

Sermon preached by Mr. Frank Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton on the 9th May 1976.

Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength. (Nehemiah 8:10)

For a short time I will call your attention again to the eighth chapter of Nehemiah and verse 10. This morning as you know we were considering the whole chapter and saw that it was a beautiful example and pattern of what it is to worship God in the beauty of holiness and in spirit and in truth. The people had gathered themselves together after their return from the Babylonish captivity and in the preceding chapter we have a register of those that returned from captivity. They gathered themselves together as one man and there was a unity in that gathering because it was a gathering of the Holy Spirit, and in this feast (or what is now a service) the Holy Ghost was there. Broken hearted sinners were there: these were repenting sinners under conviction of sin as the book of the law was read to them from the morning until midday; they were gathered together under exercise of soul. In this chapter (although not in the same words) we have an exercise which is the substance of our first hymn. It is a wonderful thing to take notice (as we said this morning) how we come to a service; to take notice of the attitude of our soul: whether we are just in a state of indifference or whether we are hungering and thirsting for the living God. I seek, and hope to find a portion for my soul like that of Jeremiah: he so sought this portion that he could leave everything else. "The Lord is my portion" (Lam 3:24) - my soul says so. Therefore I can leave every other hope, and my hope is in Him. This is a very important point in our religion and in our experience, for God will be first and if we are under divine teaching He will be the Object of our first desire; and that will mean that we will seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. We do well if we consider from time to time whether that is really so with us because there is an end in view; the end for which Jehovah sovereignly created: first His own glory and secondly the glory of Christ in the church. If we are in the covenant of grace and objects of His love and subjects of the work of grace in our heart then our end and object will be the same thing - the Lord Jesus. Now these people had ears to hear, and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. It is a mercy to have an attentive congregation because they are a people that have come for something; a people that cannot live without Christ, a people that have no substitute for Him. This is a wonderful congregation in this chapter.

"And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God." (Neh 8:5-6)

So they had Him in reverence and He is to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him. O, what a blessed example was this feast, this service of what true worship is; what a blessed congregation. So he commenced: "Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God"; there was the Object and no other Object. Here was one thing needful, nothing else is needful because everything is in Him; the fullness of grace, the fullness of salvation and also the fullness of creation is in Him. O to have some right conception by the Spirit of this eternal, infinite God that we may be brought from time to time to an amazement of faith as was Solomon at the dedication of the temple:

"But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this house that I have built!" (2 Chron 6:18)

O to be thus impressed by the Spirit of the majesty, glory and holiness of Jehovah as we meet together. It is a wonderful congregation that we read in this chapter:

"And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground." (Neh 8:6)

O that it might be so, that we might be thus renewed in the spirit of our minds and as we said this morning that the Holy Ghost might return to us individually and awaken us out of slothfulness and that He may put a new violence in our prayers and in our faith, to stir us up to take hold of Him. They bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. And so he came down to the text - they were a weeping, mourning people so Nehemiah said:

"This day is holy unto the LORD your God, mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law." (Neh 8:9)

And in the next chapter you will see a good deal of what was read - the rebellion, ingratitude of the people and the goodness of the Lord in His long sufferings: it entered their conscience, it broke their hearts. And said unto all the people,

"This day is holy unto the LORD your God, mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law."

And so he comes down to our text and he said unto them:

"Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength." (Neh 8:10)

This is a comforting word to mourning souls; it would not be wise to use this language to all and sundry as the Lord only comforts those that mourn, He only strengthens the weak and He only gives beauty to those that have been burnt to ashes. Opposites meet in the gospel as we often say, and if it were not that opposites meet we should be in complete despair. I believe that that truth has kept me from time to time from sinking. Yes, life comes to death, unsearchable riches comes to bankrupts, infinite wisdom comes to fools and grace is made greater in the heart than sin: opposites meet. Are you thankful, my dear friends? It will help you sometimes to pray when you feel too bad, too wicked to pray. When you feel that your sins are not only innumerable but that the nature of them is such that you feel unable to confess them; you could never do it, never get to the depths of them. But the Lord can, the Lord can. And it will help you to read that good word at the end of the 130th Psalm:

"Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption" (Ps 130:7)

Plenty of it! O that is a word that will suit a great sinner whose guilt rises high; that redemption is not silver and gold but the price of His own precious blood which is infinite in its virtue and contains

in it the unsearchable riches of Christ, sufficient riches to abundantly pardon - not just make two ends meet - but abundantly pardon and will give His people at last an abundant entrance to the everlasting kingdom and enough also to purchase an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that can never fade away.

