

1050

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Notes of a sermon preached by Mr. F. Gosden at "Ebenezer", Clapham
on Sunday morning 25.3.62

1050

Hymns: 2, 4, 452 Reading: Hebrews 10 Text: Nahum 1.7

"The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in Him."

This word has rested on my mind since I saw your esteemed pastor last Thursday evening. I was truly thankful to see him look so well and to hear of the blessings of the Lord in his affliction and also how you have been helped here during his absence and I did feel that this gracious word has been fulfilled both with respect to your pastor and you his people, and if the Lord would help us, it may be made profitable to our many cases.

"The Lord is good". Essentially this goodness is not first the good that He possesses, nor the good things that He gives, nor the good things that He does, but the Lord is good because of His infinite perfection. Good here intends divine perfection and divine goodness is absolute. There is a goodness of men which is good in its place but the goodness of the Lord is in His perfection - Jehovah. "The LORD is good". His Being is infinite, therefore His goodness is infinite; He is eternal and therefore His goodness is eternal. He is immutable and therefore His goodness is immutable, and I believe that faith will rejoice in this because it gives that divine value to all His blessings and to the whole of the Gospel because God is who and what He is. "The Lord is good" . Good had He never created a creature, good in His incomprehensible Being, infinite in His perfection. "The Lord is good". I believe that some of you will feel this; it is this alone that gives a value, a virtue to all that He does. The Father is good, good in His sovereign love; immutable; the Son of God is good; good because He is God's eternal Son, co-equal with the Father, the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His Person. He is good because of Who He is. The Holy Ghost is good, good because He is God, God the Holy Ghost, and therefore He is the eternal Spirit; good because He is infallible, infallible in His teaching; good because He is the Revealer of the Truth. The Lord Jehovah is good. There is the foundation, and not only the foundation, there we see divine eternal, immutable goodness in its essence. Therefore the streams must be good. The Lord is good in all that He does because perfection is in it. I have thought of that beautiful Scripture in Ezekiel concerning the river that issues from under the threshold of the house and one great point in that beautiful narrative to notice is this, I think three times the virtues of these waters are referred to their source

because they issue from under the threshold of the house. This gives them their virtue, so that everything where they come lives. The Lord is good. Good in His creation. It is unalterable, there is a kind of perfection in creation, a kind of perfection not all the science in the world can dispute, it is unalterable, things are now what they were and nothing can change them. Creation has a stamp of immutability upon it and it is good. God saw every day's work and pronounced it good.

The Lord is good. He is good in His providence. The beautiful hymn you have been singing did trace all the goodness up to its source, its Fountain of God, the Lord is good. Wisdom reigns there, sovereignty reigns through His goodness so that the perfection of the goodness of God permeates the whole of His works and in providence it orders all things according to His will, and for His people their providences are in the covenant of grace, ordered, controlled, governed by the covenant of grace, His covenant goodness. The Lord is good, and yet though He is good and immutability is His perfection, yet providence is mutable and changing. Yet He displays His sovereign and immutable goodness in the changing scenes of life. He is good. All this goodness of the Lord flows from Himself. Whatever happens to us, whatever calamities come, faith will say, the Lord is good. You may look down into the pit where Joseph was put, Joseph there would say the Lord is good: or into the belly of hell where Jonah was; Jonah looked toward the holy temple and would declare the Lord is good, salvation is of the Lord.

"The Lord is good", and therefore "a stronghold in the day of trouble". His people's lives and their lives' minutest circumstances are ordered and controlled by the covenant yet they have a day of trouble. "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5.7), but man is not created unto trouble. Trouble is not the work of God. God is not the author of sin. Man was created sinless and therefore troubleless but man is fallen into trouble. The text exclusively belongs to His people, their troubles are different from the general troubles of the world. The world have similar troubles to what His people have but the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.

