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75/Mr.F.Gosden.

Sermon preached by Mr.F.Gosden at "Ebenezer", Clapham, on Wednesday evening 19.3.75.

Hymns 1, 908, 1136.

Reading: Philippians 3.

Text: Philippians 3, v.10.

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death;"

The apostle in this blessed chapter sets a high standard of spiritual experience. It is one of the sad signs of the low condition today that the spiritual standard generally speaking is very low. Experiences compared with those of the past are very shallow and I do not exclude myself in that remark, "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; When His candle shined upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness".

It is a most blessed chapter. We can hardly take one verse out of the text. The pith of the whole chapter we have from the 7th to the 11th verses and it expresses Paul's insatiable thirst for God, his vehement desire to know Him; and there are perhaps three things in this desire that it would be a mercy if we could find in our experience. The first is: "That I may know Him"; the second is that I may win Him; the third that I may be found in Him. Look in your hearts as we near eternity, can you find these three things in your experience? It is an all-embracing desire because Paul says to the Corinthians, "All things are yours", because "ye are Christ's and Christ is God's". It is an all-consuming desire. You know when Asaph after he had envied the wicked went into the sanctuary and came out a very different man from how he went in; the Lord taught him something there and he came out with this desire of Paul's, for he said: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee". Can we say it, friends? I do feel to want the Lord to come into my heart and conscience. O may we beware of generalities in religion, even if they are correct. We want something wrought in our souls by the power of God. Not a little time since, this word was precious to me while sitting in my study: a bus went by with this advertisement that you have seen - "Littlewoods Football Pools, win £500,000" - immediately this word came into my heart: "That I may WIN Christ, and be found in HIM". Do you feel the echo, friends? These are vital things.

We will take as enabled this first thing, and most important, "THAT I MAY KNOW HIM". If we have no knowledge of God we certainly should not try to win Him and we should not want to be found in Him. It is very solemn to worship an unknown God as they did at Athens. Paul said, "I found an altar with this

inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD". I wonder whether any of us worship an unknown God? Strict Baptists could, you know. We might know all about it, all about the doctrines and be very precise and not think of lending our ears to error. Those foolish virgins were virgins; they were pure in doctrine; there was nothing wrong with the lamps; they were manufactured in the same factory as those of the wise; they sat under the same ministry, they heard the same truths, doubtless they thought they had oil until their lamps went out. What a mercy to be right for eternity! "That I may know Him". It is of first importance. In the knowledge of God in Christ is eternal life. Then Paul defines the kind of knowledge, "Ye doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord". It was an excellent knowledge, and if it was an excellent knowledge it excelled all other knowledge. "Knowledge of all terrestrial things". I hope our dear young people will remember that second verse of hymn 771 -

"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".

This then is an excellent knowledge which excels all natural knowledge. It is a living knowledge, a saving knowledge. Some of you may say, Can you tell me whether my knowledge of the truth is excellent or whether it is merely acquired? I do want to speak rightly so as not to deceive a soul, and if you are anxious you want these things clear. You know all about the truth, you sit under your dear pastor, but you want to know whether your knowledge is saving. I would seek to speak a right word and I can say this, if your knowledge is by the teaching of the Holy Spirit revealing the things of God, then the things that you know will be brought into your heart as a substance and when you read the Word of God the Word of God will read you. It will be a revealed knowledge and the apostle prayed this for the Ephesians that they might have "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him". If we have not that knowledge our knowledge is historical, He will be a historical Christ, it will bring nothing in. If you have a knowledge that is a communication to your heart as the Holy Ghost takes of the things of Christ and reveals them to you then what you read in the Word will be wrought in your heart. In Jeremiah we read this, "Let not the wise man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me". Then a poor sinner might say, "What! really understand that great God of Whom we were singing, understand Him and know Him?" Yes - and there is a great simplicity as well as

a profundity in vital religion. You will understand Him as a starving man understands food - there is a connection between his hunger and the food, you will understand me; as a shipwrecked man will understand a harbour, there is a connection between the jeopardy of his life and the safety of that harbour, and thus you will know and understand the Lord, you will understand by the Holy Ghost revealing the truth of the Gospel. You are a sinner. You see how the publican understood. Two opposites meet. The blood of Christ cleanses and blots out sin, the unsearchable riches of Christ meet bankrupts. This is how you will know him, by His own manifestations to your soul. "That I may know Him". It is inconvenient to be ignorant of some things, but to be ignorant of God in Christ is fatal.

