

Notes of a sermon preached by Mr. F. Gosden at "Ebenezer", Clapham  
on 28th. March, 1962

Hymns; 1131, 1109, 683    Reading: Psalm 102    Text: Psalm 102.16-18

"When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. This shall be written for the generation to come; and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD."

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We are not told who was the author of this Psalm. It does not matter; it is a prayer, the prayer of faith. I think perhaps I have never seen so clear a distinction made between the frailty of the creature and the glorious eternity of God as is in this Psalm. You will find the first eleven verses are spoken in the first person entirely; it is "my prayer" and "my days are consumed like smoke", my bones, "my heart is smitten, and withered like grass", and it is not merely physical. That is true, but according to the whole tenor of the Psalm it took in his whole soul and body, he saw himself to be just what he was. O you can almost see the Psalmist's eyes, visualise them suddenly look up. He turns from himself, he concludes his own condition, "My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass. But thou, O LORD". There is a blessed experience in it, a poor, frail creature crushed before the moth, confessing what he is to the Lord, gets a sudden sense of the Majesty and eternity and immutability and divine sovereignty of Jehovah. Not only so, but through the Psalm you will notice that this revelation of the being of God to the Psalmist was his comfort. "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come."

There is a set time for everything that the Lord does. The third chapter of Ecclesiastes is a beautiful chapter. I think sometimes we do not sufficiently read Ecclesiastes and Proverbs. You are acquainted with that third chapter concerning all the times and as David said, "My times are in Thy hands". Whatsoever the Lord doeth is done for ever, nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it, He doeth it that men should fear before Him. There is a time for every purpose under the sun. It would be our comfort if we were led more to consider that the Lord's goings are prepared as the morning. God's dear Son came forth from the covenant of grace where all the decrees and purposes of God were established

and He came forth and His goings were prepared as the morning and that with regard to the salvation of every individual given to Him in the covenant of grace, so that there is a set time to favour Zion. Naturally we look at things as they appear in an extraordinary way and we become very cast down; diminishing congregations, closing of chapels, foolishly we are inclined to think that the whole thing is coming to nothing. That is unbelief and the devil will not be slow to say that it is so, but the truth of it is, "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come." We do not know what set time the Lord has to favour Zion. If it should be according to His purpose in the covenant of grace that in 1963 there should be ten thousand babies born whose names are in the Lamb's Book of Life there will be a reviving, there will be ten thousand people called by grace, "All that the Father giveth Me SHALL come"; nothing can alter it, nothing can frustrate those purposes and I feel it would be for our encouragement if we were led more to look at the secret purposes of the eternal Jehovah. We are apt to look at the confusion of things in the world, as they appear. It looks as though the devil has control, that his kingdom has come, but it has not. The Lord shall laugh at them, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision." (Ps.2.1-4) He sees the nations as a drop in a bucket. It is good to see light in God's light. You get the two things here. Here is a poor trembling man whose heart is "smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread". He says, "My days are like a shadow that declineth"; it would be a great thing to come out of self to this infinite God.

"When the Lord shall build up Zion" when His set time is come, "He shall appear in His glory". "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it". That word does not say, Except the Lord build the house nobody else will, there are attempts but they labour in vain that build it. Therefore it brings us to this prayer of the prophet, "Let Thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children" (Ps.90.16) and he prays also that the means of grace shall be blessed to this end, "Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish

thou it", - establish the work of the ministry, for the Holy Ghost to give the increase, to grant the word free course, to be glorified in the salvation of the hearers, that the Gospel preached might come in divine power and the Holy Ghost. "When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in His glory". Zion, the church of God, is His dwelling place, the only place in this world where He dwells graciously, His presence in the church is different from His omnipresence in the world. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty, He will save, He will rest in His love".

