

Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, on
Wed. Evg., Oct 11, 1961.

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Text: Psa. cxix. 75. 76.

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

We have here a confession and a prayer; an acknowledgment of the righteousness and faithfulness of God in all His dealings with us, and then a prayer for His merciful kindness. In the 77th verse he continues: "Let Thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live; for Thy law is my delight". And therefore this expresses that sweet submission that the Spirit works at times in the heart of the afflicted child of God.

"I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right." If we are under divine teaching we are being led forth by the right way through the wilderness to a city of habitation, and that way is traced out through the Word of God as a path of judgment. The Lord Jesus Himself said, "I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment". And each in his own measure will be a follower of the Lamb, and as He is, or was, so are we in this world.

"Art thou tempted? So was He;
Afflicted? He was too".

We have here one of the almost innumerable exclamations that have been made much to me - "O Lord!" If you take that exclamation out of the 75th verse, it will not alter the acknowledgment, but it will weaken it. If you read it like this, "I know that Thy judgments are right"; but it is, "I know, O Lord!" Have you ever thus been before the Lord in the midst of the paths of judgment, trial, suffering, affliction, conflict, disappointment, and yet have been favoured with a faith's view of the Lord of lords whose divine sovereignty orders all things according to the counsel of His own will, and also according to the covenant of grace which is ordered in all things with respect to His people, and only His people? Their whole pathway really, from the cradle to the grave, is superintended by the covenant of grace.

"O Lord, I know that Thy judgments are right." And you see the secret here. In the teaching of the Spirit and in faith, the first thing is a knowledge of God Himself. And you will feel that perhaps gather you up, those of you who may be distracted and confused in your mind in the midst of many trials and afflictions. The first work of faith is to believe that God is; and that will be more than a mere statement to you who are exercised. You will feel that that is the very foundation, the very centre, and the very end of the whole of your experience and profession of faith. And it is so strengthening. How can we speak of anything at all that concerns us in the thousands of matters that come to us, inside and out, without first considering this great, and glorious, and eternal God?

"O Lord, I know that Thy judgments are right." Oh it is a blessed place to be brought to! But you won't be brought there in a day, and you won't be brought there in a lifetime by mere natural intelligence. More and more we shall prove that vital godliness is a living experience in the soul. And that will be precious. My friends, you can feel these things in your heart, and taste them, and handle them. There is a very real sense in which they are more real than things tangible, because tangible things can be destroyed, they can be burned to ashes, they can be reduced to rubble. But these things of the Spirit wrought

in the heart are indestructible, eternal. Sometimes you will feel a very solemn and sacred connection and contact with this great God through the ministry by the Holy Spirit. It is great to know God like that by some manifestation of Himself in the Person of His dear Son to your heart in all that He has condescended to become, and all the work that He has accomplished in a way of salvation for poor sinners. "O Lord!" It is all in those two words.

I met a dear saint lately speaking to me of the time when the Lord was about to deliver him into the liberty of the Gospel, that all he could say was, "O Lord! O Lord!" But what he saw in Him, His divine ability, His immutability, His omnipotence, His sovereign saving grace, the infinite benefit that derives from Him in the Gospel! "O Lord, I know that Thy judgments are right." It is a great thing to be brought there when you are in the midst of conflicts, and tribulations, and sorrows, and oppressions. But these judgments of the Lord are variously described in the Word of God. Hannah uses the same thing really, only calls judgments knowledge: "For God is a God of knowledge; by His actions are weighed". ~~By His~~ His judgments are His wisdom, His knowledge, His prudence. You look at that word in the 139th Psalm concerning the knowledge of God and His omniscience. It sets forth too His wisdom. And therefore this word knowledge or judgments does not only mean afflictions and trials. God's judgments are His wisdom that runs through His dealings with His people even in His chastenings. He chastens every son whom He receiveth, and He loves them. Indeed, they are blessed: "Blessed is that man whom Thou chastenest and teachest him out of Thy law".

"I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right." These judgments too are His methods - His methods are right. Oh what a diversity of ways He has in order to instruct His people! Perhaps the 107th, that very blessed experimental Psalm interprets this as well as any part of the Scripture. If you read that Psalm, which concludes, "Whoso is wise and will observe these things," - these judgments, "even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord", which the Psalmist here prays for. But you see through that Psalm the Lord's wisdom, His methods, His judgments, His conclusions with respect to a case. Why, this same dear man prayed, "Let Thy judgments help me". This is the exercise of faith, and some of you may be so jealous of your soul and vehemently desire the blessing of the Lord in your heart, that you are willing for His judgments to help you. And in looking back I feel that I can say that I have received more teaching under the chastening hand of God in affliction, than in anything else.