There is another thing - if you know Him you must love Him and God will be first. If you know Him it is because He first knew you; and if you love Him it is because He first loved you; and if you have received Him in your heart by faith it is because He first received you. "That I may know Him". There is no knowledge in this world that can know Him. Men by wisdom know not God, men by searching can never find Him out. He is incomprehensible in His Being but He has made Himself knowable in the Person of His Incarnate Son. There He is known, there He is received. We are made partakers of Christ and if we are not partakers of Him we shall be destitute in the day of death. We must partake of Him, nothing less will do and the mystery of it is that in condescension He has taken human nature that men may be partakers of divine nature. In this knowledge there is divine union. What a mercy to be a living soul. "That I may know Him".

Now the next point, "That I may win Christ". It is a wonderful expression. If we win a thing we must be in competition. If you run in a race you are in competition, Paul exhorts the Hebrews "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus". You will never go to heaven, you will never win Christ unless you run for Him, but you will never win Him for your running. We must "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life". You will never win Him by fighting but you will never win Him without fighting. It is a method. It is in the method that the exercise of faith comes in. It springs from this knowledge because as the Holy Ghost teaches you Who Christ is and brings into your heart out of His fullness all that you need for salvation He will also teach you what you are. The two things will go together as long as we live. It is a mercy to be taught what we are out of Christ. Have you been taught that? O my friends, out of Christ we are nothing but self-destroyed, ruined sinners. The completeness of our dire condition out of Christ can never

be exaggerated. It is absolutely complete. But we said just now that opposites meet, and the Lord Jesus came in infinite condescension to meet that condition with the completeness that His people have in Him. Nothing can be added to it, it is absolute completeness. The completeness that they have in Him is infinitely greater than the completeness they are in themselves and in their ruin. When this is unfolded to a poor sinner then you will run for Him, you cannot do without Him. He makes Himself the centre and circumference of your soul and life. Round that blessed Centre the whole of your life revolves and He like a mighty magnet draws His people. There are times when you know it, when you are brought into the field of magnetism. You are longing for it, some of you. Sometimes he nearly comes. If you put a magnet toward a piece of steel, sometimes if you do not get it near enough it just moves the piece of steel, but you get it right into the field of magnetism it is irresistible, and so it is with Christ.

"That I may win Him". There are two words in the Psalms which go sweetly together, "My soul followeth hard after Thee", "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." There is a sinner following hard after Christ with his mouth open for Him to fill. Have you ever felt it? You must have Him, all is death without Him. Does this desire at times fill your heart so that you are able to say, and the Lord bears witness to it,

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
All in all in Thee I find.."

It does gather you up, dear friends; it makes the world sink and recede and brings all heaven before your eyes. "That I may know Him", "That I may win Christ". It is very sweet at times when you do win Him. When you can say, "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons." "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste". There are times when this blessed fore-runner allows a poor sinner to overtake Him and sometimes He allows a poor sinner to win Him by His standing still. He stood still when He came to the blind man, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee"? Would you have an answer for Him if He came along the pew and said "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" Is there anything you want Him to do, need Him to do? "Win Him". Oh, the vehemence of faith, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force". There are two ways which the Lord generally uses as an incentive to His people following hard after Him and trying to win Him; one is that they are driven under deep necessity and their state and case as sinners to flee for refuge unto the hope set before them, and the other is His sacred drawing power, "I drew them with cords of a

man, with bands of love". "That I may know Him". "That I may win Christ". What a victory!

Some are seeking Him who are brought to feel

"We've no abiding city here;
Sad truth, were this to be our home;
But let the thought our spirits cheer,
We see^k a city yet to come."

Are we seeking a city, is our conversation in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ? It is a high standard of spiritual experience. Do not say it is too high, it is a wrong expression, I know what you mean and what you feel, I have felt it myself, but it is wrong. The lower you sink the higher your faith will look.

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

There is none less than He Who dwells in His uncreated glory in heaven can reach your soul. None can reach the poor soul with his mouth in the dust, none can do him any good but He Who dwells in the height of heaven. He must come down, nothing will ever come up from this poor sin cursed world.

