

Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton on
Lord's day morning, Nov. 4, 1962

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Text: Malachi iii. 16, 17.

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This word brings us to consider that important part of a profession of religion, namely the communion of saints. Most important it is. When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, what blessed conversation must have been between them and the Lord, what communion! A sinless pair. The tongue, my friends, since man fell, can where the grace of God is be used for the greatest good; but the tongue has been ~~an~~ instrument also for the greatest evil. It is worthy of consideration that only man is endowed with the gift and power of speech. No other creature can speak. Birds can sing, lions can roar, dogs can bark; but only man can speak. And there is more in that than a passing observation. It gives an additional evidence to the falseness, as well as the wickedness, of that theory of evolution. The power of speech was given to man and man alone, that he could express his thoughts. And this is connected with the creation of man, created differently from any other creature. It would be well if our young people might remember that point. When evolution is so universally thrust upon young people, and that we are supposed to be some development from apes, the very fact that speech belongs alone to mankind shows the fallacy of that error. But what a power is in the tongue! "To him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of the Lord." In many things we offend, but "he that offendeth not in word is a perfect man". Oh how we do need solemnly to consider the influence we are, and have upon other people, with our tongues!

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." Communion of saints is a vital indication of the spiritual condition of our souls personally, and will affect a church collectively. Oh the importance of it! And may the Lord use even the text to search our hearts. It has searched mine, and I have ^{been} brought in guilty. When we consider the truth, the Gospel, and believe in the work of the Holy Ghost, His sacred influence in the soul, and then consider how much is made manifest in our experience by communion with the saints. Paul speaks to the Ephesians of the fellowship of the mystery of Christ. There is the mystery of Christ in the Gospel, but there is the fellowship of the mystery. So writing to the Philippians Paul says, "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ". Those two disciples walking to Emmaus had sad communion. Communion with saints respects what is going on in our own souls. Blessed it is when it is brought to a head and the love of God is so shed abroad, that His people are compelled to say, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what He has done for my soul". But the point that I would press upon myself and you is, to consider how much of our conversation is in heaven, how much is to the edification of each other and to the glory of God.

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." It is this fear of God which regulates all the powers of those that possess it, and it will regulate the tongue. It is to be noticed in the Word of God what an intimate relation and connection there is between the heart and the tongue. It just comes to our mind that the 10th of Romans shows the importance of this communion. Speaking of the truth Paul says to the Romans, "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord

Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation". The connection between the heart and the mouth is very blessed where grace is. By the mouth we express what we have inside. And the Lord has told us what comes forth from the natural heart: "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, thefts, murders". Every kind of evil comes from the fallen heart of man, and therefore comes forth out of his mouth. But oh to have a new heart in which is divine grace, from which proceed words of soberness and truth! Oh how blessed it is when by divine grace the tongue is used in prayer! Faith in the heart adding learning to the lips. The Lord Himself creates the fruit of the lips, and that fruit is created in the heart where living faith is, and all the expression of the soul, both in its needs and in its desires, in its confessions, in its repentance, is by the tongue.

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." This fear of the Lord is a grace of the Spirit equally with faith. We sing:

"This fear's the spirit of faith,
A confidence that's strong;
An unctuous light to all that's right,
And a bar to all that's wrong".

It is not a human faculty. The fear of God is a grace, and it speaks for God. It is a divine and spiritual regulator. Oh what a mercy it is to possess this fear, which is the beginning of wisdom! But they spake often one to another, that is they spake in the fear of God, filial fear; not a slavish fear, but a reverential fear which has a knowledge of God in it, a fear which makes the conscience tender, which trembles at the approach of sin. The fear of God which is a divine monitor in the conscience, which gives checks to the conscience.

In the chapter we see the condition under which these saints that fear God hold communion, for the first word in the text is "Then", and that refers to what has gone before. They were among those whose words had been "stout against" the Lord, and who had "called the proud happy; yea they that work wickedness are set up; yea they that tempt God are even delivered". "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." This means, unless we have received something from the Lord—and this may cause us to look to ourselves from day to day. I have sometimes felt it might be profitable to keep a diary, if for no other purpose than this, to keep us daily in touch with our own conscience and to take knowledge of our own ways before God. But have we anything to commune with each other about? You look at it, this week, this year. Otherwise, my friends, it is only just religious gossip, and such will not be in His remembrance book. Do we receive anything from the Lord by having, first communion with Him and being brought into close contact and close exercise before God relative to our own souls' salvation? Are we brought daily to feel our need of Him, to seek day by day our daily bread, spiritual bread? Do we ever hear His voice? Has He done anything for us and in us? Has He healed the diseases of our souls? Has He brought us out of prison and captivity? Do we hear His voice? Has He spoken to us through the Scriptures? As was mentioned in prayer this morning, so that we have found His Word and it was made sweet to our taste, made over to us by the Spirit, some precious portion, some warm promise, some merciful indication, or maybe some warning? Have we anything to say?