"I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right." I know they are. It is easy enough to say when everything is well and prosperous - you are in full health and strength, your family well placed - easy enough then. But this word here is consonant with that in Job: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him; it is right". I have been there on two occasions when I could see nothing but disaster before me. But it is right. I remember going to a cupboard when everything was to pieces like scattered bones, and I said to the Lord, "Let it do me good; I know it is right". To feel the inward sanctifying effect of chastening and affliction, to see love inscribed upon it all. It is wonderful what faith will do and suffer under the power of the Spirit in adversity. And how blessed it is to meet such a person! Indeed, the preceding

verse says, "They that fear Thee will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in Thy Word. For I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right". Have you ever been glad when you have seen an afflicted soul sanctified, made submissive, under the mighty hand of God, and the evidence of the refining and purifying in their spirit, and have caught a little of that spirit? It is infectious to meet with a humble chastened soul. Ah, to be stripped, and if necessary to have much removed from us, and to have our bodies afflicted, and to say, "I know it is right!" It is one of the sweetest places you can be in.

And not only so, he went farther: "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hath afflicted me". In the margin it is: "Thy judgments are righteous, and that Thou in faithfulness hath afflicted me". So there is righteousness and faithfulness in affliction, which means this, that had the Lord not afflicted David, He would neither have been righteous nor faithful to him. Now what really is the secret - for the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him we were reading (Psalm 25), and the meek will He guide in judgment and teach His way - the secret of it is this, even your sanctification. The work of redemption is complete, nothing can be added to it; but the work of sanctification is not complete. Redemption gives His people a right to heaven; sanctification makes them fit to be there. And therefore it is the judgment, the method of the Lord in affliction, to conform His people to His image, and thereby they are brought to learn more of who He is and what they are. How are we to know that God is omnipotent unless we have been brought into places where we have needed omnipotence to deliver us? How are we to know that the love of God is immutable, but to be brought into those places of which Paul speaks: "Who shall separate us from the love of ~~God~~ Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine, or peril, or sword?" No, His love is immutable. Therefore nothing can separate from it, and we shall prove it by being brought into things that threaten to separate us. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." Oh that blessed persuasion of Paul: "I am persuaded that nothing can separate". Where did he get the persuasion from? Read his history, see how the Lord dealt with him, as he told Timothy and the Corinthians, how that he was shipwrecked three times, went days and nights and neither sun, moon, nor stars appeared, how he was in danger from false brethren. Paul's religion was experimental, and that is this knowledge - "I know, O Lord, by experience, that Thy judgments are right". I know that He is too wise to err, too good to be unkind.

"And that Thou in faithfulness hath afflicted me." I feel that the best sermon that can be preached upon that point is the 3rd of Lamentations. He says: "He hath led me and brought me into darkness, and not into light...He hath turned aside my ways and pulled me in pieces; He hath made me desolate". If Jeremiah had a wife like Job had, she would say, "Curse God and die. I would not have anything to do with a God that treated me like that". But both Jeremiah and Job would endorse what David says here, "Lord, I know it is right". And so Jeremiah says, "My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord, remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me". This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope". Oh what a mystery! It

is a mystery of godliness in the work of the Spirit in an afflicted soul, and he looks back at such dealings and considers them God's mercies: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed". If He had not led us that way, we should have consumed ourselves. But He was faithful and righteous in thus hedging up our path and breaking our teeth with gravel stones, and removing our soul far off from peace. It was wisdom, faithfulness, and mercy, and so he comes to this conclusion: "O Lord, I know that Thy judgments are right. The Lord that has chastened and afflicted me and pulled me to pieces is my portion, saith my soul".

"I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right." The very expression is beautiful. You can almost look into the broken, contrite, humbled heart of David - "and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me". How can affliction be consistent with faithfulness? How can it be consistent with the love of God? Well, because we are what we are. Oh my friends, if we are given, not only to know who the Lord is, but what we are, and what it needs to sanctify us and to refine us, to separate the vile from the precious, then we shall understand that the Lord is a faithful God. "He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver." If He never put us into the fire, He would not be faithful. It is a separating process. Oh to be in the fire and say, "I know it is right. The Lord is faithful; He is dealing with me"! Where should we be without trials and afflictions? Oh how it does break up our fallow ground! How it does refine our religion! I know that it brings it into a smaller compass; it narrows things up. But it refines it. And you will find, my friends, that those who are thus taught of God, in their prayers, which we only know in public prayers, there will be much in a little, whereas before there might have been a little in much. But oh that precious little which comes out of the refiner's fire! And what a lot is destroyed and burnt up! Oh what hearers this makes, my friends, those that are gathered!

"See the suffering church of God,
Gathered from all quarters".

Yes, "I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord".

