

Sermons preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Lord's day, March 4, 1962. ✓

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Morning text: Psalm cxxxii. 13, 14.

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We do need the Holy Spirit to direct us in the fear of God as we approach the solemnities of Zion. Some of you may distinctly feel your unworthiness of entering into Zion, especially when you come to read that description of a citizen of Zion in the 15th Psalm. But we are here, and I do feel, and I believe that many of you can say, that a day in the courts of the Lord is better than a thousand.

Well I have desired this morning, if the Lord would favour us notwithstanding our unworthiness, to enter into the rest of the Gospel. It is a time in the world full of peril and trouble, confusion, and chaos, and death, and evil, and that exhortation in the Psalm that we read (48th) is a very blessed contrast: "Walk about Zion, and go round about her; tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces". The world are going about the world. The ambassadors and Prime Ministers are going from one place to another, considering the power of each other, weapons of destruction, visiting the armies, navies, and air forces. But says the Lord to His people, "Go about Zion". There is a different strength there: "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks". I have felt distinctly that outside of this blessed city, there is nothing but what was outside the Ark. The Lord shut Noah and his in the Ark, and it rose above the floods, and everything outside of that Ark was in a state of destruction, and death, and confusion. And that really is the truth of things. In this world there is utter confusion, and death, and desolation, vexation, vanity; and to feel the sacred contrast, and to be gathered in spirit unto Zion is very sacred, and especially in these solemn days.

"For the Lord hath chosen Zion", that is, the church of God. It is a divine institution. The visible church is a divine institution, with all its institutions of divinely appointed laws. But the invisible church is contained in the visible. A very solemn thing to be a member of the visible church, and not of the invisible. But on the other hand there are those that are members of the invisible church that are not members of the visible. The church of God occupies a unique position in the earth, and that position Isaiah speaks of: "It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills". It is above all things. The church has its existence from an ascended exalted Redeemer, and He is exalted above every principality, and power, and dominion, and so is His church with Him. Therefore Paul to the Hebrews says: "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem". That in its fulness will be heaven. "The spirits of just men made perfect." But my friends, by the Spirit His people come there in this time state, and oh what a rest, what a strength it would be, if the Lord would permit us this day to come to Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem! Everything in Zion comes

from heaven. There is nothing comes from this world in Zion, for it is a kingdom that is not of this world at all. It is a heavenly Jerusalem. There is a coming too to the spirits of just men made perfect, as Paul shows: "Seeing therefore we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses". Those witnesses have gone before, and haven't you felt your very soul and spirit come to just men made perfect in the Gospel, in reading the Word of God? Have you never felt a union and communion with dear afflicted Job? Have you never come to the spirit of David made perfect, in what he has left behind by divine inspiration? Oh one of the most blessed things in communion by the Spirit, and fellowship with His people, is to come to the spirits of just men made perfect, to feel that vital union and contact with heaven by the communications by the Spirit from the glorious Head of grace! Zion. Paul says, "Ye are come to it", and there may be occasions when ^{you have felt} the sacred presence of the Lord and the things of His blessed Spirit, ^{so} that you have been unconscious of anybody in the chapel, and you could truly say, "I come to Zion; this is the city of the living God". "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty." "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved." Oh who can tell, who can express, the blessedness of the church of God, that church which is conducted in all things according to the covenant purposes of God!

"For the Lord hath chosen Zion." There is nothing else to be chosen in this world. There is nowhere else where He dwells in His love and grace. His dwelling in Zion is entirely different from His omnipresence in the world. It is a special presence. He the glorious Head; the church His body. The church of God is not a building, for "the Lord dwelleth not in temples made with hands". No; Zion is composed of living stones, living people dug out of nature's quarry. Zion is composed of those whom the Father sanctified in His electing love according to His foreknowledge, set them apart, and they are preserved in Jesus Christ right from the cradle to the grave. "Preserved in Jesus when my feet made haste to hell." The Lord's people are immortal until they are called by grace. "Preserved in Jesus Christ, and called" - called effectually by the Holy Spirit, and there will not be one left out. "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me. And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that of all those whom Thou hast given Me, I should lose nothing." Therefore these He gathers. The Lord Jesus was sent to gather them. That commandment was first given to the Mediator, the Lord Jesus, co-equal with the Father, who in His Person is above the law, yet in infinite love condescended to be made of a woman, to be made under the law, subject to God. "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold." But one commandment He had was, "Gather My saints unto Me", and He gathered them. Therefore this is also a commandment to His under-shepherds, the ministers of the Gospel: "Gather My saints together unto Me, those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice". And these gathered stones compose the church. I think perhaps there is no more blessed beautiful description of this gathering of the church than we have by Peter: "To whom" - that is to this blessed living Christ, this glorious Head - "to whom coming, as unto a living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ". Oh what a

