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Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden, at "Galeed" Chapel, Brighton
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"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."

Philippians 3, v.20 & 21.

This most precious chapter is to my mind a touchstone by which we may test our religion, the balances of the sanctuary in which we may be weighed and weigh our religion. The apostle at one time was a Pharisee. Full of self confidence; he trusted in the flesh and he so thought that he did God service in persecuting the Church of God. With respect to the law he was blameless. But the Lord killed his religion, turned his comeliness into corruption and gave him to view those things which were such gain to him in the Jews religion to be accounted loss for Christ.

Well, if we are taught by the same Spirit, we shall be brought to the same place and we might well - and it would be preferable for us to bring our religion to the test. Can we say that what things were gain to us we now count loss for Christ? and it is to be noticed how that the Apostle, he expressed this to the very end, for he did not only count all things loss for Christ but he suffered the loss of all things and counted them but dung that he might win Christ and be found in Him. How near do we come to that? If we are laid in those balances, if we are brought to that test? We bring our profession to it; if we say that Christ is precious, bring that profession of His preciousness to these verses; "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ and be found in Him". That is how precious Christ was to the apostle - and He is not really precious to us unless He is that much precious.

It is a very searching chapter to my mind, and it will be a mercy if we are willing to come to this test. May make us feel ashamed - and that will be a good thing, but it may be sanctified to seek more earnestly His face. But to come to the text.

"For our conversation is in heaven". The two preceeding verses are in parenthesis, in brackets, and therefore the two verses follow on from the 17th. "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample, for our conversation is in heaven". O what an apostle he was! what an example! How short, lamentably short one feels to come. But still, we would press toward the mark. We should aim no lower than did the apostle, I do believe that. We need the same Saviour, nothing but the same precious blood of the Lord Jesus can cleanse us, heal us and pardon us. Nothing but that righteousness of God which the apostle sought can justify us. And he says, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God has revealed even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto ye have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing".

There are different degrees of faith and of experience, but Paul says here, whatever the degree of your faith or experience, "let us walk by the same rule" that he has set in this chapter - there is the standard, there is the rule, there is the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and whatever experience or attainment we have, let us walk by the same rule and mind the same things, "For our conversation is in heaven". This word, conversation, is citizen-ship, our citizenship is in heaven, and it is so to those who can find "no abiding city here". It sets forth the pilgrims; they wandered in a solitary way, they could find no city to dwell in. Abraham was one of these pilgrims, his citizenship was in heaven, he

sought a city which hath foundations, because he realised that there was no city here which hath foundations at all. There is no foundation in this world, and it is a mercy if we are made real pilgrims, can find nothing to rest in, no refuge but in Christ, and therefore it is an important part in divine teaching, to be brought to see the end of all perfection in the flesh and to realise that everything out of Christ is but sinking sand.

"For our conversation" our citizenship "is in heaven". And if we are under divine teaching then our treasure is in heaven. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and dust doth corrupt, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven". Therefore those whose conversation is in heaven are those who are born of God, born from above. Their righteousness is in heaven. Their great High Priest is there, there hope is there, and so Asaph when he came out from the sanctuary, he declared, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee". O how spiritual, how real, is vital godliness .! and when pilgrims' are on their journey, they are but sojourners here, and strangers, and one part of their conversation is this, that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth "And they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country", they are brought to desire a better country than this world, "That is an heavenly", and that heaven is their home, their expectation is there, therefore their conversation on the way thither is about their home, as the Lord leads them by the right way to a city of habitation. "For our conversation," our citizenship "is in heaven".

Well, it is a mercy if this is true of us. For the Lord hath formed a people for Himself and they shall show forth His praise. But in experience there will be a beginning of this conversation. The beginning of this conversation with respect to the publican was, in the temple, his conversation was in heaven, "God be merciful to me a sinner". If one is brought by the Spirit unto such a conviction, a conviction that penetrates to the very core of the heart and yet, at the same time, has a manifestation by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, His infinite merit, His atoning blood, His everlasting righteousness; and is compelled to flee for refuge to that blessed hope, for you may depend upon it that publican, though he smote upon his breast, there was where his burden was, there was where his guilt was, yet he was not hopeless, his conversation was in heaven, and his only hope was there. O my friends, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit and His gracious inshining we shall realise more and more that this world is a complete wilderness; that it cannot contribute anything whatever of a spiritual kind, and that if we indeed are new creatures in Christ Jesus, we have a life that can only be maintained from Christ Himself; and O how precious it will make Him even in His own glorious declaration: "I am the light of the world, he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life". "Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more, but ye see Me, because I live, ye shall live also." So that this is the conversation of faith, the longings of faith.

