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Sermon preached by Mr. F. I. Gosden at Galeed, Brighton, on Lord's day morning, 28th Feb., 1960

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTIST

Text: Psalm 106.43-45.

We read that "we spend our years as a tale that is told", and in the records of God's Word what tales there are told in the histories, the experiences of those that have gone before. And in this Psalm we have a part of the tales of the Israelites in the wilderness, their rebellions and God's mercies. In reading this Psalm do you feel to be better than our fathers? Oh look at the way He led them about! It is a wonder that any of them got to the promised land. You may feel that with respect to yourself more than with regard to anybody else. You would say, not in a hypocritical way or in mock humility, "The biggest wonder in heaven will be if I get there"; and if you say that as you view your own life's story, oh it will enhance the free sovereign mercy and grace of God!

It matters not much which verse you drop your eyes upon in this Psalm, and cannot you say that if these verses should represent days in your experience, there is hardly a day in your life that you can drop your eye upon but what you see cause to be ashamed? "Shame and confusion of face belong unto us." If that was all, it would indeed be hopeless, but "unto the Lord belong mercies and forgivenesses". "They provoked the Lord at the sea, even at the Red Sea, where they saw His mighty deliverance, as you read in the 15th and 16th of Exodus. Why, they were hardly through the Red Sea and saw their enemies sink like a stone, but what they began to murmur against Moses and the Lord. "But nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power to be known." Then they believed His words and sang His praise." It looked well; things looked better. We may come into the house of God if He has granted us some relief, undertaken for us, then we believe His words, and come into the sanctuary and sing His praise. "They soon forgot His works; they waited not for His counsel." Oh many, many devices are in the heart of man, but blessed be God, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand!

"And they lusted exceedingly in the wilderness and tempted God in the desert." That is when they asked a king, when God was their King. They envied the nations round about them and desired a king like other nations. "He gave them their request; he gave them a king in His anger and took him away in His wrath; but He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls." This is a solemn judgment. Oh what a mercy if the Lord denies our request when we are lusting exceedingly in the wilderness, going after things that cannot profit! But sometimes in His judgment He gives them their request and sends leanness into their souls. "They forgot God their Saviour, which had done great things in Egypt."

Well now, these things are written for our instruction. But one of the most grievous things was this: "Yea, they despised the pleasant land; they believed not His word". This was solemn, and what is this in experience? It is when His people become weary - weary of the Lord, weary of His Gospel, weary of His Word, the services: "They despised the pleasant land". But when our covetous hearts and our deadly carnality bind us to the earth, when we are so engrossed in some carnal interests that this world and its things are snares to

us and appear of more importance than the things of God. "They despised the pleasant land; they believed not His word, but murmured in their tents."

I wish I did not understand these things, my friends. "How oft we grumble and complain, With blessings in our hands!" But to come to the text: "Many times did He deliver them". He hath not dealt so with any nation." You will never find such a description of being led about and instructed and chastened in the case of Saul or Ahithophel, or any reprobate. Oh these are the dealings of God, the chastening of a Father! The children of Israel were a type of the church of God in the wilderness, a type of His individual people in all their circumstances in life. "But many times did He deliver them, but they provoked him with their counsel." And the way they provoked Him with their counsel we have in the 13th verse: "They soon forgot His works; they waited not for His counsel". Oh to become so carnal as to attempt to be independent of God, and to say, "I will go into such a city and buy and sell and get gain. I will do this and do that; I will go here, and I will go there!"

"They provoked Him with their counsel." But He was good. How was He good to them? Why, "they were brought low for their iniquity". This verse may interpret some of our experience: "Many times did He deliver them". With respect to the wicked we have this word: "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy". Solemn condition to be in that! But yet here are sinners, the Lord dealing with them, mercy running through it all instead of destroying them suddenly: "They were brought low for their iniquity". Fools because of their iniquities are in leanness of soul; "they fell down and there was none to help".

And there are many ways in which the Lord brings His people low because they provoke Him with their own counsel. And this is rebellion. He brings His people low spiritually, brings them into darkness, withholds the influence of His Holy Spirit, and removes from them by withdrawing His gracious presence, and the beasts of the field come forth and devour every green thing. Brought low spiritually. It is a very solemn experience to be brought into the shadow of death in your soul, so that your bones which were not seen stick out, and your branches are bare of fruit; you see not your signs - brought low. Faith appears to be dormant, hope seems to have been cut off, zeal extinguished to a spark. "They were brought low for their iniquity." This is a mercy. You think of it. If we can live in sin and rebellion against God and yet maintain a loud profession of religion, it is a very serious mark against us. To be enabled to keep up an external religion while living in sin is very near to reprobation, and may be the first steps to apostacy. But if the Lord is dealing with us and has delivered us many times, and yet we go on to provoke Him with our own counsel, He will bring us low for our iniquity. And there shall be teaching in that low place. He will bring us to the dust, bring us back to the dunghill, shut us up into prison, put us into some horrible pit.