"When the Lord shall build up Zion." In building up Zion He will fulfil the promises. There are promises made to national Zion and they are being very quickly fulfilled. God's purposes concerning His national people are ripening fast, but the thing of greatest importance is His spiritual Zion which is composed of living stones. built upon the living foundation Christ Jesus, "To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men but chosen of God and precious". O it will be a mercy, my friends, to have in our experience that evidence of divine love by being attracted unto Christ by the Holy Spirit. "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence" "(Hosea 3.14,15) It is a blessed experience to be brought to Zion. "When the Lord shall build up Zion He shall appear in His glory", so that it will be to no spiritual purpose or for the glory of God to use any other means of attempting to build up Zion apart from this, the Lord appearing in His glory. Now this is what we need and this is what was prayed for in that opening hymn. We have sung that hymn, I suppose, hundreds of times, but I have never felt the fulness of it as I did this evening and if the prayer should be fulfilled it would come into the text or the text would come into the hymn, "When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory"; the inference is very solemn, it means that while the Spirit of the Lord will never finally depart from His people it is withheld and is greatly withheld today and therefore it is a day of small things. There is only one remedy for the decay and desolation that appear on every hand and Isaiah gives us the remedy, "Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest." (Is.32.15) The Lord who can make the wilderness to blossom as the rose will so appear in His glory, that

there will be fresh manifestations and communications to the church and individual reviving. A reviving in public assemblies, if it is spiritual, comes from individual reviving in the souls of the people. In those appearances of the Lord in His glory it is His mediatorial glory. "The glory which Thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one as we are one". It is the glory of Emmanuel. It has in it the glory of His divine Person, of the fulness of the Godhead bodily in His human nature, and therefore it is the Holy Spirit taking of the things of Christ and revealing them. The presence of the Holy Spirit in His work of regeneration, sanctification, divine teaching and enlightening and all that the Holy Ghost does, is from Christ; He speaks not of Himself.

The work of salvation that the Lord Jesus finished, the Holy Ghost begins in the heart in a work of grace and therefore when the Lord will build up Zion He will appear in His glory. The first appearance may be very solemn; He will dwell in the church as a Spirit of judgment and of burning, very solemn but very profitable. Are we willing for the Lord to return to us individually and search us as a spirit, first of judgment and then of burning? In 1 Corinthians 2 we read of those who built upon the foundation wood, hay and stubble but "the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is"; and whether this is in an individual or in the church of God, when He returns the first thing will be the spirit of judgment. The word will be made as a "two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." There will be a glory in it. Then there will be a burning, not an oven, which we read of in Malachi, for those that are in that oven will be burnt up, root and branch; but the Lord has a fire in Zion and He sits, blessed be His name, as a refiner and purifier of silver. Thus He will appear in the glory of His grace, the grace of the Gospel. There is a concentration of this glory in Romans 5 "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." When that grace is exercised through the Gospel poor sinners are brought with chains about their neck to come as did Jeremiah, "Though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake". When the Lord appears in His glory and there is such an inward movement, such a sense of urgency as with Jeremiah, one, in faith, will say, "Why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside

to tarry for a night?" Then you will notice in that beautiful 14th. chapter of Jeremiah, that he, as did the Psalmist here, had a sudden glimpse of hope. "O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble".

So when the Lord appears in His glory He will appear in the glory of His Person and His work. The glory of His substitution is that He who is the express image of His Father and brightness of His glory should condescend to favour poor sinners by communicating the merits of His Person and the invincibility of His grace, the immutability of His love. There would be an outpouring of it so that the Gospel will be a power in the soul. Grace will save and sanctify, redemption will redeem. Mercy will rejoice against judgment, the unsearchable riches of Christ being emptied out in the Lord Jesus will enrich poor bankrupt sinners. "I am the Light of the world", the light of love. When He appears in His glory then there will be that arising as in Isaiah, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come" "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee." There will also be seen His glory in the office that He occupied. It is the glory of His Person, as for instance when that glory meets an uttermost sinner. In the wilderness we see this glory. "This Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable Priesthood"; what He does is done for ever, nothing can be added to it, nothing can be taken from it. So with respect to His Priesthood and offering, one sacrifice only is needed, because He continues ever. He has eternal validity and virtue, therefore He is able to save them to the very uttermost that come unto God through Him. When He appears in His glory that will take place, He will execute His office, He will send forth judgment unto victory in the experience of His people. O the glory of His substitution as being made sin that sinners might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." At first sight this may appear to be unconnected with the 16th. verse but to my mind it is blessedly connected - the prayer of the destitute. There are some who mourn over the low condition of Zion and because God is far off and His Spirit's influence is suspended and they feel and mourn over the destitution. "When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory" and regard the prayer of the destitute. You see the two in this

