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Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden, at Galeed Chapel, Brighton,
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"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O Lord, correct me, but with judgement, not in thine anger lest thou bring me to nothing." Jeremiah 10:23-24.

As readers of the Scriptures you are well aware that the prophet prophesied in solemn times. His work, in the main, was to declare the judgements of God; His threatened judgements upon the people for their idolatry and their sins. The main sin was this, "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewed to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." A very solemn inditement, are we convinced of that sin? O look, look at the difference, a fountain of living waters in Christ; a fullness of all that is divine, spiritual, eternal; a fullness of love, of grace, of mercy, a fullness of merit. O unsearchable riches of heavenly power, of every grace; to forsake such a fountain and hew to ourselves - not a spring, a living spring, not a fountain, but cisterns, stagnant cisterns, and they broken that can hold no water. I wish I did not know it. And the prophet mourned. "Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted." And not only were there those conditions in the people generally, but also concerning the tabernacle; "My tabernacle is spoiled, my cords are broken, my children are gone forth of me and they are not, there is none to stretch forth my tent... to set up my curtains."

Then he shows to a great degree one of the main reasons, "for the pastors are become brutish and have not sought the Lord, therefore they shall not prophesy and all their flocks shall be scattered." A very solemn consideration for a pastor in evil times, and yet it would be a mercy if these threatenings of God through the prophet Jeremiah should enter into our hearts, convince us of our sins, bring us to search and try our ways and turn again unto the Lord.

And it brought Jeremiah to this, in the midst of these perplexities and bewilderments, 'O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself.' He knew it. How did he know it? Men naturally do not know it, they do not agree with it. James says, "Go to now, ye that say I will go into such a city and dwell there a year and will buy and sell and get gain, whereas ye know not what is on the morrow, for what is your life? it is but a vapour, for that ye ought to say, if the Lord will I will do this and that." - but they have not learned this truth. No natural man knows that the way, his way, is not in himself, - he thinks it is. He is determined that it shall be so, in a sense it is. Men do go into such a city and buy and sell and get gain, men naturally do have, as they think, their own way. "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?" My life is my own, my hands are my own, and my time is my own. Well, when a man is allowed to find his own way, it is very solemn because he is under God's permission and not under His direction. He permits it. It is very solemn to be left in a natural state and to be permitted to find our own ways, when at last we shall find that they are ways of death and lead to destruction. What a mercy then to be taught this truth.

'O Lord, I know it; I know that the way of man is not in himself.' And if you took notice of the reading, in the opening chapter of the 3rd Lamentations, it is just a description of how he was taught that his way was not in himself. O what teaching there is in those first eighteen verses of the Lamentations 3!

What a mercy thus to be taught, for our young people to be taught, there are very few in the religious world today know anything about these blessed Lamentations, one of the most living parts of the Scriptures. You can see there, mighty faith struggling, wrestling with all the powers of hell within and without. If there was more teaching according to those opening verses of Lamentations it would kill all light religion, it would indeed. Cannot you taste the difference, smell the difference? O the love, the life, the faith, the exercise that is manifested through those Lamentations! How different it is from a superficial religion, a joyful religion, a social religion, which has no relationship really to salvation; and when we come to die my friends, we shall need a foundation that will hold us when we have no power to hold anything ourselves. All frothy, light religion, activities in religion, will be of no use then.

So that Jeremiah had learned this truth, 'Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself.' And this will be learned both with respect to the way of salvation internally, and the way of providence in our pathway naturally, it means this, that the Lord in dealing with His people whom He loves, intends to bring them to the City of Habitation, He says to them, if not in word, yet by His dealings with them "Ye are not your own."

One of the greatest blessings that can come to a sinner is for the Lord to say, "Ye are not your own." I think of our young people, what a mercy if the Lord would take them in hand, teach them the truth of the text, even though it was such severe exercise with Jeremiah, and say to them "Ye are not your own" ye belong to Me. 'O Lord, I know that the way of man, is not in himself.'

