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Sermon preached by Mr F L Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Lord's Day morning 5th January 1964

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3 v. 13-14

The apostle had just made a most blessed confession of faith, that he counted "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ," and that he had "suffered the loss of all things," and counted them but dung, that he "might win Christ and be found in Him" (v. 8-9). But in the twelfth verse, that blessed confession of faith he qualifies, corrects – not that there was any mistake about it, but lest these Philippians should be unduly cast down by a sense of their inferiority and insufficiency. He says 'But, brethren, though I count thus "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ," it is "not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." This is a gracious word. He thinks of the spiritual capacity of these Philippians whom he loved, as though he would say 'Brethren, I do count all things "but dung, that I may win Christ"; but we haven't got to heaven yet. The race is not yet finished; there is still the warfare, still the wilderness.' 'I count not myself to have apprehended,' that is, to have laid hold of. 'I am not in full possession of that which my soul seeks after.' 'I count not myself to have apprehended.' That is very evident by the 10th verse: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." This word seemed to lie a little upon my mind at the commencement of this year, this noble confession of faith; and yet he also confesses that he has not yet apprehended, but did desire to apprehend, that for which he was also apprehended of Christ Jesus; and that is a point of experience. Paul knew that he was apprehended by divine grace, that is, that grace had laid hold of him. Very conspicuous was his conversion; he was apprehended on the way to Damascus, when that light "above the brightness of the sun" (Acts 26 v. 13) shined into his conscience and brought him to the ground. He knew he was apprehended. He knew the Lord laid hold on him, and yet he said "That I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (v. 12) – that he might know the fulness of that which had laid hold of him, the fulness of the grace, the fulness of the mercy; and therefore he says 'I count not myself to have apprehended.' Oh the eternity that is in Christ and revealed in the Gospel! We shall never fully apprehend it here. A true knowledge of Christ in the truth is like a horizon: it will be until we thus are favoured to get to heaven; it will keep receding from us, or rather, drawing us on: as we go from faith to faith, from strength to strength, from glory to glory, and reach one horizon, we find that there is another as far off. Oh blessed horizon - to have it set before our eyes, the incomprehensible God in all His divine purpose in the covenant of grace, opened to the eyes of faith of a poor pilgrim here! That is how they go on from strength to strength.

So Paul here says 'I count not myself to have apprehended' the fulness that there is in Christ, and all that is contained in the Gospel, and all that He has laid up for them that love Him, 'but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind ...' This is a difficult part of the text; but still, it is here, and we would speak a right word concerning it. There is a sense in which we cannot forget 'those things which are behind.' David could not forget his sins: "My sin is ever before me" (Ps. 51 v. 3). Blessed be God, who has an infinite mind, yet there is one thing in the Word of God that He *can* forget: "Thy sins and thine iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8 v. 12). And we would not forget the mercies of God which are behind, His goodness that has brought us thus far. "Having obtained help of God" (Acts 26 v. 22), we would not forget those helps.

Well then, what does the apostle mean, 'this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind'? As I judge, it means this, that he cannot live upon the past; and in this sense, as we begin the year, those of you who begin it dependent upon His grace, while you are thankful for past mercies, you cannot live upon them.

There is another sense in which the people who walk by faith forget those things that are behind, and the 5th chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes helps us on this point: "Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart" (v. 19-20). Now if you read those three closing verses of the 5th chapter of Ecclesiastes, you will find that it refers to the life of a godly rich man, and the life of a godly poor man; and when they come to the end, they will not remember the days of their life. 'Forgetting those things which are behind,' we are talking about. A rich man, if he has the grace of God in his heart, won't "much remember the days of his life" and say 'I am sorry I have got to leave this mansion; I have got to leave all these riches; I would stay here and enjoy them if I could.' No, "he shall not much remember the days of his life, because God answereth him in the joy of his heart," so that he has been a *praying* rich man, but given to see the transitory nature of all things here below, and that riches cannot save him in the day of death or in the day of wrath. He has laid up a better foundation, sought better riches, better wisdom, better power and might. Then a poor man - "he shall not much remember the days of his life, because God answereth him in the joy of his heart." He won't much remember the hard labour, the adversity, the losses, the afflictions, because he had been a *praying* man. He has reached forth unto those things that are before, and therefore "will not much remember the days of his life." To my mind, this is the intention of Paul in the text: 'forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before.' This reaching forth is the stretching forth of every faculty of the soul, like a man in a race strains every muscle, every nerve, and has his eyes upon the winning post, 'reaching out unto those things that are before.'

There is another reason why everything of a natural kind is behind: because they are passing away. Whether we would or not, everything is passing away and hastening to desolation; so really everything is behind. I have thought sometimes it is

very much like riding in a railway carriage. The windows are at the side; you don't look forward, and everything you see does not stand still. It passes by – everything behind; you see nothing before.