He said unto them "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet" We did just refer that as you know to the 25th of Isaiah:

"And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Is 25:6)

And it is just this: it is the gospel, all the gospel contains; it contains the fullness of the Lord Jesus that it pleased the Father should be there, and it pleased the Holy Ghost that all the fullness should be in Him. And it pleases a poor empty sinner that that fullness should be there. It is a fullness of the gospel with all these riches in it that His people here are exhorted to eat. That fullness of the gospel is a completeness of everything that the church will need to take them to heaven and make them fit to be there. It contains all that accompanies and constitutes salvation, it contains everything that pertains to life and godliness, all the fullness is in Christ Jesus. There is another fullness mentioned in the Colossians:

"For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9)

And these two fullnesses will be made something to a poor sinner who has been made to know by experience that his wreckage and ruin and pollution in the fall is so complete that nothing can be added to it. Because that fullness of the Godhead bodily in Christ Jesus is not the same fullness that it pleased the Father should dwell in Him. He, possessing the fullness of the Godhead bodily - O the blessed word 'bodily' - in Him all divine perfections meet, and though he became man he did not cease to be God. What a Person for a poor sinner to look at as He condescended to come: this is what they eat, "Eat the fat, and drink the sweet." He brought this provision of the gospel with Him: in Whom all divine perfections meet and His Deity gives divine authority to everything that He became, everything that He accomplished in salvation, every word that He spoke gave divine authority (even in His sufferings), for He was made perfect through sufferings. Through sufferings perfect - He could not be made perfect in His person; He could not be made perfect in His humanity, His humanity was perfect, sinless and impeccable. And this means something to a vile sinner: O this is the fat, this is the drink and this is the sweet. By these things alone we can live as the Holy Spirit takes of them and brings them into our heart. He said unto them "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet", and that is to partake of Christ and nothing less, nothing different. It is a great thing to partake of Him. That really was in the chapter that we read (John 15); the secret of that chapter is the secret of all vital godliness - union with the Lord Jesus Christ, a union that was made in the covenant of grace, a union which is indissoluble and also eternal, a union that nothing can break. "Eat the fat, and drink the sweet" - and to do this we must partake of Christ. To hear about Him is not enough, to talk about Him is not enough, we must absolutely partake of Him by faith and that is only by being a living branch in the living vine. And therefore it is of paramount importance to know that we have union, vital union with the Lord Jesus Christ, and that union was made possible only by His matchless condescension in taking human nature. It is one of the most amazing things in salvation that He took human nature that His people might be made the partakers of the divine nature: nothing less will do. This union, firm and strong, a union that was made in the covenant of

grace, a union which in experience begins when one is born again and there is a living upon Him, partaking of Him, a union so real that all that He is and all that He has and all of His finished work is ours. This is the gospel - "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet." Has the Lord ever made this place a sanctuary to you, a house of bread to the hungry? Are you hungry, thirsty for the living God?

Has He ever made this place a house of rest, have you ever come to Him with your perplexities and He has been made an interpreter to your case? But O the savour of His Name! "Eat the fat, and drink the sweet" So, that where there is the life of God in the soul, there is the taste:

"If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." (1 Pet. 2:3)

There is an ear of faith which ear alone can hear His divine voice. When He rends the heavens, opens the heavens and pours you out a blessing individually and personally: and you will be brought really to long for this. There will be a longing with a consuming desire for the Lord Jesus and all that He is: that you might be taken up in Him and by Him. When He thus condescends to come you will be unconscious of anybody else in the congregation and you will be brought to such an intense desire and need together that you will need all that He is (you will tell Him so). I believe I have had to tell Him so and you will feel that there is a completeness in Him which is greater than the completeness of your ruin. How then you will partake of Christ, of His precious sin atoning blood. Yes there are two completenesses and we shall know one, and if we know one by the teaching of the Spirit we shall know the other. Complete in our wreckage, pollution and ruin, good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under the foot of men. But the completeness of His people in Christ is infinitely greater than that completeness of ruin and it was swallowed up. Christ will swallow up everything that His people are in themselves by everything that is in Him in His fullness. This is the fat, this is the drink and this is the sweet.