To take then, this way, as it relates to the souls salvation is to learn this truth. I know that the way of salvation is not in myself. A natural religion is, a religion which is in oneself, a religion that one begins himself, carries on himself and will end in self. And the way that the Lord teaches a sinner that the way of salvation is not in himself is to bring him to the end of self. O to be brought to self despair is the beginning of a good hope through grace. I do not wonder that a natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God. I do not wonder that they are foolishness unto him. Neither can he properly know them for this reason, they are spiritually discerned, therefore, it needs a new light, it needs a new creature, a new understanding, a new light to shine. Only the Holy Ghost can reveal this way of salvation. I know, O Lord, that the way of salvation is not in myself. Have we been taught that much? If we have been taught that, then we shall be made real seekers, because we salvation is not in ourselves, we have been taught a need of that salvation and we shall begin to live by faith in seeking after the Lord.

How does the Lord then teach His people the way of salvation? He gives them to feel their need of it. "Show me thy way O Lord, teach me Thy paths, lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of My salvation." A mercy to have a teachable spirit, a receptive heart, a tender conscience. This truth we shall be learning all our journey through. The Apostle Paul never got beyond it. He expresses the same truth where He confesses, 'Without Thee I can do nothing.'

Let us look at some of the ways of salvation which are not in man's self. First, the way of conviction is not in himself. Although it appears a contradiction, yet these ways, all of them, are in the man by the Holy Spirit, but they are not in him as to their source, no, "All our springs are in thee." The whole of the work of salvation was wrought outside of man, the way, the source, the fountain of all

salvation is in Christ, and yet all the ways of salvation are wrought in a man by the work of the Holy Ghost. But at the same time there will ever be a knowledge, a consciousness that there is no way of salvation is in ourselves.

Conviction of sin; this is the work of the Holy Spirit and it is the first, it is the beginning of a work of grace in the heart. The importance of conviction of sin can never be exaggerated. If we are never convinced of sin we shall never be brought to repentance. If we are never convinced of sin we shall never know our need of salvation, we shall never want it. The next blessing to forgiveness is conviction; and conviction and repentance and forgiveness are near neighbours. If the Holy Ghost convicts of sin He will bring that sinner to repentance and He, in His own time, will manifest divine pardon; but these ways are not in ourselves. In a natural religion they are, but they are natural ways, they are dead. It is a dead faith, it is a letter knowledge of the truth, a mere acquiescence, it brings nothing in, it leaves a sinner where it finds him. A mercy to know that. 'I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself.' A man cannot convince himself of sin. This is the work of the Spirit, the action of the holy law of God in the conscience. When the law weighs a man in the balances of the sanctuary that light of the holy law shines and discovers everything that is wrong. Discovers death, ruin, destruction and sin. It pronounces a sentence of death in the man, universally and throughout the whole of his soul it will leave nothing living.

This, I believe, is the commencement of a knowledge that the way of salvation is not in a man. It is a blessed knowledge; I feel it as I say it. I could wish that everyone that is not convinced of sin, and our dear young people, that they might come under this penetrating conviction. It is the beginning of a work of grace; it is the beginning of a religion that will take you to heaven. O beware of that lightness in religion, that superficiality. I know what it is, I have been in it. I believe that is one intention of the parable of the prodigal son. He gathered up all he had and went into a far country and he fain would have eaten of the husks that the swine did eat. One of the countrymen sent him into the fields to feed swine and everything that is not of the Holy Spirit are husks that swine do eat. But the grace of God reached his heart and he was brought into want, he came to the end of everything that he possessed. He was hunger-bitten and ragged, he was an outcast and what a mercy.

If ever we are left to go into a false religion where there is all lightness and mere social activity, it will be a mercy if such are brought to want, unto conviction of sin. But he was brought back to the father's house, brought to the end of himself. He proved the test, he could say when he came back, 'O Lord, I know that the way of salvation was not in myself'; O what a mercy.

The way of repentance is not in ourselves. Very solemn was the case of Esau, He sought repentance, a place of repentance, sought it with tears, sought it diligently, but he found none, and that needs to be explained really. What were those tears that Esau shed? Were they tears of sorrow for sin? they were tears of rebellion, of remorse. Why could not he find a place of repentance? There was no place of repentance in his religion. He had never been convinced of his sin by the law of God. It was remorse. But true repentance is the work of the Spirit. Him, the Lord Jesus, "Him hast Thou exalted a Prince and a Saviour to give unto Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins." And the same Spirit that convicts of sin works repentance in the heart and it is a repentance unto salvation, that is the direction of the repentance; and that repentance will issue in salvation. 'I know O Lord that the way

of repentance is not in myself.' Cannot be produced by nature, does not grow on nature's barren soil, I know it. O what a mercy to have a religion of knowledge.