Oh but, to faith, those things that are passing here below are forgotten, because faith is all taken up by those things that are before. This, therefore, is the same teaching, the same truth, as in the Colossians: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3 v. 1-3). Now this internal life is the secret motive of this stretching forth unto those things that are before, those things that are above, those things that are eternal and unseen, forgetting those things that are seen, that are temporal (2 Cor. 4 v. 18).

Well now, this is a life of faith. It is only possible to those who are risen with Christ, only possible to those in whose hearts the true light has shined. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4 v. 6), that is, to reveal the whole glory of the Trinity of Jehovah, the glory of His grace, the glory of salvation; and these are the things towards which the apostle reached after. And this work of faith is to be traced throughout the Word of God. Right from Abraham's day it was the same thing. When God called him alone "and he went out, not knowing whither he went," he lived by faith. He went out to a place which he "should after receive for an inheritance" (Heb. 11 v. 8). It is the same thing. Have we then (for this is a vital point) any ground to believe that we are 'forgetting those things which are behind,' and, in the light of the Spirit revealing 'those things which are before,' is there a reaching forth, a stretching forth? "Wherefore ... let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus" (Heb. 12 v. 1-2).

'But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.' The young people come into my mind continually. There may be some young people who listen, and I understand their thoughts. They might say, 'Well, we have life before us; we have difficult examinations; we have our ambitions, our responsibilities in life. How are we to forget "those things which are behind" and reach forth "unto those things that are before?"' They might think that belongs to older people. Life contains so much for them – and it does; it seems so important, and so it is. The Scriptures in no way inculcate carelessness, idleness. But if the true light should shine into their hearts, it would just put the things of this life into their right places; for there is a right place for them, and there is a real sense, even in young people, where they, if they were blessed with grace and faith, would realise as they pore over their books and their studies that all the wisdom that they can derive from their studies must die. I thought of it when President Kennedy was suddenly killed – a young man of much wisdom and great responsibility, and with one shot his wisdom perished. As we read in the 146th Psalm, "In that very day their thoughts perish" (v. 4). No more influence! Done! If our dear

young people should realise that everything, all wisdom and all material, tangible things, are passing away, and they are brought to seek those things that endure unto eternal life, it would bring them into this text.

‘This one thing I do’ – and this is one thing, says David, I desire (Ps. 27 v. 4). Only one thing! Why, David had many desires as a king, great responsibility, and yet, comparatively, all his desires were comprised in one. The main centre of a living soul is Christ, and all his life, his affections, his strength, are all focussed, and his prayer focussed, upon that one glorious Person. For it, says Paul, “I count all things but loss” (v. 8). This is one of the most blessed chapters in the New Testament, by which we may well examine ourselves, especially if we make a profession. “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious” (1 Pet. 2 v. 7). It is easy enough to say Christ is precious, but here is the touchstone; here is the test: this chapter. If He is precious to you, He will be your exceeding joy, and all else will sink to insignificance that you “may win Christ, and be found in Him” (v. 3-4), because life is short. We shall be found *of* Him; that is a very different thing; but to be found *in* Him, to win Him, to win Him by running, to win Him by seeking Him, to win Him fighting the good fight of faith and laying hold of eternal life, it just brings us to that very simple Gospel declaration, “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mk. 8 v. 36) What can it profit? And yet the world is after the world, to swallow the world. Oh, what a mercy in that sense to forget the world and the things that are behind, and in the simplicity, and yet in the power, of faith, to say “Oh that I knew where I might find Him” (Job 23 v. 3); I don’t care what else I don’t find, if I can but find Christ and be found in Him.’

‘Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark.’ I like this word ‘press.’ It is consonant with that word in the 63rd Psalm, “My soul followeth hard” – *hard* (v. 8). ‘I *press* toward the mark.’ He did not merely walk toward the mark, nor drifted toward the mark, but he *pressed*, with all the energy of his soul. There is the kingdom, the glorious kingdom, before him. “And the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Mat. 11 v. 12). Salvation is made a necessity to a lost sinner, and therefore there is a connection between this vehement desire and this blessed violence of faith, and the teaching of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a sinner, whereby he knows that unless he wins Christ and is found in Him, he is undone to all eternity.

We shall continually be brought back to that truth (and it *is* a truth), the work of the Holy Ghost. The work of grace in the heart is first to turn man to destruction. Paul would never have found the preciousness of Christ so as to count all else but loss, if he had not been reduced to a “wretched man.” Oh the importance of that teaching which we have in the 7th chapter of Romans! If it was not for that teaching we should never have heard from Paul the 8th chapter, nor this blessed chapter. “Thou turnest man to destruction” (Ps. 90 v. 3). It must be so, and it is an evidence of the presence of the Lord when He does turn them to destruction. “I am come, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mk. 2 v. 17; Lk. 5 v. 32), and before Christ is made precious to a sinner,

before a sinner sees the blessedness of the Gospel, he will be brought to experience – not merely have a notion, but *experience* that in himself he is utterly lost and ruined and dead and corrupt. I believe that by my own little experience. It is a preparation for the Gospel. It is then that there will be a pressing ‘toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.’ The Lord teaches the same thing: “*Strive* to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Lk. 13 v. 24). But there is none that *strive* but what will enter in. Let us labour therefore to enter into Christ's rest (Heb. 4 v. 11).