You look at the case of Jonah, how he provoked the Lord with his counsel. He was commanded to go to Nineveh, but he did not want to go. His own reputation and interests came before the commandment of God. He provoked God with his own counsel, and He brought

him low, into the belly of hell, brought him into that condition where he said, "I am cast out of Thy sight". What a mercy it was! I feel it. I would speak rightly, but it is a mercy to be brought low for our iniquities, and not to be cut off. That word does come to my mind in distinction with the text: "Many times did He deliver them; but they provoked Him with their counsel, and they were brought low for their iniquity". But on the other hand: "He that being often reprov'd", not often delivered, but often reprov'd and warn'd, "hard-eneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy". That is a terrible Scripture, and we shall either know one or the other. Oh my friends, I thought when we were singing the hymn just now (789), you would hardly think that running through this severe judgment of the Lord with His rebellious people, that this was in it: "See the suffering Son of God, Panting, groaning, sweating blood! Brethren, this had never been, Had not God detested sin". And He will deal with it, and deal with His people. But oh the mercy of this dealing!

Even David, the man of God's own heart, in his pride disobeyed the Lord and numbered the people. Oh how low he was brought! He said to Gad, "I am in a great strait; let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for great are His mercies; and let me not fall into the hands of man". If any of you are brought low in your soul, so low that you almost give up hope, oh may the Holy Spirit give you to hear the voice of mercy, even in this 43rd verse: "Many times" - not once nor twice - "did He deliver them, but they provoked Him with their counsel and were brought low".

Then the Lord brings His people low in their circumstances. "If He rebuke for pride", He won't leave you in your pride; "He will humble thy proud heart". And He knows how to do it. "And if for want of love He chide, That love He will impart". Now the Lord deals with His people, and we have a beautiful illustration of it in the case of Ephraim in the 11th of Hosea. And that is what is written throughout this Psalm. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within Me, My repentings are kindled together. And then He says why He cannot give Ephraim up: "For I am God, and not man". Therefore, "Rebellious thou hast been, And art rebellious still; But since in love I took thee in, My promise I'll fulfil".

"Many times." I wish it may break our hearts. That very love of a suffering Saviour runs through all His chastenings. "Nevertheless". Oh what a word is here! We have another one in the eighth verse: "Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake." "Nevertheless He regarded their affliction." There are many of these most gracious "neverthelesses" in the Scripture. If we are inside of them we shall be safe, and they all have respect to that which threatens our destruction, or that which seems to be completely impossible. Take for instance the case of Lazarus. They came to the Lord Jesus, and He remained two days where He was and let him die. Then He said: "Lazarus is dead; nevertheless let us go unto him". That was for His glory. It was eternal life coming to death, and therefore the nevertheless has a two-way look. It looks at death, at impossibility, and it may look at your sin. And it not only looked at death, but looked at Christ, His eternal life, His ability to save.

Take another one in Timothy. There the case was perilous times when men would not endure sound doctrine. There were antichrists, errors, deceivers; but nevertheless, notwithstanding all the deceivers in the world and all the errors, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His". And it comes into the mind - a Psalm or two previous to this, the 89th: "If His children forsake My law and walk not in my commandments, I will visit their transgressions with the rod and their iniquities with stripes". Nevertheless all that they are, notwithstanding that they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters and have despised Me, and hewn to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water, yet "nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, My covenant will I not break".

Oh what a mercy to have any evidence that we are among the children of God! But Paul would ask, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! Oh my friends, if any should hide behind such mercy and grace, why they are worthy of double damnation, and will receive it. "Nevertheless He regarded their affliction when He heard their cry." Yes, "they pour out a prayer when Thy chastening is upon them". Does He ever hear our cry? He did His people in Egypt. Their cry reached the heavens, and He said to Moses, "I am come down to deliver them". But the Lord waits, "He waits to be gracious". "Therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you. Therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you; for God is a God of judgment; a God of ~~wisdom~~ wisdom, a God of method. "Blessed are all they that wait for Him."

But there is instruction in this. I believe there is a blessedness in it. Not in sinning; not in rebellion. But my friends, we are fallen creatures. Some of us know it. We are at enmity against God naturally. "Nevertheless He regarded their affliction when He heard their cry." "But blessed is the man whom Thou ~~chooseth~~ chooseth and causeth to approach unto Thee." Oh it is a mercy if our conflicts of soul, the temptations of the devil, the darkness of our minds, outward afflictions in our circumstances, weakness of body, trouble in our connections, cause us to approach unto God! It must end well whatever it is, if it causes us to approach unto God. Everything that brings us to God must be good; good in the issue I mean. I have often thought of Joseph and his brethren, and a remarkable thing to observe, I judge, is this. Joseph knew his brethren; he loved them. But he treated them roughly, as the Lord did His people through this Psalm and through the wilderness. He became their enemy, met them as a bear bereaved of ~~her~~ whelps. But everything that Joseph said to his brethren, and everything that he required of them, compelled them to come back to him. Nothing that he said, nothing that he did, nothing that he commanded, could issue in their going away from him. In order to fulfil those requirements and obey those commands, they must come back; and that is just how the Lord deals with His people. Now have you found it so? And if so, you can join with Jeremiah, and looking back confess it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. We should have consumed ourselves, the devil would have consumed us, the world would have consumed us; but it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. And He tells us in Malachi the secret of it: "I am the

Lord; I change not; therefore because I am what I am, because I am immutable, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed".