I know O Lord that the way of prayer is not in myself. Natural religion, the way of prayer is in self. A natural man's religion looks to be a better religion than the work of the Holy Ghost, as to the outside of it. They can believe when they like, they can rejoice, can pray when they like, manipulate their faith; it is an automatic religion. What a mercy if the Lord should kill it, so that such a one is brought into the knowledge of the text. I know that the way of prayer is not in myself. And you will be glad it is so. O I have been thankful that the way of salvation is not in myself. But a poor sinner looks out of self and sees that way in the Lord Jesus, when He is made in the heart a new and living way to God. The way of prayer. If the Lord has taught us to pray, we shall not only at the beginning, but we shall learn this lesson right through our lives, that the way of prayer is not in ourselves. It is not easy to pray, and yet there is nothing easier. Not easy to pray when we cry and shout and He shutteth out our prayer, when He covers the throne of grace with a cloud, O but when faith, by the Holy Ghost, is given a sight, an attractive sight of the Lord Jesus, His intercession, His High Priesthood, feel the influence of His saving grace, the warmth of His immutable love, the sweetness of His mercy, we shall know that the way of prayer is not in ourselves, but O the sweet spring of the Holy Spirit as a well of water, in prayer, springing up unto everlasting life. Are you not glad, my friends that these spiritual ways are not in yourself? But that they are all wrought in you by the Spirit.

The way of righteousness is not in ourselves. Self-righteousness is, and therefore, the Apostle was brought to realise that his righteousness was as filthy rags. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, but the Lord killed his righteousness. He shows us how he was brought to know the truth of this text in the 7th Romans; and that is the way the Lord teaches all His people to know that the way of man is not in himself; and he was brought to seek a righteousness of full perfection. The righteousness that is revealed in the Gospel, from faith to faith, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus wrought out by His work from the manger to the cross. A righteousness through the perfect obedience He rendered to the law. A righteousness made perfect through sufferings. It is not in ourselves.

Do these truths find a response in your heart? Do you feel your faith going out that you might receive the imputation of that righteousness that you might have a religion that is not of yourself, but is the work of the Holy Ghost. 'I know that the way of man is not in himself' and you prove this too, that the way of life is not in yourself. The way of death is, as the description of a natural man that he is 'dead in trespasses and in sins; and that is all that belongs to him, and therefore, in order that we may know that the way of life is not in ourselves, is to be brought inside of that wonderful word, "And you hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and in sins", and those who know it, they can be satisfied with nothing else, and this life is conveyed by the Holy Ghost in quickening, in regenerating, in being born again and you will know that the new birth is not in yourself; you cannot regenerate yourself. How precious it makes Christ! how the eyes of faith look out of ruined self to the perfection that there is in the Lord Jesus, when one has been given to feel that hell that one deserves, and look out from a sense of despair and have a good hope through grace as heaven is seen in the face of Jesus Christ, not in himself. 'O Lord, I know.' We might well ask ourselves whether we know these things. I believe I do.

*Make us well our vileness know,
Keep us very, very low. (Gadsby's 706)*

Well, one might say, that is a miserable religion, certainly it is one side of it, but if we are brought there we shall be raised up to sit together with Christ in heavenly places. O to know what real joy is! Real, solid joy is not in ourselves; there is nothing in self to glory in, but there is everything to rejoice in in the Lord. Everything in Him to glory in; so that we shall ever have to go out of self unto the Lord Jesus to find everything that we need.

'O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' And this also, with respect to His people, takes in the path of providence. If you can make your own way in providence and do as you like, make movements with no prayer, independent of the Lord, then as yet you have much to learn. Not only shall we know that the way of salvation and the work of grace are not in ourselves, but there will be connected with this internal work, our pathway through the wilderness; it is not of ourselves. When we are older and look back and remember all the way the Lord our God hath led us in the wilderness, we can see how our way has not been in ourselves, "But the lot is cast into the lap and the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." Again with respect to the wicked, the world for whom the Lord did not pray, they may be permitted to find their own way and to direct their own steps, it is as we have said already, but the permission of God. He can control them, but it is very solemn not to be permitted of God to have our own way and to follow our own ways to ultimate destruction. Therefore, it is no small evidence of the love of God if He so deals with us that we cannot find our own paths, 'It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' He says, "He hath set me in dark places as they that be dead of old, He hath hedged me about that I cannot get out, He hath made my chains heavy, He hath enclosed my way with hewn stones, He hath made my paths crooked." This is the way he learned.