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." Not one about another. I think this perhaps might be more general than communion with saints - speak often one about another. But this is, they often spake one to another. And when you go through the Word of God you will see what they had to speak about, and compare your own case, whether we have had any such experience. You may depend upon it that that poor leper that we read of in Mark i, who came kneeling unto Him and beseeching Him that He would cleanse his leprosy, "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean", and He put forth His sacred holy hand and touched him - that leper would have something to talk about. So would the woman who pressed through the crowd and got healing, and the man with his palsy. They had something done. Have we anything done? If not, what is our religion? Have we anything to commune with each other about? Time is short.

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened." His eyes not only go through the earth, beholding the evil and the good, but His ears also go through the earth listening to both evil and good. This was a solemn point to me in my own case. And we are accountable according to the Scripture for even a foolish thought or word. "And the Lord hearkened and heard it." Now we have exactly the opposite to this in Jeremiah. We read there of the Lord: "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright". No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, "What have I done?" Everyone turned to his course as the horse rusheth into the battle" (Jer. viii. 6). Very solemn! The Lord says, "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright". True, that was of the wicked and His enemies; but is not it even so at times with His people? The Lord hearkens and hears, and oh how He delights and approves of the communion of saints when His people, pilgrims through the wilderness, get together and speak of the goodness of the Lord! It may be at times what they desire. They may speak of their weakness, of their many fears, wonder whether there has evr been a right beginning, wonder whether they will endure unto the end. And that is communion. When one expresses to the other that sense of deep need of the all-sufficient grace of the Lord Jesus, a need for Him to be a refuge and a present help in time of trouble. And it may be that one may have received a blessing. Oh how good this is to come upon one in whose heart is the blessing and favour of the Lord, whose cup is running over, whose spirit is chastened and sanctified and made tender in the fear of God! What a contrast to everything else that is going on in this noisy crazy world!

"And the Lord hearkened." Therefore the Lord hears the prayers of His people. "Hearken unto Me", He says by Isaiah, and how a poor troubled sinner's heart would respond to it! I would hearken if He would speak. "Incline thine ear and come unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live." Oh the precious Scriptures, the heavenly divine language, the vital power that they convey to the soul, the deliverances they work when applied by the Holy Spirit! We might say with respect to communion with the saints what we sing about prayer:

"Hast thou no words? Ah think again!
Words flow apace when you complain,
And fill your fellow-creature's ear
With the sad tale of all your care.

Were half the breath thus vainly spent,
To heaven in supplication sent,

Your cheerful song would oftener be,

"Hear what the Lord has done for me'."

Oh my friends, I say again, that our conversation and communion is an indication of our spiritual condition individually and as a people!

"And the Lord hearkened and heard it." Yes, it is like music to His ears. "Oh my dove, that art in the cleft of the rock, let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." And there is "a book of remembrance written before Him". You may depend upon it, my friends, in heaven's high court above there would be no trivialities written in that book of remembrance! How long is it since you had communion with another, of that value that the Lord would put it in His remembrance book? I know such a consideration of these things may cause us much sadness of heart, but I believe it will be profitable. I cannot tell you the importance that I felt this morning of that vital part of a profession of faith, the communion of saints. And there is nothing that more clearly indicates our spiritual condition than that.

"A book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord." Oh what value is set upon the fear of God in Holy Scripture! The fear of God will interfere with our lives. It is an interfering grace. It will make us tender in conscience in all our actions and transactions in business and in the world. It will make us tender relative to our relationships in life, and certainly it will have to do with the church of God and regulate our conduct there.