"That I may know Him - that I may win Christ". Jacob won Him, he wrestled with the angel, he was in trouble and you will never fight for Him, never run for Him, never pray to Him, unless you are brought to feel your desperate need of Him; "Give me Christ or else I die", one thing or the other. We shall be brought to points, my friends. "That I may know Him that I may win Christ". How is it that Jacob overcame the angel that wrestled with him? He overcame Omnipotence. When men naturally wrestle they wrestle against one another to overthrow one another, but you will read the angel wrestled with him - not against him. Oh poor wrestling sinner, as you wrestle, though the Lord may put your thigh out of joint and weaken you, yet He puts strength in you and faith increases. Job said, "Will He plead against me with His great power? No; but He would put strength in me". "That I may know Him" and "That I may win Christ and be found in Him". Very thorough was Paul's religion. You take for instance "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ". There are plenty of people in a natural religion that will part with odds and ends that are not much good to them, but here he said "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ". I do feel that this chapter is a touch-stone. You will be safe if you weigh yourself and your religion in the balance of this chapter. For instance, do you say that the Lord is precious to you? Put that confession against this chapter; do you count all things loss for the excellency

of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord? To confess that he had was not complete enough, as much as to say there are plenty of people that can say they "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus", but he said "for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ". Is He precious? Do you come up with this standard? Have you lost anything for Christ's sake? Has your religion cost you anything? Oh friends, what if we do not win Him, if we are not found in Him!

"And be found in Him". "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord". They are blessed. Oh my friends, you know by the paper that a multi-millionaire has died. Where are all his millions? he cannot take them with him. These considerations have made Christ very precious to me this last day or two by faith. We would be thankful for the things of this life, daily comforts and benefits, but you will know you have a soul as well as your body, and when you get a glimpse of heaven and a little foretaste of what is there by the heavens dropping into your soul (Isa.45,8) and the Lord make the house of God a Bethel, it fills your very soul and you stretch forth your hands unto Him as in the 143rd psalm, "I stretch forth my hands unto thee". There have been times in years past sitting in a pew when I felt my little faith stretch her hands out in order to reach the Lord.

"And be found in Him". It is one of two things - we shall either die in the Lord or we shall die in ourselves. They are the only two alternatives and if we consider how we are living we should have some ground to realise how we shall die. Where is our treasure? What is our aim and object? The end for which God created anything was first His own glory, and secondly the glory of Christ in the church. That is the end for which He created anything at all, and if we are called by grace we are called unto His eternal glory. We are passing through Vanity Fair, and if our end and object is something in this life and world it is very solemn. It is solemn to make a profession of religion and yet live unto the world. A worldly man lives for the world, to accumulate wealth, but that sweet hymn 988 says -

"Happiness, thou lovely name,
Where's thy seat, O tell me, where?
Learning, pleasure, wealth, and fame,
All cry out, "It is not here".

Not the wisdom of the wise,
Can inform me where it lies;
Not the grandeur of the great
Can the bliss I seek create.

"Object of my first desire,
 Jesus, crucified for me;
 All to happiness aspire,
 Only to be found in Thee.

Thee to praise and Thee to know,
 Constitute our bliss below;
 Thee to see and Thee to love
 Constitute our bliss above.

Source and Giver of repose,
 Singly from Thy smile it flows;
 Happiness complete is thine;
 Mine it is, if Thou art mine!

Do you agree? Do you agree? It is wonderful to agree with the Word of God.

"And be found in Him". If we are to be found in Him we were in Him before the world was, in the covenant of grace, that is when His people were in Him.

"Of God are ye in Christ Jesus". "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new". Are we new creatures? Have old things passed away and all things become new? "One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark". What things are behind? Everything in this world; and they are behind for this season, that they end at death; there they must be behind. Everything that comes from God in a way of salvation is before, whereas nothing in this world is before; it is all behind. It is a mercy to feel it and at times to have that land set before us, the land of the living, and feel by communications from heaven that your soul is in the land of the living. When the desires in this precious chapter are uppermost in your soul it brings as much heaven as we shall know in this life. I believe that His people, each in their measure, know what it is to be brought into the belly of hell and what it is to be brought to the gate of heaven. I would not speak rashly; I believe I have known both. Oh! solemn it is to feel and come to the conclusion that you are a reprobate, wrong from the beginning. I remember going into Hawkhurst Chapel over 50 years ago; staggering like a drunken man; dear Mr. Kemp was there, I went out singing --

"Yes, I to the end shall endure,
 As sure as the earnest is given;
 More happy, but not more secure,
 The glorified spirits in heaven".

"That I may know Him". "That I may win Christ, and be found in Him", at last. You will never be found in Him at last if you are not found in Him now. If the Lord brings the blessedness of this chapter into our hearts it will awaken us.

We need to be awakened and quickened, friends. It will bring us in secret to lay this chapter before Him and say, "Lord, do it, I need power from on high; I do not seek religion; I seek reality, seek divine life for my soul, the forgiveness of sins". It is all to be found in Him.