We would look then at this good Lord as a stronghold. What is this Stronghold? It is Emmanuel, God with us, the Lord Jesus Christ. He hath laid help upon One that is mighty. All the divine perfections of Jehovah met in God's eternal Son incarnate. Those perfections which render the glorious God a consuming fire, these very same perfections in Christ are a refuge for sinners and there is this Stronghold. God in Christ is a Refuge for us. The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble. The Person of Christ is the strength of this Stronghold but Deity could be no Stronghold to fallen

mankind. Mercy and truth, righteousness and peace fled from men when they fell, but in the Lord Jesus mercy, truth, righteousness and peace kiss each other. O to a poor, troubled, trembling sinner to view by faith all the divine perfections met in God's dear Son and that it pleases the Father that in Him all fulness should dwell will lay a foundation in the soul that nothing will ever remove or shake. Days of trouble, trouble in the soul, conflict between the powers of sin and grace, trouble with respect to circumstances, contradictions that we meet with, losses and crosses, family trials, the Lord uses and sanctifies to break down every other confidence so that we are brought to realise that apart from Christ Himself all other ground is sinking sand. Everything will be shaken to pieces except the Lord Jesus Christ, His Person, His work and the work of the Holy Ghost in the soul. It is a mercy for everything to be shaken within us apart from this foundation which God hath laid in Zion.

"The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble". Isaiah very beautifully throws a light upon this word. He speaks in the spirit of prophecy, "I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house". (Isaiah 22.23,24) So that the Lord Jesus was constituted this stronghold in the covenant of grace, He was set up there from everlasting as the foundation of all the counsels and purposes of God and through Him all the decrees of Jehovah will be accomplished in the church of God and in every individual member of His mystical body and so He becomes a stronghold. O to see Him as He is set before us in the 6th. chapter of John, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Who is it who does come to this Stronghold? Why, those in whom He turns strength into weakness, wisdom into ignorance, beauty is consumed away like a moth. My friends, if we go to heaven we shall not only be prepared for it but you may depend upon it we shall be prepared for the Gospel also and learn by experience what we sing,

"No help in self I find,
And yet have sought it well;
The native treasure of my mind
Is sin, and death, and hell."

That is all. When we are brought there and fall down and there is none to help and the blessed Spirit leads us by the hand to this Rock that is higher than we and gives us to see in Him the very opposite from what is in ourselves what a strength it is. Have you ever beheld Him? Has the work of the Holy Spirit so broken up the foundations of your own confidence, so torn to shreds your own righteousness, as to leave you exposed and pursued and then to have given you a glimpse of this glorious Person, God's dear Son? The government is upon His shoulder, infinite He is in wisdom, and you see in Him that which you can find nowhere else, a righteousness to full perfection; a stronghold in the day of trouble. That is when we shall need Him. You have proved Him

to be that to you and your pastor has proved Him to be a stronghold in deep affliction. It is a mercy, my friends, to have an experimental religion. It is the only evidence of the life of God in the soul. If we have an experimental religion we shall be brought into circumstances to prove it. The apostle when he was encouraging the young minister Timothy enumerating many of his sufferings, spoke to him of how that he received "forty stripes save one, thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck", but he said, "I am not ashamed", I am not offended that I had to go the way of persecution and tribulation, because, I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day, as though he would say, Timothy, that is how I knew Him, He brought me through these stripes, these persecutions, these shipwrecks. It is by that experience I have known that He is omnipotent and that His love is immutable and that His mercy endureth for ever and so we shall prove Him in the day of trouble to be a stronghold and you will see and feel the beauty of what we referred to at the commencement. It is because the Lord is the foundation and source of divine perfection and therefore He cannot do but what is right and must be righteous still.

A stronghold in the day of trouble". What a stronghold too is the atonement of Christ as it is revealed by the Spirit to a poor, guilty, trembling sinner. I have lately seen a beauty in the connection between the 51st. Psalm and the 53rd. Isaiah. There you get a poor, trembling, repenting, confessing sinner, mourning at the throne of grace. In the 53rd. Isaiah you see the stronghold. The mercy of it is the 53rd. Isaiah is infinitely greater than the 51st. Psalm. O to behold a suffering Redeemer as revealed in that chapter, or as seen by faith upon Calvary will give you to see a refuge, a stronghold in the day of trouble. Some have looked from the border of the pit. I shall never forget those two lines when I felt to be sinking lower than the grave -

"Look from the borders of the pit
To my recovering grace."

