

Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, on
Lord's day morning, 1 Nov., 1959

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Text: - Jer. ii. 2.

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Here the Lord reminds His people of their beginning, and when you come to reading the remainder of the chapter, the Lord is expostulating with His people for their unkindness, for their departures, their rebellion against Him, and in several places through the chapter He pleads with them. It would break our hearts if the Lord should come to some of us who, having we trust received mercies past, now forget Him days without number, and often live as though we have found another resting place, a new interest and object, and as He charges them in the 13th verse: "My people have committed two evils". Another thing you will notice in the chapter, that repeatedly it is emphasized that it is My people. Their backslidings, and rebellions, and departures from Him have not altered their relationship, and therefore it is said of the representative of the same people: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I make thee as Admah, or set thee as Zebaim?" And He tells them why He could not give them up - "I am God, and there is none else".

In our several conditions of experience, there may perhaps be three ways in which this reference to the beginning may refer to us. There may be those who are enjoying walking in their first love. Oh while the sun does shine, and while that sweet, soft, south wind blows, spread your sails and catch the breezes, for the days will come, days of darkness that will be many. Others may remember the days of their youth as did Job: "Oh that it was with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shined about my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness!" And there may be others who neither at present, nor in looking back, experience any of these things; but it may yet be in store for them.

"But go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, thus saith the Lord, I remember thee." There is nothing that grieves the Lord more than that sin that was charged against the church at Ephesus: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left" - not lost; no, because the love is on His side immutable love - "because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore, and repent." And so this is a commission to Jeremiah concerning this people. You will notice the same characters in the chapter that we read in Hosea ii. We do need a spiritual mind to read the Book of Hosea. But oh see how the rebellious child of God walked, and how the Lord in mercy dealt with her! "She shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them." How good He is! Do you remember in years that are gone by, when you were determined to fulfil the lusts of the flesh, determined to have as much of this world and its pleasures as you could; but at the same time the Lord was determined to save, and His determination was greater than yours, so that He stepped in and said, "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price"? "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. I will take away My corn and My wine, and recover My wool. I will also cause all her mirth to cease." I remember the time when the Lord caused my mirth to cease, when He put death into that which I thought was life, emptiness in that which I thought was full, bitterness into that which I thought was sweet. "I will also cause all her mirth to cease,

her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees." What kindness, what loving-kindness, not to allow a poor sinner to destroy himself!

But then He said, "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness", and that just comes into the text. And the Lord said to this people, "I remember thee". It is enough to cover us with shame, and yet at the same time to break our hearts, when you think of two things. The Lord says, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth". And with respect to their sins He says, "Thy sins and thine iniquities will I remember no more". Think of it! He remembers no more their sins and their iniquities, but "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth". The Lord took it as a kindness, those days of first love. There is nothing really the same, nothing just the same as a first love, the tenderness of it, the purity of it, when the Lord first allures a poor sinner, having brought him into the wilderness, dealt with them so that they can truly say, "Compared with Christ, in all beside, No comeliness I see" - brings them into the wilderness.

"I remember thee." And the Lord will have His people to remember it. We sing sometimes, "Shine upon Thy work of grace, If it be indeed begun". There is nothing that will confirm the souls of His disciples more than when He tells them the text. If He should come to you and say, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth", you will remember it. He will thereby bring to your remembrance all that He has said unto you, and give you to remember all the way that He has led you these forty years in the wilderness. And oh what a confirmation that will be for the present, and what a sweet hope it will give you for the future! Oh then it is our desire, as we feel it our need, for the Lord to come and confirm us with respect to our beginnings! But some of you who are anxious might respond and say, "I have no beginning".

Well, if you look at the text, you will see that there is no definite point arrived at, but a very definite object followed. "The kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness". So that if there are any here who are after Him, as was the Psalmist: "My soul followeth hard after Thee", you are in that degree inside the text. Indeed it comes to our mind that the great Apostle Paul, not long before his end, a seasoned warrior, a well-worn pilgrim, said this: "Not that I have already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after". And there is a real sense that you will never get farther than that - at least I hope you went. Do you think I ought not to say that? Well, we will put it in the language of the Psalmist: "I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness"; and until you are brought to heaven, it will be a constant following after, "if I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus". That is a very blessed word. It comes really into the text. We might just look at that for a minute. What did the Apostle mean when he said, "That I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus"? He meant this, that he might lay hold of that which he knew had laid hold of him. Oh he knew that he was apprehended! He remembered the beginning on the way to Damascus, when the light shined above the brightness of the sun, eclipsed the world, killed his religion, stripped him of his Pharisaism, brought him to the ground and blinded him. He knew that he was appre-

hended, that he was under the power of divine grace; but such was his fervency and his zeal that he wanted to enter into the fulness of that which had saved him and apprehend that which had apprehended him in the fulness of it.

"Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth." Well, those first, tender, pure, simple followings after the Lord, those seekings of the breasts of consolation, those days of being dandled upon the knees, were very sweet; but although they were really the work of the Spirit, they were not very deep. That is to say, there was very little real knowledge. And for that reason Isaiah, by the Spirit, asks, "Whom shall He teach knowledge, and whom will He make to understand doctrine? They that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts". Sweet as was that first love, it is like a child being sheltered in a good home with all the affection and love of parents and brethren, but the time comes when the father must say to the child, "Now you must go away, you must go and stand upon your own feet, you must go and earn your own living". And so it is in experience. There is a going forth deeper and deeper in discoveries of the depth of the Fall, the mystery of iniquity.

"Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee." Well, it was His Spirit's doing. "The soul that with sincere desires, Seeks after Jesus' love; That soul the Holy Ghost inspires, With breathings from above." Have you ever been conscious of that? You see it does not come to any particular attainment, not to the full assurance of the forgiveness of sins, though I would not set you down short of that. No, if it were possible for a person to be born an old man, it would be a monster; something repulsive about it. So with regard to the beginning of a work of grace, a new-born infant. But oh, the child knows who its parents are, the infant knows the breast where it can find food and comfort! But the time comes when there is to be a deepening of the work. And according to this chapter, those of us who have to sadly confess we are no better than our fathers, it is indeed in a low place in which we are brought to have that still small voice penetrate through all our sins and bondage, and to hear the Lord in mercy say, "I remember thee".

"The kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals." And these espousals are those that we were reading of just now, how the Lord says He will betroth His people unto Him in righteousness, in loving-kindness, in faithfulness, and for ever. Now this relationship is made. The Lord Jesus is the Bridegroom of the bride, and therefore as Abraham sent his servant to obtain a wife for Isaac, so the Lord sends His servants to find Christ's bride. It is a very beautiful chapter, and is designed really to illustrate Christ, and His church, and the ministry. If you read that 24th chapter of Genesis, and the commission that the servant had, and how he waited for these particular tokens, and how here and there he saw signs that he was being led forth in the right way, until eventually he happened upon Rebekah. Abraham did not give the name and address of Rebekah at all. The servant had to move by faith, and look for certain tokens, and signs, and evidences. And then it was said to Rebekah, "Wilt thou go with this man?" and she said, "I will go".

Oh these blessed beginnings! It was the same with Ruth. She left her sister Orpah, her gods, and people. It was the same with

Abraham, and it is the same to-day. And why was Rebekah willing to go with the servant? Not that she was going to marry the servant, but because she believed the report that the servant gave of Isaac, his beauty, his person. He told her also that Isaac's father had given unto him all that he had, and she believed the report. And in the beginnings, I trust I can remember when I was drawn, went after the Lord in the wilderness in a land that was not sown. Oh how I did long to get, even if it was my head inside the chapel doors! I did not mind whether people spoke to me, or whether they did not; had no thought of such a thing. But oh, after some years of conflict and condemnation, the first gleam of mercy was from that text - for a long time I was looking for something in myself; but that word brought me first to a hope in the mercy of God: "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" - God that showeth mercy. Oh how sweet was grace to me in those days! It had an influence upon my heart that I could never describe. Such an attraction - had but little understanding. Oh but I was needy! Yet my needs were brought to a sweet hope that there was an all-sufficiency in Christ and in the means of grace, that He would bless the provision of His house. Oh with what sacred anticipation in those days I entered into the sanctuary, perhaps ten minutes before the service began, and had secret communion with the Lord in anticipation of the riches of the Gospel! "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth."

I do wonder sometimes if there is anything like that coming on in some of our dear young people, because the Lord saves the same way, the same way as He saved the woman who went to the well. She had got no idea that she would meet the Lord, and did not know Him when she did. But He knew her; that is the point. He may know some poor sinner here and meet with such. "If thou knewest the gift of God, woman, and if you knew that He who speaks to thee is God the eternal Son. If you knew that I created this world, that I was the Redeemer, and your Redeemer, you would pray. You would ask if you saw what was in me, and knew what was in Myself; you would pray, woman." Do you remember when it first dawned upon you?