"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection". The power of His resurrection as it is exercised is first in the quickening of a sinner. When the Holy Ghost quickens a sinner into divine life it is a direct consequence of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, not a type, but the actual exercise by the Holy Ghost taking of the virtue of the resurrection of Christ and communicating it to a sinner. That brings a sinner into an invisible, indissoluble union with Christ Jesus, so that all that Christ is and all that He has done is his. That is to be found in Him, to possess His unsearchable riches. "And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law". "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death". Oh my friends, how far short I come! It was a consideration that caused me much trembling last Sunday, "Ye are dead unto sin and alive unto God". The only alternative is to be alive unto sin and dead unto God. I did pray the Lord not to leave me there; you see the blessedness of the chapter. I have not strength or grace enough to speak of it as I ought, but there it is. "Object of my first desire", Paul could say. I say again, outside of Him, what is there? Are we outside of Him or inside of Him? Does He dwell in our hearts by faith? If He dwells in our hearts by faith He dwells in us in all that He is. The union between Christ and His people is an eternal union. They are made partakers of the divine nature of His righteousness, of His unsearchable riches, not gold and silver. He said of Himself "Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness". Oh to possess Him, Oh to win Him, Oh to be found in Him here while we live and to be found in Him when we come to die. There is also this, Job said, "My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high". that is blessedly true of His people; it is solemnly true of the wicked - the same witness, a different record. The same witness. If we are in Him then He is our substitute and the record concerning us on high is His blessed life. You will not go to heaven unless you have lived a perfect life, unless you have perfectly kept the law; but to be in Him, to die in the Substitute, is to die in the merit of His own precious life. There is another record - the same witness - the record of the wicked. It is written that men must give an account of all things done in the body - Who shall stand? I would not for a moment. Look at the importance

of the chapter and the precious text, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings". To be found in Him. Oh may the Lord bring us inside of this chapter, and may it influence our hearts. Dear friends, we are either in it or out of it. We are either in Him or out of Him, and eternity is very near to us. Amen.

Prayer meeting address at "Ebenezer" Clapham by Mr. J. Delves
on Saturday evening 5.4.75

Hymns 139, 205

75/B/PM

Reading Psalm 23

The Psalm is a Psalm of David and a very precious one it is. He must have been in a sweet place when he wrote it, and under a sense of gracious confidence in his God; a sweet spot to be in. There is no if, but, how, when or where, but the Lord is my Shepherd. If that is true of you and me then the blessings that are referred to here in the Psalm will be ours, even though we may not often be in the enjoyment of them, but we are embraced by them, and will ultimately enter into the blessing of a future estate.

He says, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want"; that is he had confidence that the Lord would provide for his need. Many of the Lord's people have been in painful circumstances but they have been witnesses of the goodness and faithfulness of their God in them. "The Lord is my Shepherd" - and I shall not need another shepherd - "I shall not want" - I shall not come short at last, I shall not be weighed in the balances and be found wanting. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures" - He maketh me - not to indicate that it was a compulsory force upon the Psalmist but of sweet compliance with the will of God which he could follow. "He maketh me", takes me in hand, He brings me into green pastures and makes me to lie down in them.

"He restoreth my soul", as though he had wandered away to some extent and the Lord had brought him back again. "He restoreth my soul" - some of us may feel to need something of this. And there was a path to walk through - "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil"; not actually death itself necessarily but the shadow of death. The shadow is not the substance though it is connected with it. It is often noticeable how this follows out in the experience of the Lord's people, when they come to the end of the journey they seem enabled to fall into the Lord's hands, and are comforted by the rod and staff for their safety and guidance.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. He has prepared a table in the presence of our enemies, anointed our head with oil, our cup runneth over. He was in a blessed place was he not? I believe there have been times with the Lord's people when they have felt they could just quietly go through this Psalm, feel a little sweet meditation upon each verse of it; and be profited by it. The Psalmist was able to look to the future. "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever", this was not a material building, but the heavenly city. I will dwell there for ever. Here we go in and out and find pasture, but there it will not be going in and out, but to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever in the mansions above of which we read. O how short life is, it is but as a flash when we contemplate the eternal happiness of the redeemed of the Lord, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever". May we be found among them, and in this precious Psalm that brings such a quietness, submission, confidence and hope. When we can really read it feelingly, then we can say "The Lord is my Shepherd", connecting this with Psalm 27 "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?". Amen.

Further reading Revelation 22(1-5)