"For them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His name." Well, those that think upon His name by the Spirit are the same people; but in their estimation it would appear there are those who could not say that they fear God. They would if they could. But they think upon His name. And there are many things and circumstances that bring out these thoughts of the heart. As we have it in Isaiah: "Yea, in the way of Thy judgments, O Lord! have we waited for Thee; the desire of our souls is to Thy name and to the remembrance of Thee". So that the Lord sanctifies judgments, and difficulties, weaknesses and afflictions, disappointments and frustrations, and all the inward conflicts of the soul, to bring about these thoughts upon His name. "That think upon His name." And there will be a connection between these thoughts and the needs of their souls. For instance, "His name shall be called Wonderful". Well, who is it that thinks upon His name as Wonderful? Why, it is those who need wonders wrought for them, wonders of grace in their souls, wonders of divine sovereignty in their pathway; and therefore these inward conflicts and outward difficulties are used by the Spirit, and their thoughts are directed to and exercised upon God Himself. "Those that think upon His name."

Some of you may need a Counsellor. Oh the difficulties that confront His people! Things that you cannot possibly manage, things in the family, things relative to your circumstances, difficulties, impossibilities, and you know not which way to take. Well, when a poor sinner who feels that he is not like unto the Lord's people is brought to his wit's end, then to think upon His name that He is a divine Counsellor having infinite wisdom, knowing the end from the beginning. Ah I believe David intended this, speaking of a poor distracted sinner, when he said, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul". And you may depend upon it, when such think upon the name of the Lord they are thankful for what He Himself says: "My thoughts

are not your thoughts". Your poor weak distracted thoughts which drive and weaken you, My thoughts are not like that.

And a poor sinner may think upon His name: "For His name shall be called Jesus, He shall save His people from their sins". And for a poor sin-burdened sinner to think upon the name of Jesus. I remember it once in the middle of a service, it came into my mind and I began to sing in my heart:

"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!"

It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear."

And you will prove it. It is no small thing to think upon His name. I believe there are some thinkers in this chapel who would not say that they fear God, and yet that fear is manifest in them.

"And this is the name wherewith He shall be called, the Lord our righteousness." And who thinks upon His name as righteousness? Those who have had a discovery of their own filthy rags. Pharisees do not think upon His name as the Lord our righteousness, for they have got enough righteousness of their own. But oh to be brought to raggedness, to beggary and want! This thought, my friends, is the thought of divine faith, and there is in that thought that which brings something of Him upon whom the thought is, all that He has, the comfort of His love, the support of His grace.

"And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts." Not because of what they have spoken one to another, not because they have thought upon His name. They are the consequence of being the Lord's. But "they shall be Mine" manifestly. Ah you may depend upon it, there are some who can only think upon His name that could hardly dare to hope they are His; but the Lord says they shall be. It is such a great thing to be a child of God. He asks the question by Jeremiah, "How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a goodly heritage among the nations?" How can it be done? Look at the honour, to be a child of God, among the children of God, the seed royal! Look at their inheritance above, and here below the ~~dwelling~~ dwelling place of the Holy Spirit! In them is a kingdom which is not of this world. How shall I put thee among the children? And a poor self-condemned sinner would say, "I dont know, Lord. I really dont see how I can be put among the children." But the Lord answers His own question: "Thou shalt call Me My Father, and shalt not turn away from Me". Why, that would be a greater difficulty to a humbled sinner, and they would answer that as the first part of the question, "How shall I put thee among the children?" A trembling sinner would say, "Lord, I dont know". And if He should say, "Thou shalt call Me My Father", the poor sinner would say, "I wish I could, Lord". But He says, "Thou shalt call Me My Father, and shalt not turn away from Me". The point we are upon is this, "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord". But how does He cause a poor sinner to call Him his Father? Why, we have the answer in the 8th of Romans: "The Holy Spirit beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God"; and if the Holy Spirit bears witness with your spirit, He bears witness to His own work in your soul. That is "the spirit" He bears witness to. And He will bear witness to your thoughts, you that think upon His name, to your groans and sighs which are His work; and so bear witness to His work in your heart as to bring you to cry, "Abba,

Father".

"They shall be Mine, in that day when I make up My jewels."
 Jewels! A poor sinner would look at himself and say, "Jewel?" and what is the value of this jewel? It is the work of the Holy Ghost in the heart that makes a sinner precious.

"A sinner is a sacred thing;

The Holy Ghost has made him so."

Jewels? Yes, "the king's daughter is all-glorious within". It is an internal glory. For says the Lord, "The glory that Thou gavest Me, I have given them, that they may be one, as We are". Oh the honour, the unsearchable riches of Christ, bestowed upon a poor unworthy sinner! And as we try and speak of these things of the Gospel, you look at the text again: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another". Oh may the Lord revive the communion of the saints! It honours Him, and I say again my friends, when the communion of saints is low, then our spiritual condition is low. May the Lord bring us to sing in the height of Zion and flow together to the goodness of the Lord.