Can you trace this in your experience? Perhaps in some periods and circumstances very clearly; and have you ever wondered what would have become of you if He had not enclosed your ways with hewn stones and made your path crooked? I do not know where I should be, I believe in looking back Jeremiah saw the Lord's mercy and that he was not consumed because He enclosed his way with hewn stone and hedged him about that he could not get out and made his chains heavy - this is the Lord's mercy, if it were not for that I should be consumed. Well, this is teaching, teaching to profit, and we shall not learn this only by experience. 'It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' No! "there are many devices in a man's heart, nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." When we read this it may be a comfort to many troubled people, those who feel to be in prison, those whom the Lord hath brought into darkness and not into light; those whose paths appear to be very crooked and who can put nothing straight. God is a God of judgement, but His eye is upon the righteousness when they are in these places, "He knows the thoughts that He thinks toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end."

'It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' When a man knows this, what does he do? he walks in the precepts of the Scriptures, "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, He will bring it to pass." There are no impossibilities with Him. When a man believes that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps, he listens to the direction of the Scriptures and takes encouragement from the Lord Himself. Hears a voice saying, "I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, is there anything too hard for

me?" Nothing too crooked that I cannot make straight, no locked door that I cannot unlock, no mountain that I cannot level, no enemy that I cannot overcome, and coming to the soul, no sin that I cannot blot out. It is a mercy to know this. O what a comfort to a poor, weak, trembling, staggering sinner, there is nothing required from yourself and you will gladly acknowledge this truth in the language of Toplady,

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling. (Gadsby's 143)*

It is a sweet religion. Christ is all and in all, He is no respecter of persons, not at all. "All that the Father giveth, me shall come to Me." all the conditions hath the Father given to Me. The worst of sinners, the filthiest of lepers, most hopeless cases, "I will in no wise" for no reason whatever, "cast them out." But you will find nothing in yourself.

'O Lord, correct me, but with judgement.' This is a tender conscience, as though Jeremiah, and a child of God whom he represents, looking back may see many things that you have done, many ways that you have taken without prayer, and all things that we do, all movements that we make without prayer have sin in them and therefore, Jeremiah prayed, 'O Lord, correct me' and if I am now under some deception, if I am walking in some way that is not in accordance to Thy will, correct me, put me right where I am wrong, but with judgement. Judgement in the Scriptures sometimes intends the wrath of God, but here it intends His methods, His wisdom, His knowledge, for God is a God of knowledge, by Him actions are weighed, 'But with judgement.' God is a God of judgement with respect to His people. He judges each case. He knows how to deal with different cases, He knows what medicine to give. He will never give a tonic if they need a purge, He will never give them comfort if they need chastening. He knows too, when their strength is gone and they are shut up and left, then He manifests His grace, communicates His strength.

'O Lord, correct me, but with judgement;' and it comes to our mind, the 15th chapter of this Prophecy, when he was brought completely to the end of everything, he said, "O Lord, Thou knowest." - the infinite knowledge of God knows you intimately, our thoughts afar off, our down-sitting, our up-rising. "O Lord, Thou knowest, remember me and visit me." - but with judgement, not in thine anger. O His frown is terrible to bear; and this expression here, 'Correct me, but with judgement, not in Thine anger,' shows a reverence for the majesty of God, His justice, His holiness. O but when one, like poor afflicted Job, approaches to the throne of grace and the eye of faith is up on the Redeemer, Job said, "Will He plead against me with His great power?" Jeremiah deprecated this. "Not in Thine anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing." But Job's faith was strengthened, "Will He plead against me with His great power? No! but 'He will put strength in me.'"

O may the Lord grant us this teaching, that we may realise that without Him we can do nothing, but we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us.

Amen.