O what a stronghold is the Lord Jesus in those merciful characters and offices that He occupied and assumed for His people. He could never had done so had He not become incarnate. That is the strength that God the Son took into union with His divine person - human nature - so that the strength of His deity might be a stronghold for poor, dying sinners - that is the point. Not that deity can be communicated. Divine perfection cannot be communicated and yet there would be no stronghold without them. This is the beauty that whereas omnipotence cannot be communicated to a creature, omnipotent grace can be. The blessings have omnipotence in them. Although the intrinsic righteousness of Christ can never be imputed to a sinner yet the virtue of the righteousness of the Person of God's dear Son is the virtue of that righteousness He wrought out, and this is a

stronghold. Why, my friends, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus is the perfection of His sinless humanity and the sinless life He lived in which the obedience He rendered to the law in that humanity belongs to His people so that one great, blessed ingredient in this stronghold is the substitution of the Lord Jesus because all that He is and has and has accomplished belongs to His people as done for them. He is good, He is perfect, a stronghold, and there will be a day of trouble whether it is internal soul trouble or external trouble, whatever the nature of it and you will see this sovereignty and goodness manifested. When He was here upon earth He cast out devils and unclean spirits, healed withered hands, cleansed the lepers, raised the dead and what He did to their bodies He does for the soul. "Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?" The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble. A stronghold too because He is infinite in His wisdom. I feel this strength. There is no other strength and everything else will fail. There were the people in Isaiah's day who came into a day of trouble and perplexity when they said, "My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God", as though they would say, now I am where God does not see me, He does not take up my case, things remain as they are and get worse. But, says the Lord by Isaiah, why do you say that? "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding?" A stronghold is the infinite wisdom of the Lord Jesus who of God is made unto His people wisdom.

A stronghold in the day of trouble. The great day of trouble is before us - our dying day. It will be a day of trouble. It is not easy to die, my friends. There have been some blessed death-beds but the article, the day of death must necessarily be a day of trouble, "He will deliver thee in six troubles; yea in seven there shall no evil touch thee". O to have a stronghold in the day of death,

"In that dread moment, O to hide
Beneath His sheltering blood!"

That is the only stronghold then, when faith sees the Forerunner enter into heaven itself. Blessed Stephen saw Him when he was stoned, he saw the heavens opened, he had a stronghold there. In my judgment Stephen did not feel a single stone, it was a blessed death bed, though his poor body was terribly wounded and doubtless his poor head, it was a blessed death bed. He said "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" - a stronghold who is good. That goodness will flow through life, through every circumstance with respect to His people. So Paul gathers it up in writing to the Romans and says, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who

are the called according to his to purpose" (Romans 8.28) - all things. The hardest of things. The everlasting love of God is a stronghold as we sing,

"Praise the mount! O fix me on it!
Mount of God's unchanging love."

For I am persuaded says Paul that nothing can separate us from the love of God. The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble.

He is a stronghold too in the gracious characters He has assumed. "I am the good Shepherd". David says, "The Lord is my Shepherd", Jehovah, infinite, eternal, immutable, whose divine sovereignty orders all things in love, the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He has heaven and earth at His command, He is my shepherd, what a stronghold in this wilderness world, but we shall be brought to depend upon Him. We are dependent creatures.

The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in Him." This is for our instruction and encouragement, the Lord knoweth them that are His. The Father elected His people according to His foreknowledge of them. It is a wonderful truth, the foreknowledge of God the Father, and by that foreknowledge He elected His people from before the foundation of the world. You see in Ephesians how this is connected with that "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world". (Eph.1.3,4) So He knows His people but here comes the experience, He knoweth them that trust in Him. You take for instance, if I might use an illustration, you have a bank account. How does that bank know that you trust it? Why by having confidence and placing your money there or valuables there, and the Lord knoweth them that trust in Him because they commit unto Him their body, their soul; their treasure is in Him, He is the object of their first desire. He knoweth them that trust in Him because they cast their care upon Him and this trust is an act of faith. If you cast your care upon the Lord Jesus you will know that He cares for you. That will be a blessed knowledge. When you cast your care upon the Lord you come to Him as a poor, trembling sinner, He cares for you in all His infinite power and omnipotence and love, He cares for you out of His fulness, He cares for you by making His strength perfect in your weakness and His grace sufficient for you. He knows what we have need of before we ask Him, and not only that, but He can do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. He knows those that trust in Him, so that of such He will never be able to say, "I never knew you". It is indeed good to feel that the Lord has manifested Himself in the way of this text in your midst and to your dear pastor. "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him. Amen

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