sacred description of the church, and of the divine institutions in the church, and the sacred occupation of the blessed citizens of Zion!

"For the Lord hath chosen Zion", because He hath chosen His people. And the whole of it is "according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world". So that the church has its rise in the eternal decrees of Jehovah. God decreed to have a church. He decreed to create a creature capable of receiving a revelation of Himself, a creature to whom He could reveal His glory, a creature capable of being prepared to be with Him in eternal glory. That is the ultimate end for which God did anything outside of Himself, the end for which He created anything; and if we were created to that glorious end, oh how unspeakably blessed is our case, blessed to have been born, "born to prove the wonders of redeeming love"! If this is so, then our lives will be conformed to His image, and the end for which we live will be the end for which He formed us anew. We might well examine ourselves as to what is really the aim, and object, and end of our existence.

"For the Lord hath chosen Zion." Oh sacred place! Inimitable it is; there is nothing like it. There is also this in the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of His people, there is an agreement. All that is in Zion is from Christ. The fulness that is in Christ Jesus is to be emptied into the church, into the experience of salvation, and an accomplishment of that salvation in each of His people. Therefore there is a river - bottomless eternal river, and that is God Himself. And there are streams, and they "make glad the city of God". They flow exclusively to Zion, and they are the streams of all that pertained to salvation. The streams of the fulness of the Gospel, streams from the river of life. Oh to sit in Zion, and to be solemnly and spiritually conscious of the flowing in of those streams which make glad the city of God!

"For the Lord hath chosen Zion." Well, His people chose it: "My people shall be willing in the day of My power". In the 31st of Jeremiah you have a very sacred account of how the Lord brings His people to Zion: "They shall come with weeping, and with supplication will I lead them; and they shall ask their way to Zion with their faces thitherward". This is a mark in experience. Some of you perhaps cannot say the day or the time, or any outstanding circumstance by which you know that there was a beginning of grace in your heart; but do you remember when your face, your affections, your heart, because of a sense of your need, of your deep sins, was turned to Zion? Whereas once you asked your way to the picture palace, the theatre, that dance hall, went with the multitude to do iniquity, the time came when you asked your way to Zion. I believe that that is a mark in ~~my poor little experience~~ my poor little experience. Yes, those days are very sacred to me, and they have answered the devil more than once, especially when brought very low, and it was suggested that my religion was simply an official religion; that "if you had not to preach, you would have no interest in the Scriptures or prayer, but because you have to preach your religion is just official". Well, I pointed the devil back to those days, when I was anything but official. I was an unknown, insignificant, troubled sinner, and I wanted salvation, and I walked those country roads when I trust I had opened eyes to see things as God sees them, saw myself as He saw me, and I wanted God, needed salvation, and felt underneath it such a secret drawing to the house of God.

"For the Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation." In the work of grace in the soul, there is a very sacred harmony with the purposes of God, His mind, His thoughts. Everything that is wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost is reciprocated. It will go back to Him; it is His own work. And therefore where there are holy desires, the desires of those that fear Him, where there is living faith, then the desires of the Lord and the desires of your soul will be the same. Beautifully Isaiah expresses this. He says: "Yea, in the way of Thy judgments have we waited for Thee; the desire of our soul is to Thy name, and to the remembrance of Thee". Oh blessed agreement between Christ and those who are taught of His Spirit!

"The Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation." There is another very blessed thing in this, that what is spoken concerning the church of God, Zion, is spoken of, and belongs to in its entirety, to every child of God, to every living stone in the building. I wish some that are tempest-tossed and in conflict might receive the comfort of this, that everything the Word of God speaks concerning His people from Genesis to Revelation belongs to each one of His people in the entirety of it. It is no small truth.

