

Sermon preached by Mr. F. Gosden at "Galeed" Chapel, Brighton
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Morning Service.

1053

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Psalm 71. v 1-3.

"In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be put to confusion. Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape; incline thine ear unto me, and save me. Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort;..."

When a man is under the influence of the Holy Spirit, you can tell by his prayers where he is in his soul experience. This Psalm, as most of the Psalms, is a blessed prayer. Why, you can feel the very throbbing of the life of God in David's soul as you read these Psalms. A mercy, my friends, if we have a measure of the same life in our souls.

According to the prayer David feared being put to confusion. He evidently was under reproach and was under the power of the wicked, and he was being pursued by the unrighteous and cruel man.

It is a great thing, my friends, when the Holy Spirit indites prayer, and therefore prayer is genuine. Take for instance the 69th Psalm, the preceding Psalm - and you will see there that the Psalmist felt to be sinking in deep mire where there was no standing, and he had come into deep waters where the floods were overflowing him, and therefore, his prayer gave evidence of the exercise of his soul. "As for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time"; and what was his prayer? "Deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink, let me be delivered from them that hate me - and out of deep waters - let not the water-floods overflow me." So that his prayer manifested the exercise and condition of his soul's experience - and so it will be.

O what a mercy it is to be enabled in simple and Godly sincerity and in faith to go to the Lord with just what we are, and pour out our heart before Him in just those things that try us and exercise our hearts! To bring to Him, ourselves, our sins, our worst condition, our fears. To bring to Him our enemies for Him to overcome. Obstacles for Him to remove. Crooked things for Him to straighten. O the prayer of faith is a prayer of simplicity - and the "Feeblest prayer, if faith be there, exceeds all empty notion"!

But the commencement of the prayer shows the foundation upon which David stood. "In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust". He had that faith to believe that God is what He is, and we shall never pray by the Spirit unless we have that same faith in God. We must know Him. We cannot pray aright to an unknown God. Now that may try some who may say, "I wish I did know Him, but I have no reason really to say that I do know that great God; and one evidence of your knowledge of Him will be your prayers - then you may say, "I wish I could pray". Well, prayer is "the upward glancing of an eye, the falling of a tear" - and if you feel your deep need, if at times you feel the burden of your guilt, the depravity of your nature, and you groan before the Lord, it is prayer; and you may depend upon it, it is with the Lord a greater influence than all the notions of an empty professor or proud pharisee.

"In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust". And the Lord knoweth those that put their trust in Him. He knows that they trust Him because they bring everything to Him, for Him to take as a man will take his money to the Bank and entrust his money there, so you will take to the Lord everything, that He may be your refuge.

"In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust." and This trust of faith, in the first place, is in the infinite Being of God - and that you will feel - feel a distinct connexion between the infinite Being of God and your need of salvation. Though, at the same time, you will realise your insignificance and less than nothingness. O it is a mystery that there is a people so united unto the Lord by the Holy Spirit that they are members of His mystic Body, and therefore, derive everything from their glorious Head! In a spiritual sense the Lord Jesus is the wisdom, the righteousness, the sanctification, the redemption, the strength, the hope, everything that His people can need.

"In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be put to confusion". This he feared. Some of you may have feared being put to confusion before your enemies, before the world, and I feel that here this is inferred. As Joshua said, "What wilt Thou do with Thy great name if the people were put to confusion before their enemies, what wilt Thou do with Thy great name?" - and so David says here, "Lord, I put my trust in Thee, let me never be put to confusion." It is a very real fear, and you have not a real religion if you have not been brought here; all the words of the Scripture will have no meaning. But have you ever feared that you would be ashamed of your hope and that you will be put to confusion before the Church and before the world? There is enough in us to bring us to confusion, and it is only of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed and that we are not put to shame. That is the meaning of the word here, "never be put to shame". It is a wonder to some of us that we have got thus far through life without being made a public disgrace, without bringing ourselves to absolute confusion. I could not go by any prison and point my finger to those criminals. All I could say is, it is of the Lord's mercy that I am not there.

"In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust, let me never be put to confusion". Deliver me in Thy righteousness". He looks out from himself. A praying man always does, and that is the mercy of it. O we are foolish enough to look within and try and find something to bring to the Lord! If our sins were not so black, if our nature was not so corrupt as it is. But my friends, have we come to the Lord as Toplady did, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling"?

"Deliver me in Thy righteousness". It is a relief to look away from self and to have the eye of faith to look to the Lord Jesus, and to see in Him a fullness all divine, a fullness of infinite merit, of grace, a fullness of strength, of infinite wisdom, of righteousness - and to go out, to go out unto Him in your very soul and to find contact with Him as did the woman with an issue of blood. Beautiful narrative that is. She said that she knew within herself that she was healed of her plague - and the Lord said exactly the same thing - He knew in Himself that virtue had gone out of Him. O what there was in that contact, my friends - and that is what we need. That is what we need in divine worship, and nothing else really will be of any use to us. It is only that contact that gives power, communicates power and life. "Deliver me in Thy righteousness". He had none of his own. O there is an attraction in Christ! But there would be no attraction in Him, not even in all that He is, were it not that it is there as He is the Mediator to be communicated to those that come unto God through Him.