"And he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet."

But he was dismissing them here, the feast was done: and if you are thus favoured at any time with such communion with the Lord and have communications from heaven to your soul, and find that your little earthen vessel is refilled with the oil of grace; and you get some fresh strength communicated to your soul, some fresh direction for you journey on the pathway through life then it will leave a savour upon your Spirit: and so he says "Go your way..." There will be a coming in and a going out to receive pasture, you will come in and if the Lord is with you and replenishes you with the oil of grace, strengthens your heart and establishes you in His ways; gives you once more to feel that He is precious; gives you to realise that you yourself and your times are in His hands and you will feel His divine favour in your soul. There will be a savour resting upon your spirit: you will go out with it, that's the point here. "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet"; you will chew the cud. Have you not found sometimes after you have felt the presence and unction of the Holy One under the preaching of the Gospel that it has had a sobering, sanctifying influence upon your spirit and made you go softly in the tender fear of God, and perhaps upon your bed the night after things may come back to you. (We must not go over this again.)

"And send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared."

That is to say (among other things) that you will not look at your own things but at things of others also. It takes in a variety of circumstances as for instance the Lord's afflicted people that cannot get to the services. It is good to realise that that spirit is among us: there are those who have received something in the service and have made notes and have taken it to those that could not get there.

Our hearts will be enlarged if the Lord blesses us: and

"Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates...." (Prov 8:34)

That is watching at the gate of the Word of God and watching at the gate of the throne of grace; waiting at the posts of my doors. The services come as did these people gathered together, and when they received something they go and scatter the seed. O my friends the communion of saints is very sacred as we read in the first epistle of John:

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another...." (1 Jn 1:7)

It will produce the fellowship of the saints if we have union with the Lord Jesus. "For this day is holy unto the Lord, neither be ye sorry" He said that because they were mourning, broken hearted sinners. But then for their consolation he shows them the fountain of all consolation, strong consolation: "For the joy of the Lord is your strength." Now this is the joy of the Lord. There are many carnal joys of a natural man, but this is a spiritual joy and it is among the graces that the Lord gives to His people. I believe it is true what we were singing just now:

*Joy is a fruit that will not grow
In nature's barren soil;
All we can boast, till Christ we know,
Is vanity and toil. (933 Gadsby's)*

Have you proved it; do you believe it from your own experience? In my little way I believe that I do, there is nothing else:

*No help in self I find,
And yet have sought it well;
The native treasure of my mind
Is sin, and death, and hell. (739 Gadsby's)*

There is nothing else, and we shall learn this. I believe there are two directions of faith in the main while we walk through this wilderness: He must increase but I must decrease. "For the joy of the Lord is your strength." Well this joy of the Lord is the joy of the Holy Ghost, and in the first place I would say that it is a mutual joy. Perhaps you noticed it in the reading:

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11)

And that is very blessed; it is faith reciprocating the joy of the Lord in the heart. Now you take these two joys as we have it in the word of God; take for instance the opening verse of the twelfth chapter to the Hebrews, there the Lord Jesus had a joy set before Him:

"....who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb 12:2)

Now He had a joy, it was set before Him and that joy was His church. He had that joy even when He was upon the cross:

"...when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days,...." (Isaiah 53:10)

It seems almost beyond comprehension, but that is a very significant word: "He shall see His seed;" - when He bowed His sacred head He knew for whom He suffered, He knew for whom He died, and He saw them. It tells us this: that the infinite mind and foreknowledge of God was such that He recognised every one of His people that were given to Him. He saw them, He loved them; He loved them in the covenant of grace, it was the joy that was set before Him when He died, it was the joy of divine everlasting love. And He bowed His sacred head: did He see you, did He see me? My friends we limit the Holy One if we say that it is impossible that He should see the number that cannot be numbered and recognise them. How much less are you going to reduce it? Do you think that the infinite mind of God saw just a nebulous mass, unrecognised?