Therefore this is true, this the Lord says concerning everyone of His people - and the "foundation stands sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His". As many people here as are the Lord's, this is true of them, not typical, not merely a figure, but absolutely true, that as we read this verse, "The Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it" - the Lord would go along these pews and stop at everyone whom He knows to be His, and say: "This soul is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it". It makes the church a sacred place. Everything else fades away into insignificance; the fine gold of this world looks dim.

"For the Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation." It is a wonderful thing, the temple was a type of the church, and it was a type of the Lord Jesus. That it can be a type of both is very blessed. For the church is Christ, and Christ is the church. She is complete in Him. Such is the union between Christ and the church, it is so real, that it is as the Head to the body, as a branch to the Vine, as the Foundation to the superstructure, as the Husband to the wife; so that all that Christ is and all that He has, is the church's, and we might say, is the church itself. Oh this blessed union between Christ and the church, and the fulness that is in Him! The concluding verse of the 1st of Ephesians is very beautiful. The Apostle says there: "And hath put all things under His feet and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all". Not only His body which receiveth from His fulness, but "His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all". That fulness which it pleased the Father should dwell in Christ is the fulness of the church. It is not the fulness of His Deity, of His eternity; but it is the fulness of grace that He received in the covenant for His people. The fulness of Christ intrinsically as He is infinite in His Person cannot be communicated, but the fulness that was in Him was communicable, and that fulness fills the church. It is a fulness of grace, and that all-sufficient grace that His people will need to save and sanctify, and be their sufficiency and strength through the whole of the wilderness. A

fulness of divine life communicated to them whereby they live a spiritual life, a fulness of infinite merit, a fulness of righteousness to perfection. Oh the church is complete in Him!

"For the Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation." Now the Being of God cannot be contained, because it is infinite. "Thus saith the high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy. I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a humble and contrite spirit." Oh how sacred if our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost, if Christ dwells in our hearts by faith as the Hope of glory! So He dwells in Zion; it is His habitation. "This is My rest for ever." His rest. He does not rest in His wonderful beautiful works of creation. He rests from them, not in them: "He rested from all His works". But He rests in His love, rests in Zion. And this rest is a rest of love and complacency, of divine satisfaction. He sees in the church the travail of His soul and is satisfied. All the travail of Christ's soul, His sovereign love, the shame, and spitting, and ignominy, and blessed death, He sees the travail of His soul in the benefits derived to His people from His coming, doing, suffering, overcoming, and His glorious resurrection and ascension on high; He sees it in the church. And He rests - "this is My rest for ever". And this rest is a rest of complacency, that is to say, He has no other object; and as I think I said some time since, that this resting for ever in Zion shows that Zion is the terminus of all the divine acts of Jehovah, all the emanations and outflowings of His purposes, decrees, and salvation terminated in the church. They are designed for the church, and when they find a sinner's heart, they have found their terminus, and the atonement of Christ terminates in the conscience of a sinner in the forgiveness of all his sins, in the justification of his person, and the Lord rests; He is satisfied. He rests in His love too because He knows those that are His. There is no other object that He loves. He never diverts His love. There is a divine sacred jealousy in it. He will not brook a rival. He rests; He is content. They are accepted in Him, and what His Father says concerning His dear Son is true of His people: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; and His people are accepted in the Beloved, and therefore it is to be said to each of them: "This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased".

Oh what a sacred thing it is to be of the household of faith! If it is true of us, "ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God". Well, may the Lord give us to feel the witness of His Spirit in our own hearts that we are no more strangers and foreigners. We were once. Amen.

Evening Sermon: Text: Psalm cxxxii.14,15.