It has been sometimes a great encouragement to me - and I sink very low - the unspeakable gift of God in the Person of His dear Son - "and how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things," that that full Christ is made available for poor sinners - and this is the result of infinite wisdom, goodness, mercy and grace.

"Deliver me in Thy righteousness and cause me to escape"; therefore he was under captivity. What this particular Psalm refers to in his experience we are not told, but the interesting history of David is full of instruction. Nearly all of his Psalms come out from tribulation and persecution and trial and affliction. "And cause me to escape" - and this word of God is to all His people - and you will be brought into places where this prayer will fit your case - and this prayer where it does fit your case and comes out of your heart is as much your prayer as it was David's. You can pray as you read the Word of God if the Spirit is with you.

Have you ever found your heart praying as you read the Word of God? you will not unless you are brought into the same conditions and position and circumstances, in the same depths, pursued by the same enemies. But it is very sweet to read the Word of God and find that the Spirit interprets the Word in your own heart as your prayer.

"Deliver me in Thy righteousness and cause me to escape". It might be some of you are in a position from which you cannot escape yourself, a temptation, but He has promised with the temptation to make a way of escape. You may be in some difficulty, your pathway hedged up. You may have that before you which causes you much consternation and fear. "Cause me to escape". O it will enlarge your heart as by the Spirit you read the prayers of David! "Incline thine ear unto me and save me". There is something very simple and childlike in this petition. "Incline thine ear unto me," bow down thine ear unto me, O Thou exalted Intercessor, High Priest, in Thy divine compassion! Bow down thine ear, incline thine ear unto me." Sometimes He seems to be so far off, seems as though your prayers will never reach Him.

"Incline thine ear unto me, and save me". Save me from all my present extremities, from my enemies; save me from the greatest enemy, even myself. Save me from the power of my own nature. My friends, we will tremble at ourselves if we really know the terrible recklessness of sin. Why it has no limitations except what God puts upon it. Those extreme evils and cruelties and murders and the terrible things that are happening in the world today my friends are in our nature. Have you ever felt that you need to be saved more from yourself than anything else in the world. I can say so without hesitation. There is nothing I am so afraid of as I am of myself - and the Lord is beginning to teach me a little of what I am - but He never leaves that teaching just there. He will always teach you what He is, otherwise we should be in despair. If I was only told what I am without Christ, what I am just as I am in my nature, why my friends I could not bear myself, I should not dare to come into the pulpit. But when the Lord in His mercy does reveal a little of what He is in the Gospel, it won't make sin light, no; but it will show you this way of escape. "Deliver me in Thy righteousness, and cause me to escape - from myself - and save me". Then this prayer will cover all the salvations that we need, and we need many salvations. The main thing is the salvation of our soul; and that through the Lord Jesus Christ in all His Person and work and suffering and death and resurrection. But we need saving every day. To uphold us, to preserve our going out and our coming in. But the part of the text that was more upon my mind was this: "Be Thou my strong habitation whereunto I may continually resort".

"Habitation". The Lord has condescended to make Himself to His people a refuge, a covert from the storm, a high tower, a rock; but there is something in "Habitation" that is more than that. It is a home. The first verse of the 90th Psalm beautifully points to what this habitation is. "Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations". This is the habitation of His people. The Lord Himself. In the main He manifests Himself as their habitation in three places. He is their habitation as He is that true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man. Then the Lord in the Church is the habitation of His people: "Lord I have loved the habitation of Thy house, the place where thine honour dwelleth"; and finally, heaven is their habitation. "He led them forth by the right way that they might go to a city of habitation".

We should, as helped, look at the prayer, "Be thou my strong habitation whereunto I may continually resort" - Or to which I may retreat. This shows that there is a going out, as it were, according to that word in John - "To go in and go out and find pasture". To my mind that is what good Watts meant when he wrote that beautiful hymn:-

"Oh God our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast -

- and it will be a waste howling wilderness -

"And our eternal home;".

A habitation is a home, a home where there is provision and comfort and friends and communion. "Be thou my strong habitation." It is good my friends to be made childlike. "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom". Well, children, when they get into any trouble or difficulty are full of fear when they are abroad; the first thing that they want is to be taken home. So you will find in your experience, whatever you come into contact with, as we must as we are in the world; and have to do with it, and compete with it, there will be a continual need to retreat unto the Lord Himself.

"Be Thou my strong habitation whereunto I may continually retreat". We need a strong habitation because of our enemies. Of what use would the Lord be to us if He was not what He is? O how suitable this is to a poor trembling, weak pursued, sinner! "What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee", said this same good man. A strong home - and everything then in that home is omnipotent. Everything in Christ is invincible. It is a home wherein there is grace invincible, reigning grace, a home wherein there is provision in Christ, unsearchable riches in Him; and if we are real pilgrims and have the life of God in our souls it is a life which can only be maintained by Him, a living soul which can only be nourished by Him. O to live a life of faith upon the Son of God! So that in the first place this prayer - "Be Thou my strong habitation", suggests that David desired this in all the conflict that he was in, as pursued by Saul and his enemies, driven often from the sanctuary.