But the great point of this text is, sweet submission, to lie submissive in His hands, and know no will but His. You wont learn this as schoolboys learn their task; you wont learn it at college. "Thou hast in faithfulness afflicted me. Let, I pray Thee, Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort." Well, he expresses the same thing in different language, which will help us to see this in a right light, in the 94th Psalm: "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul". And the first comfort to a distressed sinner is this where the Lord says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord". Ah those that were in captivity had not much to encourage them, but the Lord sent them a message, and that is what David wanted here. The Lord sent the captives a message: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end". But what we need is the application of the word of truth, for the Holy Ghost to repeat them in our hearts, so that what the Scriptures declare is accomplished in our experience. "He sent His word and healed them", and I doubt not that that would

be a good word to our many afflicted friends: "I know the thoughts I think toward you". And they may be very different thoughts from what you think about yourselves as you look at your circumstances, as you look at your poor bodies. But "I know", and when He says that you will say, "Yes Lord, and I know that Thy judgments are right; but let, I pray Thee, Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort", and that "according to Thy word unto Thy servant". It is an outstanding feature of this long Psalm that there are many repetitions of that - "according to Thy word". And you are safe there, and it will give you a standing ground in prayer when you feel to have got none of your own. I felt this lately; my own case has seemed very extreme. Oh how I do need the Lord to restore my soul! But in trying to order my cause before Him the other day in secret, it was just that authority of His Word - "according to Thy Word". And it gathers in the great cloud of witnesses that have gone before. For instance, "Let Thy merciful kindness ~~come unto me~~ be for my comfort, according to Thy word"; that is, according as Thy merciful kindness was a comfort to Jacob. And Thou art the same to-day; let that same merciful kindness be for my comfort. And so faith looks at the Scriptures, at what the Lord has done. And it has authority. So you may go through the Word of God and look at the case of Joseph and those that walked in the footsteps of the flock. You may take the New Testament too, and ask the Lord to remember you with the same favour that He bears unto His dear people.

"Let, I pray Thee, Thy merciful kindness." It is the same thing as His loving-kindness, and it is "like as a father pitieth his children". It is a Father's kindness: "So the Lord pitieth them that fear Him". He knoweth our frame, He knoweth everything, He knows the way we take, and "the Lord knoweth the days of the upright", what sort of days you are passing through, whether a day of affliction or of adversity, or of bereavement, or sorrow, the Lord knows. Therefore we shall continually be brought back to that point of rest and that only comfort, that God is who and what He is.

"Let Thy tender mercies come unto me that I may live." And that declares the tender exercise of his soul; it was to live. The end of this Psalm comes to the same point: "Let my soul live, and it shall praise Thee, and let Thy judgments help me". As though to be exercised in the judgments of the Lord will keep alive the soul. And that is according to Hezekiah: "By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit". Now my friends, as we try in our little way to unfold this blessed experience, is it strange language to you? Is there a response in your troubled heart? Can you walk with David, being agreed, and walk with the Lord in agreement with Him in His dealings with you, and find that blessed response of faith: "I know it is right, Lord"? When Job was so terribly bereaved, he said: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord".

"Let Thy tender mercies come unto me." Divine compassion, tenderness. "His compassions fail not; they are new every morning". Divine compassion and tender mercy flow from the love of God in Christ. But oh what a security and safety is felt in the soul when the Lord comes with His tender mercies, speaks to the heart, brings in some sweet promise; for the promises of the Lord are unalterable. His promises are unconditional; his purposes cannot be frustrated, and His promise will never be forfeited. And therefore look at that tender

mercy in His promise: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee". And if it is a more painful affliction, as through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire - it is not a running through it quickly, but a walking through the fire, thou shalt not be burned. Oh this great Lord is in those promises! For that very reason, Job speaking from experience and in a good hope, concludes: "The righteous shall hold on his way". It is God's shall, not ours. If we say we shall hold on our way, we shall soon fall; but it is God that says it. And David here was before Him in humble sweet submission.

"According to Thy word unto Thy servant" - and the Lord may have given you a word before you enter into an affliction. I remember in 1932, when I went into hospital, there was that word:

"All thy wastes I will repair,
Thou shalt be rebuilt anew;
And in thee it shall appear
What the God of love can do".

Oh what we should miss but for sanctified trouble and affliction! Oh how the Lord smiles sometimes! You may depend upon it, that that poor man that fell among thieves, stripped and wounded and half-dead, how he felt the tender mercies and loving-kindness of that good Samaritan. That man was in such a state that he said nothing. I don't know, but I have yet to find another case where there was nothing said. Jonah in the belly of hell prayed unto the Lord, as did Jeremiah from the low dungeon. The woman with an afflicted daughter prayed, "Lord, help me". Hezekiah prayed, "O Lord! I am oppressed". But that poor man in the ditch said nothing. That may suit some of you. He could not get up and go to the Lord. The priest and the Levite were not a bit of use to him; but the Lord came and looked upon him and poured in oil and wine. And so it was just an answer to this prayer: "Let, I pray Thee, Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to Thy word unto Thy servant. Let Thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live". He wanted to live. So do I; and it is dreadful to be dead. You may be in health and prosperity and have all that heart can wish, and be dead.

Now be honest. See whether you can join with Moses or not, because it comes into this text. Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God. It is only faith that can make that choice. But I must leave it. Oh may the Lord enable us to honour and glorify Him in the fires. And what will that do? This - I know, O Lord! it is right. And what then? May He answer the prayer and grant His merciful kindness for the comfort of our afflicted friends.