That expression that we have in the 33rd of Isaiah is both solemn and blessed: "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities". It is only faith, under the enlightening of the Spirit, that can look upon the solemnities of Zion. It is a beautiful expression when you connect it with that promise, "I will gather the sorrowful for the solemn assembly". There will be a suitability in the condition of the Lord's people wrought there by divine discipline and teaching, for the solemnities of Zion. If we look outside of these solemnities, we see the vanities of this world, the laughers of the fool, which are as the crackling of thorns under a pot - emptiness. But in Zion there are the things of God. All is eternal, incorruptible, and that fadeth not away. The things provided in Zion are exactly the same as that provision which shall be in heaven. There is nothing in the work of the Spirit, nothing in the provision of the Gospel, but what is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. And it is a great thing to consider. Not merely to consider it from an external view-point, but to consider it as it may have a connection with what the Spirit has wrought in us in the sense of needs.

"This is My rest for ever, here will I dwell; for I have desired it." This is the Lord speaking here, the glorious One, He who is the brightness of His Father's glory, He who is co-equal with God, heaven's highest glory. Yet says He, "This" - His church, Zion - "is My rest for ever". It is an amazing thing that this great God the Son needs a rest; but the rest here is divine satisfaction. There is nothing that the Lord can rest in but in His own work, His own institutions in the church of God. There is nothing else that He has any satisfaction in. And comparatively His people will feel the same. You consider it, those of you who want to know whether you have any evidence of being a citizen of Zion. Do you feel, looking honestly into your heart and feeling what is going on there - can you in your measure say concerning the house of God and the provision there, the Gospel and what it declares, Christ and who He is - can you say, "This is my rest"? Of course the Lord said, "This is My rest for ever"; and it is true of His people. It could never be true unless the Lord Himself is eternal. So that His people at times can say, "This is my rest for ever", because if it is your rest here in the kingdom of grace, it will be the same rest in heaven; only there we shall have no infirmities. Here we have the treasure in an earthen vessel, in a poor body of sin and death in which works every evil; but the treasure is there. But in heaven, according to the promise, "Who shall change our vile body and fashion it like unto His glorious body", there will be no infirmities, no old age, no grey hairs, no weaknesses; and therefore it is a very sacred thought and true, that what the blessed Spirit does in the church in communications from its glorious Head, will produce in the soul that which is heavenly. Therefore it is called the heavenly Jerusalem. I feel warranted to say that whatever we receive from heaven by the Holy Ghost in our souls, is the earnest of heaven. It has heaven in it in the nature of it. You will find that the things of God, the assemblies of the saints, the preaching of the Gospel, and the Gospel that is preached, will be your rest, because it is all in Christ Jesus. He is the only rest of a sinner. David saw everything in it, an eternal kingdom, and an inheritance even here.

Oh the people of God have an inheritance here below, and that is in Christ: "In whom also we have an inheritance"!

But oh what strength of grace one needs to be occupied in these unspeakable things that must be spoken of, in setting forth these unseen things which faith alone can see! Sometimes it seems almost too much for a poor, weak, human constitution to stand up under a sense of the glory, eternity, and majesty of God and His things which are equally eternal and majestic. Yet you love them because of the need of them. Nothing else can satisfy. And so as you sit at times under the truth you can say, "This is my rest for ever". David gathered up the whole in one parcel and said: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple". Can we say that in our measure? There are many declarations we can turn into questions as we examine ourselves, and if we have a living faith, it will turn many things into prayers and into questions, that answers to them may give us a token for good, that we may know where we stand for eternity.

"This is My rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it", saith the Lord concerning the church, and say His dear people who are attracted to this living foundation as living stones. It is Christ's life that attracts. We have upon occasions used that illustration as you know, and it seems to me a very solemn discrimination, that if you put a powerful magnet in mixed brass and iron rivets, you will find that the iron will cleave to the magnet, and the brass will remain unaffected and untouched; and we may well examine ourselves to see whether we are brass or iron, whether there is that in Christ as revealed in the Gospel that is a mighty attraction to us in our hearts, not in our heads or imaginations, but because there is everything in Him that is opposite to us. And you will rest - rest your weary soul at times upon Him. Oh it is wonderful to hear the word, "Come; come unto Me"; "Ho everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters", and for the blessed Spirit to influence our hearts and compel us to come in, to come to the throne of grace, to seek those things which accompany salvation.