"Be Thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort." "Casting all your care upon Him for He careth for you". The strength, the spiritual strength that is in Christ, to go to Him in prayer is to resort unto this strong habitation. It is suitable for weak people, it is the strength of His righteousness, the strength of His Person. If He were not God's eternal Son, then the fullness of the Godhead would not be in Him bodily. To go to Him in your ignorance, to Him who is infinite in wisdom; to go to Him burdened with guilt and to know the strength and power of His sin-atonement sacrifice. Why my friends, you will find this and it is a consolation, you may find it in the day time, in your difficulties, and resort unto this strong habitation. To pray your way through impossibilities, through enemies lively and strong - and when things come into your life, astonishing things, tribulations, calamities, to be able to retreat, to find this home in Christ Jesus - and the great thing in a home is love. That mantle of love which does not excuse sin, but which brings forth that blessed Redeemer.

"Be Thou my strong habitation whereunto I may continually resort". We shall continually need Him. Then the house, the Church of God is a strong habitation. The Church of God is impregnable because it is built upon Christ the Rock. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, to the city of the living God" In the last days shall the house of God be above the mountains and the hills; the Church of God is above the world; everything in the Church is eternal, proceeds from Christ Himself. "Be Thou my strong habitation". Christ is everything in the Church. Everything we are occupied in in worship is Christ Himself, the whole Scriptures - as we sing, "The written and the incarnate Word, in all things are the same". Immutability, infallibility is in the Church of God. The work of the Holy Ghost is infallible - and have you not found from time to time you have resorted, you have come to Zion with your burdens, felt a relief and thanked God for the Sanctuary and have confessed with David - "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, the place where thine honour dwelleth." His things are heavenly, divine, eternal; and they are to be known, felt, tasted, seen.

I believe there are some here who just feel that your concerns in this life are important, duties, responsibilities are important, but they are different. All natural responsibilities and cares are different from that which is spiritual; and have you not felt a relief in coming to the house of God? Difficult it is to express. Some of you know it - how with joy you hasten to the place - you may feel burdened and troubled and bring your burdens and troubles into the Sanctuary and find it to be a strong habitation. O the strength of immutable love, mercy joined with power; grace which alone can abound over sin, grace which is sufficient in every time of need!

Also, a strong habitation in the house of God because of the nature of the provision there. For instance, the Word of God, what a strength it is; "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Word shall not pass away". It is indestructible and it is the Word of the living God, it must be fulfilled - not one jot nor tittle but what will be fulfilled of the Word of God; and when the Holy Spirit in Zion takes of the things of Christ revealed in the Scriptures and brings them into your heart in all their unsearchable riches, fills you with His Gospel and His Grace, communicates His life and lifts upon you the light of His blessed countenance so that you see light in His light; and unites you to Him, gives you a blessed hope of Glory; strengthens you out of Zion and sends help from heaven itself; O what a habitation Christ is in the Church!

"Be Thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort". Well Heaven is a habitation. "He led them forth by the right way"; and if you take notice of that 107th Psalm you will see the need of these first two verses: "In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust, let me never be put to confusion". Look what they passed through, look how low they were brought, how near to death, how they were bound in affliction and iron. How they went down to the sea to do business in deep waters and therefore, they needed the Lord, His deliverances to cause them to escape - and how often, repeatedly, continually they resorted to this strong habitation. "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses." O that beautiful Psalm! It takes in this - "Be Thou my strong habitation whereunto I may continually resort". Continually - through that Psalm - "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble"; and you will resort unto this strong habitation in your trouble; and you will need these deliverances; and He delivered them in His own righteousness. But heaven is a habitation; and He leads His people forth by the right way to heaven, otherwise we should never get there; and while He does lead them in a way of tribulation and distress, brings them often into darkness and not into light, yet my friends, He has provided the Sanctuary of the Church, the house of God, and there gives them earnest of heaven itself.

I believe in my little way I have felt that connexion between the presence of the Lord and the influence of the Holy Ghost in the heart in the midst of the assembly of His saints, and heaven itself - and it is a correct influence. We have said, and it is worthy of repetition, that what the Holy Ghost does in your heart here; and the Church is a divine institution, therefore, the manifestations of Christ to your soul, when you behold His beauty; when you feel that inexpressible drawing of the attractions of Christ, is a part of heaven begun below. But what a strong habitation heaven will be. There will be no enemies enter there. Nothing that defileth or maketh a lie - "A holy, happy place, where sin no more defiles". But O the trials, the sinkings, the many fears! My friends, I have feared many, many times that I shall fit myself for the bottomless pit. But it is an amazing sight and feeling when the Lord shows to such a self-destroyed sinner that He can and is fitting such a one for Glory. Yes, "the hope that such a day will come, makes e'en the captives portion sweet". "Be Thou my strong habitation whereunto I may continually resort". Yes, you will have to continually go to Him. Well, may the Lord give us this prayer and answer it.