"...the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." (2 Tim 2:19)

O what a comfort that is! Well, that was the joy that was set before Him; in the chapter that we read: "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you." There is another expression of the Lord's joy:

"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied:" (Isaiah 53:11)

Does He see the travail of His soul in you? It is the accomplishment of redemption in the sinner; he rests in His love, the whole of the work of redemption terminates in the salvation of one of His people: it rests there, it goes no further. With respect to every individual of His people, the whole of the Gospel, the whole of the strings of salvation terminate in their salvation; He sees that, He sees that His grace has saved them, that His redemption has redeemed them, that His precious blood has cleansed, healed and pardoned them; this was His joy, His satisfaction. Now, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you." It does remain because whatever He does is done forever, we said just now that all the divine perfections were in Christ and therefore everything that He does in His people partakes of His immutability, His divine sovereignty. So it is an everlasting joy: "My joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full." What is the joy of His people? Why, it is the Lord Himself. I often think of a verse and I have desired that our dear young people might commit it to memory:

*Knowledge of all terrestrial things
Ne'er to my soul true pleasure brings;
No peace, but in the Son of God;
No joy, but through his pardoning blood. (771 Gadsbys's)*

We shall learn this, this is the joy, and there is strength in it - O, there's a strength in it because you cannot joy in the Lord unless you partake of Him. And so it is the joy of Him in all the offices that He condescended to occupy and execute for His people. And when He dwells in your heart by faith that

joy will be there; He will dwell there as the hope of glory because He will dwell in your heart as your redeemer; as your mediator between God and your soul; He will dwell in you as your counsellor; He will dwell in you in the wonders of His grace. O the joy of the presence of the Lord - that's the thing: His presence. "For the joy of the LORD is your strength." And there is another joy too, and that is the joy of the covenant of grace:

*Rejoice, ye saints, in every state,
Divine decrees remain unmoved;
No turns of providence abate
God's care for those he once has loved.*

*Firmer than heaven his covenant stands,
Though earth should shake and skies depart.
You're safe in your Redeemer's hands,
Who bears your names upon his heart. (82 Gadsby's)*

Do you think there is any joy in the covenant? It is ordered in everything and that is intimately connected with that gracious statement in the Romans, the covenant is ordered in all things and sure: therefore because of that all things must work together for good to them that love God. Well, this is strength: "for the joy of the LORD is your strength:" and you will weep when this joy is removed. You take the case of David in the 51st Psalm - that beautiful Psalm - he had lost the joy of salvation, he had not lost salvation but he had lost the joy of it through sin; and he could not bear it:

"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (Psalm 51:12)

And so the joy of the covenant is this, that the Lord Jesus has laid Himself voluntarily in the covenant to bring every one of His people safely through this wilderness to heaven, so that everything that concerns them is under the conduct of the covenant of grace. Their worst conditions, their greatest losses, their most severe conflicts, their pains, their sins are all under the covenant of grace. O the joy of that covenant: it was a joy to David when he came to die:

"Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant"
(2 Sam 23:5)

And everything He thus gives to His people has eternity in it and derives its eternity and immutability from His Person - O the strengthening of the soul by this joy of the Lord: I have desired that you may know it more and more: "For the joy of the LORD is your strength." There is another joy of the Lord, and that is communion with Him. Whoever felt that joy in the gospel so as to be able to sing:

*The gospel bears my spirit up;
A faithful and unchanging God,
Lays the foundation of my hope,
In oaths, and promises, and blood. (83 Gadsby's)*

As these things are brought into your heart it will strengthen you like nothing else will; and it's a mercy to have a life that needs to be strengthened and maintained.

"Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord" and it will be. In reading this chapter - you read it when you get home - and see the beauty of it. I do feel that we are warranted to take this as a pattern for the true spiritual worship of God; blessed congregation that are in such a case, for the joy of the Lord

is your strength. Well then there will be the end. To His servants (not only those that preach, but every one of His people are His servants) it shall be said:

"...thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (Matt 25:23)

You take the conclusion of the 35th chapter of Isaiah and that will give us this joy:

"The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isaiah 35:10)

What do you think of this gospel, my dear friends? And O to meet among a people that are thus gathered together. May the Lord give us to seek larger communion with Him and to know more of the joy of salvation here and to enter at last into that everlasting joy. O what a consolation to be given an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of God; because you have known here the earnest and have been abundantly satisfied with the fatness of His house, even of His holy temple. Amen.

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