"I will abundantly bless her provision." It is therefore for us, as far as ability is given, to speak of the provision that God has made in the church. That provision in the first place is Christ Himself. You remember that when Isaac was going up the mountain with Abraham, he saw the wood and the fire, but asked, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering? Abraham said unto Isaac: "The Lord will provide Himself a Lamb for a burnt offering". What a providing, what a provision! Therefore the first and the last, and every provision in the church is Christ Himself. Oh it is a great thing to know Him, and to be brought into such a condition as to be hopeless, ruined, and in despair without Him! "I will abundantly bless her provision", which is the Lord Jesus Christ and all that He has become, and all the work that He has finished that His Father gave Him to do. So we read in the Proverbs: "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars, she hath killed her beasts, she hath mingled her wine". It is redemption. If by faith we can look at this great provision that God has made in the church, the necessity for the nature of that provision is in the nature of the necessity of salvation. The provision is suitable in two opposite ways. It is suitable to the dignity and

glory of God. It is a banquet, a king's provision. "Upon this mountain there shall be a feast of fat things, of wines on the lees well refined, of fat things full of marrow" - the best food for kings and princes. It is suitable to the dignity and glory of Christ.

It is suitable in the very opposite way and is only applicable to ragged beggars, filthy lepers, the chief of sinners. Oh blessed mysterious provision! It brings out that truth that we sometimes mention, that this two-way suitability shows us that opposites meet in the Gospel. There is an antithesis in the Gospel that is very blessed. Extremes meet, and meet in the dear Redeemer. If those extremes met anywhere else but in Him, it would be the destruction of the sinner. So that this glorious kingly provision is suitable and needed only by the very worst of sinners, helpless ruined sinners.

"I will abundantly bless her provision." Therefore in the first place it is the Person and work of the Lord Jesus, and in Him there is provided a righteousness. There were those who, being ignorant of God's righteousness, went about to establish their own. And that is what all men do naturally. But what a mercy it is for that righteousness to be turned into filthy rags, and comeliness into corruption, and then to behold the righteousness that is in Christ Jesus. Oh the beauty of it! It is the wedding garment in which the bride shall be brought to the Bridegroom: "She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework"; and it is provided. And if there are some in the highways and hedges with poor worn-out shoes and ragged clothes, hunger-bitten, there is good ground to compel them to come in. There is a change of raiment. There are unsearchable riches, and they are for bankrupts; beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning.

This abundantly blessing the provision shows two things. It shows the abundance and all-sufficiency of the provision, and it also shows us this - its efficacy when applied to the most malignant disease, that there will be an abundant, a perfect cure. So that it is abundant in the supply of it, and it is abundant in the efficacy of it; and the Lord will bless both. He will abundantly pardon. He has abundant mercy, He has plenteous redemption, He has infinite wisdom, everlasting righteousness, unsearchable riches. Notwithstanding that our very being is impregnated with sin and ruin, and we are in universal destitution in self, yet such is the abundance of this provision, that it is more than we need. You look at the atonement of Christ. What a provision that is! In the Hebrews it is beautifully shown how abundant it is in the blessing and efficacy of it: "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God". I believe those three words were made a real anchorage to me on one or two occasions. This is the abundance. Here is the slain beast. Here is a suffering Saviour in His precious death, in all the merits of it; and therefore when this is revealed to a sinner, that sinner can look at the worst of things, not so much outside of him which does not concern him, but the worst of things within, the worst of his death, the worst of his life, things that cause confusion and shame, and then look at the precious blood of Christ, and looking at the two things - "how much more". I believe in the 5th of Romans we have that "much more" repeated three times. But where we need to have it repeated, my friends, is in our

own experience. "I will abundantly bless her provision."

Well, not only is there that provision in Christ Jesus, but there is the provision of the institutions of the church. As for instance, what a provision is the Word of God. What a provision is the appointment of the ministry of the Gospel. What a provision in the church is prayer. What a provision in the church is the singing of His praises, for that has a spiritual warrant and example, even at the Lord's Supper: "They sang a hymn and went out". These things are mainly the provision of God's house. His Word, the divinely ordained preaching of the Gospel, and prayer and singing of His praises; and He abundantly blesses each of those institutions, and then by His Spirit He brings those who are thus abundantly blessed to the provision of the ordinances of His house, sometimes makes those ordinances like a banqueting house, and the King sits at the table.