It is also in the affections set upon things above and not upon things on the earth. It is not to be always talking about religion, we may talk about religion all our days and be destitute of the truth, destitute of grace, but it is the character of the new creature. There are the Godward movements of faith in the heart. This conversation includes those desires, even

"Those feeble desires, those wishes so weak,
'Tis Jesus inspires and bids you still seek".

Those desires are the conversation which is in heaven. They are toward heaven, they can only be satisfied from heaven. O what a mercy to have that evidence of the life of God in the soul, because nothing but that which comes from heaven can support it, satisfy it, nourish it; and keep it alive. "For our conversation is in heaven". And this conversation is the influence of the grace of God in the

heart. It is the tender fear of God in the conscience. Paul says to the Hebrews, "Let your conversation be without covetousness, for He hath said, I will never leave you nor forsake you". So that this conversation also is in our deportment, our condition among men. Your conversation can be in heaven when you are doing business with a worldly man. Some of you may have felt this. A tenderness of conscience in your transactions, to feel the influence of the fear of God preserving you from all covetousness and dishonesty. It is by reason of the presence of Christ in the heart, His grace taking control of every power, sanctifying inwardly and wholly.

"Our conversation", our citizenship, "is in heaven". Pilgrims, sojourners, strangers in the earth, but O the blessedness of it ! I do believe what we sing,

"Although our cup seems filled with gall
There's something secret sweetens all".

And it is a secret conversation in the heart in communion, meditation, as we were trying to speak on Wednesday. O has not your conversation been in heaven in your quiet moments in the night season. Well, it is a mercy if we are thus made real pilgrims. And our conversation will also be in our movements; we shall seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and that seeking first His kingdom in all our movements, our citizenship, the end of our faith is in heaven; and we shall speak in our movements. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you", other necessary things, "shall be added unto you."

"For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour". There is a looking for Him by faith when He comes a second time, Indeed, Paul to the Hebrews, joins these two things together "He shall come the second time without sin unto salvation," and to ~~them~~ ^{they} that look for Him shall He so come. But there is a looking for Him in experience here and that is the most important thing for if we never look for His coming whilst we are here we shall never be made partakers with those to whom He shall come without sin unto salvation, from whence also ye looked for the Saviour. Do we look for Him ? Do we need a Saviour ? Do we look for Him in the word of God ? "Search the Scriptures, for they are they which testify of Me". You will look for Him in all those places He has promised to appear in the means of grace, in His Word, at the throne of grace. Do we look for a Saviour ? O what a consolation to faith that there is a Saviour to be looked for. It has the same import in those Scriptures such as, "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you".

From whence also we look for the Saviour". All people are looking for something. Looking, each for their own gain from their quarter. David said, "Now Lord, what wait I for ?". What look I for ? The world are waiting for that which the world can give, honour, pleasure, wealth and fame. Everybody is looking for something. There is an expectation natural to people, "and they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh". They put all their energy to attain to some advantage of the flesh. But these things must soon end. "Let not thine heart envy sinners, for surely there is an end and thine expectation shall not be cut off". The expectation of those whose conversation and citizenship is in heaven is a different expectation from the world. I say these things will show us really what our religion is and where we stand.

"Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour". It is only lost people that look for a Saviour. It is a mercy to be lost, it is indeed. It is a mercy to be a ruined sinner, it is a mercy to be hopeless in self, it is a mercy to be brought to self despair. It is only such that look for a Saviour, nobody else needs one, and therefore, in all these groanings and wrestlings there is a conversation, it is in heaven, a deep need of that which is in Christ, which comes from heaven. So that an upward glancing of an eye - our conversation is in heaven - and there is a

looking for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. What a Saviour He is ! Lord, Lord of Lords, King of Kings, Lord in His divine sovereignty, but that sovereignty exercised toward His people in sovereign immutable love. Lord, in His immutability, His omnipotence, and that immutability of the Covenant of grace; the sure mercies of David; spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. This is the Lord, Jesus. "His name shall be called Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins". That is why His name is called Jesus. It is a name that belongs to His mediatorial office, a name given to Him when He was born. Christ, the anointed of God. Anointed He was to preach the Gospel, anointed of the Father with the Spirit immeasurably.

"From whence also we look for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ". we may well pause from time to time as we read the Scriptures and ask ourselves the question whether these works of the Spirit are in operation in our souls and made manifest in our lives from day to day. This chapter has caused me much trembling many a time, I come so short, that it makes me almost a terror to myself. How do you feel about it ? Look at your life from day to day, then look at the text. "Our conversation is in heaven from whence also we look for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ". O but I believe there is a looking for Him. We would not make any excuses my friends, but we are in the flesh, and therefore you will see how many exhortations in the Epistles there are, and warnings, "Fret not thyself because of evil doers", and therefore, there must be a fretting, as with Asaph, he was envious at the foolish when he saw the prosperity of the wicked, his conversation then was not in heaven, no. We shall find no perfection in the flesh. But this is the point when we come to feel so lamentably and sinfully short of this standard, a real standard, what do we do ? O have you not when you have felt covered with shame taken that shame and those shortcomings to the throne of grace and sought that you might have more grace, that you might live more to the honour and glory of the Lord ? Ah, your conversation is in heaven when you confess your sins, when you feel and mourn over what you are. It is the spiritual life of the soul under the influence of the Holy Spirit; and you will find that it is all directed heavenward.

