection alone belongs to God, and He sent this perfection. The love of God, which we have spoken of as the first authority of this law of liberty, was such a love to His people that He sent, not Gabriel, but sent His only begotten Son. He sent perfection, divine perfection; and that divine perfection took into union with Him a perfect sinless human nature. Oh, see the perfection of divinity in human nature! And that is the source and secret of the perfection of salvation, the perfection of righteousness, the perfection of the Gospel (do you feel any attraction to it?) and provides for ruin for everything that is imperfection. Are you looking, as we are speaking – are you looking into this “perfect law of liberty”? Is there anything in it you want? Is there anything that you need the Lord Jesus to do for you? If we were speaking to that forgetful hearer, then he would say ‘No; I quite agree with what is being said. I believe that it is according to the Scripture, but really it does not much matter to me.’ “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” (Lam. 1 v. 12) I can say this, that it is everything to you, or nothing. All the wisdom that is here, the unsearchable riches, how it beggars the great riches that this world has, as we were reading on Friday concerning wisdom, Christ represented as wisdom, and to desire wisdom more than rubies, more than fine gold (Prov. 8 v. 10-1). Well, faith looks through this perfect law of liberty; and the only way that prisoners under the law of God, in bondage and under the sentence of death, could have liberty, was by the coming of the Son of God, and taking the exact place, becoming a Surety, a Substitute, a Mediator; and you will feel to need it all.

It will be amazing when the Holy Ghost brings it into your particular case – that which is seen here. Divine perfection from God the eternal Son could come and stand in your exact place, to take all your imperfection, all your sin and guilt and filth, to take your unworthy life, and substitute for it Himself, His holy birth, His sinless blessed life, and to fulfil the law that you had broken. As the Son of God He could not *fulfil* the law; He was above it; but in love he condescended to be made *under* it, to be “made of a woman,” to be “made under the law” (Gal. 4 v. 4), to be brought into such a position that the law could curse Him, that His people might receive the blessings of Abraham – to so come under the law as to be made sin (2 Cor. 5 v. 21), sent “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8 v. 3). This is how liberty is obtained, procured: bought by the precious blood of Christ.

‘Whoso looketh into’ it. Oh, this look! This look unites the looker to that which is seen. It so joins a poor soul unto Christ in the gospel that virtue, the virtue of His Person, the virtue of His perfection, the virtue of His holiness and His righteousness, is communicated to them as sap.

What a wonderful thing then is a true believe! And in this looking you will perceive this – and may those who are anxious have the authority of the Spirit as they look. You will perceive this truth: “Unto you therefore which *believe*” (for this is the look of belief, the look of faith; you believe what you see) “unto you therefore which believe, He is precious” (1 Pet. 2:7)

Why, if the Holy Ghost would use that Scripture for the confirmation, as a token for good to those anxious souls who are enquiring for a token for good! Is Christ, as you look into the ‘perfect law of liberty,’ precious? You know whether He is or not. If He is precious, you are a believer; and therefore it does not honour God if you try and add something to it, or take anything from it. If Christ is precious to you, you are a believer; and it is such that look ‘into the perfect law of liberty.’ The revealing light of the Holy Ghost reveals the things of God; these things are hidden from the wise and prudent (Mat. 11 v. 25).

Well, “the perfect law of liberty” is through the righteousness of the Lord Jesus; and that righteousness is imputed into sinners. The imputation of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus has this in it: the imputation of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus of all the sins of His people. There must be the two things. Oh the mystery of the imputation of sin to the Lord Jesus! And perfection is in it. The sins of His people were so laid upon Him, so imputed to Him, He was sent in such a likeness of sinful flesh, that the righteousness of the Lord Jesus is imputed to them so as to justify them from all things from which they “could not be justified by the law of MOSES” (Acts 13 v. 29); and it leaves the sinner in such a condition and standing before God as though he had never sinned. It is a great thing, salvation – a great salvation!

‘But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty’ – perfect, the holy law of God! The law of Moses, while it *made* nothing perfect, *demand*ed that which is perfect. That is a point. We need the blessed Spirit to open that point to us. It may seem very difficult, perhaps incongruous, that the law which made nothing perfect demands that which is perfect from the sinner. The weakness of the law is not in itself (there is nothing imperfect in the law), but the imperfection and weakness of the law is to be found in the sinner himself. For a creditor to demand of a debtor a debt which he was unable to pay, being a bankrupt – the creditor’s demand would not be weak, but it *would* be weak because the

debtor could not pay it. But the law demands payment; the law demands perfection; and therefore said the Lord Jesus, "Lo, I come." Have you ever heard His voice in that, as much as to say 'Nothing else will do; they will never pay it; condemnation belongs to them; but "Lo, I come." I like that word, "Lo" - look, behold - "I come." And see who it is coming – as we said, not an angel, but the infinite God, the eternal Son. "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me. I delight to do Thy will, O my God. Yea, Thy law" (the law of Moses) "is within my heart" (Ps. 40 v. 7-8). And He fulfilled it. Oh the perfection and the completeness of the work of salvation, resulting from the perfection of the divine Son in human nature!

'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.' The margin says 'in his doing,' and therefore he 'shall be blessed in his *looking*.'

Amen.