But now has He blessed this provision of His house abundantly to us? And take that abundantly upon each branch of this provision. The Word of God. Why, everything is there. It is sufficient to thoroughly furnish a man unto all good works. There is nothing needed outside these two covers for salvation. It is profitable for doctrine, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works. And oh how sometimes the Lord does abundantly bless a chapter, abundantly bless one verse, or it may be one word which the blessed Spirit takes, so that you join with Jeremiah: "Thy word was found, and I did eat it, and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart". Look at the promises that fill the Scriptures. Everyone of them must be fulfilled. Then the precepts - everyone of them must be walked in. The blessed invitations will reach everyone of the Lord's dear people.

"I will abundantly bless the provision of thy house." Then there is the ministry of the Gospel. This is one of the great provisions in the church of God. A very solemn office it is, and if this is not abundantly blessed, there is something wrong in the pulpit or in the pew. The sower went forth to sow, and the seed was good enough, but three of the grounds were wrong. I feel that that parable of the sower is exceedingly searching, especially for those of us who have lived for many years in a profession of religion. But the Lord has promised to bless the preaching of the Gospel. "As the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth that it may bring forth and bud; so is My word which goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void." Has the Lord ever blessed the ministry to you? I am speaking of the ministry generally. It is difficult for me to speak about, seeing there is so little apparent fruit. But the Lord knows where the seed has fallen and is secretly germinating in some hearts. But He will abundantly bless the preaching of the Gospel, and through it save those that believe.

And there is an abundance in the preaching of the Gospel. Paul speaks of it in the Acts. The Lord said, "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister...to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance amongst them which are sanctified, by faith that is in Me". What an abundant blessing upon preaching! Take heed what ye hear, and how ye hear. ~~This is~~

This is the purpose of preaching. If a minister has no evidence of that fruit and effect to his ministry, where is there any evidence of his commission to preach? If this is never effected through the preaching, the man has no right in the pulpit. But I am not going to leave it there. What about hearers? If that is to be the effect of preaching and there is evidence that the Spirit is in the pulpit, but these effects are never accomplished in you, what are you to say with respect to your hearing? You must be one of the three wrong ones. You might say, "Well, that is a very harsh thing to say". But I would say it faithfully and affectionately. Can it be otherwise? To my mind the provision, and the blessing on the provision of the Gospel, you will see in Acts xxvi.16, and if you examine yourselves and all the hundreds of sermons you have heard, and see whether anything in that has been accomplished in your soul.

Then there is the provision of prayer. Prayer is appointed to convey blessings. But I have felt thankful to believe, and to believe because there is a spiritual sense and discernment of a praying people in this place. I know that there is not a lot of joining the church. We would be glad for the Lord to increase us with the increase of God, but that is not first. Oh my friends, I was reading the other day of Philpot. He said, "It is the easiest thing in the world to be baptized and join a church". If the Lord gathers His people in, it is a most blessed thing, and I pray to Him for it. Oh but the great thing is to be possessed of that divine life which is the life of faith and the life of prayer! Prayer by which there are communications from the fulness of Christ. "Christ has blessings to impart." And yet there is an encouragement to trembling sinners:

"Why art thou afraid to come?
Why afraid to tell thy case?
He will not pronounce thy doom;
Smiles are seated on His face."

Now you look at the abundance of it. It says in the Ephesians, that He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think". That is an abundant blessing. Oh that provision of prayer in the church! That will encourage prayer - prayer for the church, for its prosperity, for its upbuilding, for its peace.

"I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread." Poor, they may be naturally; perhaps most are. But more particularly, poor in spirit. It is a mercy, whatever we possess, to be poor without Christ. It is a mercy if we can look at the whole universe and say honestly:

"There's nothing here can satisfy;
Not gold, nor house, nor land".

"I will satisfy her poor with bread." Faith has a gracious dissatisfaction in everything short of Christ, and the provision that He has made in Zion is complete. Nothing else can satisfy. There is an aching void - I think one of the most telling and beautiful expressions in our hymn-book: "An aching void the world can never fill". Be thankful if you have got it. I have wished sometimes the void would ache. It is a blessed painful ache. But we must leave it. Amen.