"Our conversation is in heaven from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall change our vile body". O how complete is salvation, the redemption of the soul is complete. The Lord Jesus finished redemption upon Calvary. The work of sanctification is the work of the Holy Ghost through the whole of a sinners life and therefore it makes that hymn we sing to be true,

"Thou shalt see my glory soon,
When the work of grace is done".

Redemption is a complete work by Christ on the cross, the work of sanctification is the work of the Holy Ghost through life, and O what means is used, what chastenings, what sorrows, what temptations, what persecutions, what emptyings, what tribulations, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification".

"Who shall change our vile body". So that the redemption of the body is to come. That beautiful chapter in the Corinthians sets this forth in such a most sacred way. "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption, it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory, it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power, it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." What blessed truths are these concerning even our poor, vile bodies, mortal because we are sinners. Must go through the grave and see corruption, but O the grace of God reigns through death, not only then is the redemption of the soul, but there is the redemption of the body.

"Who shall change our vile body". What a blessed hope is before the people of God, both body and soul. What a comfort ! the only comfort in death, and how, when this is testified by the Spirit in a sinner's heart, he could say, "Into thy Hands I commit my Spirit", "Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of hosts". When you come to consider these realities and to have a portion in this life how

inferior it does make the best portion of this poor world.

"Who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body". O this is a mystery, the union between Christ and His people is ineffable, unspeakable. O the love and grace and wisdom of God in such a plan as this, only made possible by the incarnation of the eternal God the Son. There could be no union with Him but for this. It makes the doctrine of the Person of Christ and His eternal Sonship to be exceedingly precious. This is how in my little way I believe in the eternal Sonship experimentally. It affects everything. It affects His people through life and death. This would be impossible but for that union. "That it may be fashioned", not like unto the angelic nature, but be fashioned according to "His glorious body". He has a body, a human body. O sacred union! and we shall know it here if we have that union with Him. It is only by union that we ever have contact with Him. It is only by union that we ever receive anything from Him, and His people are predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son. These are tremendous truths and if we are His indeed, we must be thus conformed unto His image, and that conformity will be seen upon us.

I know these things cut deep, but then this is a vile body. Every grey hair is the result of sin, all mortal decay and death - and if that was all, O what gloomy despair, and yet this very state and condition of things has been over-ruled by the wisdom and grace of God to bring us to greater glory than ever could be if man had never fallen, if man had never sinned. I have thought of it, indeed, I think of it in every saint that I bury; it is not the end, my friends, indeed it is a new beginning, a beginning of eternal glory.

"Who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned". That very body that we bury, it is not the same that shall be raised, the same body but not the same condition, "will be fashioned like unto His glorious body". There is something very sacred about the body of the Lord Jesus, a body. God is a Spirit, He has no body; God the Son is a Spirit but He took into union with His divine ~~Spirit~~ Person a body, "A body hast Thou prepared Me" - and that same body, human body, is in heaven. His people's vile bodies are to be changed, fashioned like unto His glorious body. O how different we should live if we had this more before us! This would set our conversation in heaven and make us as sojourners here.

Abraham, he sojourned in the wilderness in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. This will help us to hold the blessings and comforts that we enjoy with a loose hand. This will give us true gratitude for what God has given us, and His merciful provision and His help through the wilderness, but it will make us willing to say farewell to all below when His time shall come to call us hence.

"According to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself". His mighty working. He works in the grave, that same blessed Spirit that works in the heart of His people, quickens them into life, He subdues even the grave unto Himself. In His death He was the death of deaths. O it brings the blessedness of that truth, "I am the resurrection and the life, He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"; and that is true in a double sense with respect to those that were given to Him in the covenant of grace. Dead in trespasses and in sins, it may be said of each one of them, "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." O the power of Christ's resurrection is the power that raises a sinner from death in sin, and the same power of Christ's resurrection will raise His people from the grave at last. "Therefore, as sin has reigned unto death, even so shall grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life. "Who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned ~~even~~ like unto His glorious body according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself! It is one thing to subdue all things but the end to which they are subject is "unto Himself". O may the Lord use this chapter to stir us up to self examination that we may be found, while we live, in the 20th verse, and when we die in the 21st verse.