"Many times did He deliver them." Has it ever touched your heart? There are two things about it, and the Lord holds both ends, if I might so speak. He will never let His people go. "He will never, never leave us; Nor will let us quite leave Him." He holds both ends. Oh my friends, that is why the righteous shall hold on his way! "Nevertheless He regarded their affliction." And many are the afflictions of the righteous. Now, some of you are afflicted. James says: "Are any among you afflicted? Let him pray". That is the remedy, whatever the affliction may be, whether internal soul trouble, soul conflict, soul affliction for sin, or whether it is external affliction in the body, in the business, in the family, let him pray. There is nothing to hinder him, as though James would say. "Let him pray." The devil cannot stop him; no warrant to stop him. Sin has no warrant; let him pray. I do love those "lets". He may think he cannot pray. I remember a dear young man, now in heaven. He was asked one day: "Do you ever pray?" He said, "I am too wicked". Have you ever felt like that? "Let him pray." Who shall hinder him? Tell me a word in this blessed Book that prohibits him from praying. "Let him pray."

"Nevertheless He regarded their affliction." Well, you might say, "I really cannot; I cannot pray". But I know what that is. Does His word come in there? "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." Oh destitute sinner, but you must be destitute! Oh real religion is not a theory; it is an experience! And that is what makes it so blessed, and the Word of God most blessed. And if you want to know whether you are dead or alive, just look inside and see whether you have got any experience of what this Psalm sets forth. I don't say like some people that have gone up into the third heavens and seen many visions; not that at all. But have you had an experience of the sentence of death in all that you are? I really have. But oh to have set before us such a One, the Rock of Ages, a full Christ, a glorious, rich, eternal Gospel!

"Nevertheless He regarded their affliction", came and examined the case, what kind of affliction it is. That is what this regarding means. As though He would say, "Now, what is the matter, come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden". "Trust in Him at all times, ye people; pour out your heart before Him. The Lord is a refuge for us." It is a merciful word. "Nevertheless", taking everything into account, the whole of your life. "He regarded their affliction when He heard their cry."

Well my friends, it is wonderful. But then what are we to do with this "tale that is told". The chapters are written. If that solemn eyewitness in heaven that is faithful should write a book of all your thoughts, imaginations, ways, would you like anybody to read it? What are we to do with it then, because we must all give an account of our selves unto God? What are we to do with the pages that have been written of the "tale that is told"? Here comes in the substitution of the Lord Jesus. With respect to His people it will be blotted out as a thick cloud, and He who has an infinite mind will remember their iniquities no more. But how? The whole life of the Lord Jesus,

His sacred Person, His sinless humanity, the whole of His holy acts, the fulfilment of the law of God and God's purposes and counsels - He delighted to do His will, that life, that record belongs to His saints. That is what your tale that is told will be, the life, work, Person, obedience of the Lord Jesus, and that record is on high when He rose for all His dear people. I don't wonder that Paul says, "That I might win Christ, be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness". "And He remembered for them His covenant." The covenant was an oath, and could never be altered. "God is faithful; He cannot deny Himself", and so He remembered for them His covenant. Oh that blessed covenant of grace! If we are in it, my friends, then God is for us, and "if God be for us, who can be against us?" But if God is against us, who can be for us? It is one thing or the other.

"He remembered for them His covenant, and repented according to the multitude of His mercies." We often read of the Lord repenting. It does not mean that He changes His mind; He cannot, for "He is of one mind and none can turn Him". But His dealings with His people are in love, and these repentings are a change of His dealings with His people. You see that in Jeremiah: "In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise Thee. Though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me". "He remembered for them His covenant" - remembered what He had promised them, remembered what He was. They are appointed for them, He remembered that the government was upon His shoulders, that the responsibility was upon His shoulder. He remembered that.

"And according to the multitude of His mercies." Oh we have a multitude of sins, but here is a multitude of mercies! It takes in "plenteous redemption; let Israel hope in the Lord." It is another one of those "lets". It is really a kind of challenge to hell, to the world, to death. "Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with Him there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous", that is eternal "redemption". There are more riches in Him to redeem a lost soul than there is sin in that soul to condemn him.

Well, I wish I could speak of these things; but look at it. For about four or five seconds it touched my heart. See the love in this: "many times did He deliver them". How many times has He delivered you? If He has ever delivered you in six troubles, He will deliver you in the seventh. Oh what a deliverance is the day of death to a child of God! His expectation shall not be cut off. "But they provoked Him by their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity." But be thankful, my friends, that the things through which you have passed have not been permitted to drive you away from God, but that "He regarded their affliction when He heard their cry".

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