Well, the Lord says to Jeremiah, "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem". And the people were in a bad state. And that is why I was brought to this text. You may be looking at this text from the 31st verse. You look at the beginning from different angles. "Oh generation, see the word of the Lord: Have I been a wilderness to Israel, a land of darkness?" He appeals to them. Oh His condescension, that He should plead with His people! It is an amazing mercy that an unworthy sinner is allowed to plead with the Lord, but it is a greater amazement that the mighty God in Christ should condescend to plead with a sinner. Oh that He would come to some of us who are far off, make us ashamed of ourselves, and yet at the same time to sing with understanding: "Weary of wandering from the Lord, And now made willing to return, I hear and bow me to Thy word".

"I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals." The marriage is not in this life; it will be in heaven, the marriage supper: "Blessed are they that are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb". But there is to be an espousal, a betrothal here. The Lord engages Himself to His dear people, He does indeed. Has He ever made an engagement with us, and have you ever

made a covenant with Him? Ruth did: "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God shall be my God". Has there been anything wrought in your poor heart that is the nature of a betrothal between you and the Lord? It is a great mercy.

"When thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." And that seems to be a very outstanding feature of the Scriptures, and therefore must be a feature of our experience. "Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" And here the Lord brings His people into the wilderness. That is to say, He so allures them and eclipses this world, and the true riches and righteousness that are in Christ in the Gospel make the fine gold of this world look very dim, and there is a realization that the best things, and even the lawful pleasures and blessings of this ~~the~~ world are dead. It is a great thing to feel that, and a mercy. We would enjoy the blessings of this life, and to my mind the people of God who know the Lord enjoy creation and creation's benefits and blessings in a way that a worldling cannot enjoy them; but at the same time creation is dead, temporal blessings are dead blessings. They have no life in them. They will last while we live and we shall be thankful for them, but you will be conscious that everything outside of Christ and His glorious kingdom is a wilderness.

"How thou wentest after Me in the wilderness." I feel - and the Lord knows I feel it - to be exceedingly poor, and in my experience I come very, very short, but I do believe that this comes into my little experience: "When thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown". And I believe there are others here who in a certain literal way went after the Lord in a land that was not sown during the First War. For it was there that I believe that the Lord mercifully entered, if I might so speak, into an engagement with my unworthy soul. In 1916 in France, a wilderness it was not sown as far as I knew. I did not see any of His dear people, not a child of God, not a service. It was a wilderness that was not sown with the means of grace. The Lord remembered that, and I sometimes remember it. And I tell you who I told about it - the devil. I have been very tried as to whether my religion is an official religion, a pulpit religion. But then the text is very sacred. The Lord remembers when I had not any official religion, any pulpit religion, but I went after Him in a land that was not sown, and He remembers it. Oh would it not revive some of you for the Lord to come and tell you that? We seem to forget it often, and because we become so carnally-minded we bring ourselves into temptations, doubts, and fears with respect to the beginning; but this will clear your way. And I will tell you another thing it will do. It will give you to eat a new store because of the old. Yes, the reminder in your heart, through the mercy of God, of your beginning will give you those fresh new touches, will bring to remembrance the days of old, and you will return unto the days of your youth. Well, this is a reviving that I desire for myself and for you. Oh it would help us, correct our spirit, purge us from everything that is defiling and grieving to the Spirit of God! It would make us tender once more as in the days of our youth.

"How thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." He was the **G**object, and more or less distinctly you will continue to go to Him. Backslidings are solemn sins, bring ourselves

into darkness, shut ourselves up in a prison often; but where once the life of God has entered, and therefore a living faith, there will be that spiritual and heavenly principle in the soul that will not depart from its Object. It is a very blessed consideration that living faith never backslides with the backslider. No, it may through force of temptation, by some surprise, or by some solemn backsliding, it may be greatly tried, but it will not rest until it finds its resting place. Oh then can we trace through all the changes that we have been brought through - and what a history is the history of one child of God! But can we trace in all the windings of our pathway that in the main we have continually been brought back to God, and is that the reason why we are here this morning? Oh my friends, not only at the beginning, but we shall need constantly for the Lord to hedge up our way that we should not find our paths! What a mercy it will be to be brought safely through, to the end, and at last to be gathered to that blessed company, to the marriage supper of the Lamb! This same prophet speaks of a day - oh that that day might come among us here! - a day, "a voice of joy and a voice of gladness"; but this is the point, "and the voice of the bride and the voice of the Bridegroom, and the voice of them that say, Praise the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for His mercy endureth for ever"; and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land as at the first, saith the Lord". Therefore we must ascribe all the power, the kingdom, and the glory unto God.