‘I press toward the mark for the prize.’ There is a prize; therefore there is a battle to be fought; there is a race to be run. But there are many things to press *against*. Had it been the will of God, when He called a sinner by grace, He could have removed all opposition to that grace; He could have so renewed nature that it would give no trouble, and so subdued the devil that he would no longer tempt. But it was not His method, my friends. A sinner saved by grace is no better than he was when he was in an unregenerate state, except that grace subdues nature. It does not eradicate it, and that is one of the greatest oppositions against which faith must press. In that 7th chapter to the Romans, Paul says “I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind. O wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7 v. 23-4) And Paul was a converted man when he said that; he had the grace of God in his heart when he said that.

‘I press toward the mark’ ‘My affections set upon things above.’ There is a *mark* here, and a *prize*. You cannot separate them, but you can distinguish them. When one is running in a race, the mark is the winning post, but the winning post is not the prize; but you don’t get the prize unless you come first to the winning post. And yet every one of His dear people is first. Yes, “the last shall be first” (Mat. 19 v. 30; 20 v. 16); “the lame take the prey” (Is. 33 v. 23).

What is that mark really? It is the Gospel standard, or the standard of the Gospel, and this is the standard that is to be lifted up: “Lift up a standard for the people,” a rallying point, a winning post. Now haven’t you at times felt in your hearts living faith, ‘forgetting those things that are behind’ we feebly tried to describe, and as it is set out in the Ecclesiastes? Some of you that are getting near the end of your pilgrimage, cannot you say ‘I don’t much remember all the days of my life, for the Lord is able to answer me to the joy of my heart. I seek “a better country” than this, “that is, an heavenly” (Heb. 11 v. 16),’ and you agree – you are *brought* to agree – and walk with God in the Scriptures. “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches,” for this simple reason, that it is the wrong kind of riches, the wrong kind of might, and the wrong kind of wisdom, “but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me” (Jer. 9 v. 23-4). Thus he understands what true riches and righteousness are, that he has “tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Pet. 2 v. 3), that he has a glimpse of His glory, and that glory has eclipsed the world and made it look what it is. Therefore ‘I *press*’ – press against nature, press against the lusts of the flesh, press against a body of sin and death, press against the power of unbelief, ‘toward the mark,’ the uplifted standard of

the Gospel. Therefore says the Lord by Isaiah to the ministers, "Go through, go through the gates; lift up a standard for the people" (ch. 62 v. 10). The mark, the standard, is the Gospel of the grace of God, and the prize is Christ Himself – at least, that is how I read the chapter: 'that I might win Christ.' It is the prize that is won. Oh to win Him! Are you after Him? Have we been brought to press toward Him as He is set out in the Gospel, that blessed banner of truth upon which is written His love, His grace, His mercy?

'I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' Oh, it is a high calling! It is an honourable calling, a divine calling; it is a heavenly calling. It is a call from heaven by the Holy Ghost, an internal call in the heart. Blessed it is to hear that call, and this is one of the secrets of pressing 'toward the mark for the prize,' to have that inward call. It is a calling out of the world. It is a calling wherein the voice has a commanding and an attracting power. I wish I could speak of this.

I wonder how many there are under the preaching of the Gospel, who are conscious of an inward calling. A calling has a voice. In Zechariah it says "I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them" (ch. 10 v. 8). Oh that "hiss" from heaven! It has in it the recognition of divine foreknowledge of individual people, and has too the appointed time to come. With respect to some individual sinner, the Lord, as it were, looks down from heaven and says, 'Now that sinner's name is in the Lamb's book of life, and the period known to God has come. I will hiss for that sinner.' You sit in a chapel pew, and you feel a mysterious and inward influence under the preaching of the Gospel, and it takes hold of you; you hear a voice which moves you toward God. It is a call *from* heaven. It is a call *to* heaven. It is a call for you as the Lord called His disciples when they left their nets and their boats and followed Him.

We have not got to lay down our work. You will do it with all your ability, and whatsoever your hand finds to do, you will do it with all your might (Ecd. 9 v. 10); and yet you will do it as a thing that is behind. It is passing, as we should look through a side window of a railway carriage; nothing is standing still. And if you should be a rich man and you are travelling through your own estate, it is just passing by; you cannot hold it. I remember seeing Lord Courthope and his Wylie estate in Wadhurst, really a very extensive estate, and he was a worthy gentleman if ever there was one. 'Well,' I thought, 'that is all you can do, and I can look upon it.' O my friends, the difference between possessing riches which can make no difference at all to your person, and being enriched by the life and grace and righteousness and sanctification of Jesus Christ!

'Press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' The prize is Christ. He is the inheritance; He makes heaven. Oh may the Lord then help us during this year to forget 'those things which are behind,' and press toward 'those things which are before'!