verse; He the great incomprehensible God. It is blessed to see that meeting. We have it in 57th. Isaiah. There is there what one may call the spiritual antithesis, two extreme opposites meet and it would seem that the Spirit by Isaiah in the conversion of poor sinners emphasises that antithesis "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." O the meeting! When the Lord appears in His glory these opposites will meet. You will go on to the next Psalm then, it is very blessed, the next Psalm is very different and yet flows out. My friends, I believe we shall be brought in experience into light through darkness, into liberty through bondage, into heaven through an experience of hell and so after this grievous complaint of the Psalmist the next Psalm commences, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name".

"All that is within me". If we have not an inner man we have nothing in us that will praise Him; carnal reason will not; a formal dead profession will not. O what a mercy to have any evidence of an inner man, "all that is within me". Only that within a sinner that can praise the Lord, is the work of the Spirit, the love of God, and when that faith is lifted up the highest she sings of none but Him. There would be this reviving, the restoration of the joy of salvation, a restoration of a hunger and thirst and reviving of an aching void, a restoration of hearing, a restoration in the preaching. When the Lord shall build up Zion, He will appear what He is. O He will make it effectual, He is a good Shepherd to guide His people. He is the Mediator between God and man. He will appear as such and give fresh liberty at the throne of grace, and He will regard the prayer of the destitute. Strictly speaking, these are just the people that are not destitute; it is not a natural destitution, as the Lord begins the sermon on the mount, "Blessed are the poor in spirit", and this spiritual destitution is a mercy. How opposite is that state of Laodicea, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked". Do we know that spiritually? The Lord will give us to know it and not once or twice, my friends, He will keep us at mercy's door. Unsearchably rich, infinite in divine wisdom, full of grace and truth, the Lord of life and light and glory, He

will regard the prayer of a poor, destitute sinner that comes before Him under divine teaching and says, Lord in my nature there is not a spark of life, not a grain of grace. My nature is fallen, universal death is throughout my being. "He will regard the prayer of the destitute." It is a mercy to be destitute without Christ; to have nothing. It is a solemn thing if we have anything without Christ. To be brought to destitution is very painful so that this destitute person prays; there is one thing he possesses and that is life.

We might just mention a few prayers of a destitute sinner and see whether we ever pray them. Psalm 141 is right to the point, "Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth. But mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord: in thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute." The experience there is very much like the Psalm - Bones scattered at the grave's mouth, "My bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness". It will be a solitary way. There is nothing you can get from the world or nature. You will feel to be destitute of life and have to walk in weakness. When the Lord appears in His glory He will regard the prayer of the destitute. Another prayer of the destitute will be, "God be merciful to me a sinner", and the Lord will regard it. This man went down to his house justified rather than the other. The other was not destitute; the Pharisee took everything he had with him to the temple; he was full of it, rich as he could be; he took his own righteousness, his own merit, his own works. The poor publican took his destitution, his misery, his unworthiness, and the Lord regarded him. Blessed man! Yes, he stood before the Lord, he stood before His Redeemer, he stood before infinite fulness, he stood before invincible and saving grace, before his Mediator. "God be merciful to me a sinner". He went down to his house justified. So there is the whole experience in that publican's prayer and such a man will go down to the house appointed for all living, he will go down to the grave, justified.

"He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer". If He regards your prayer He will regard your person. You cannot separate the two. O sweet prayer! Prayer is a blessing. Job prayed and he felt destitute. He went forward and backward, went to the left and the right and could not find the Lord; he was a destitute man, "O that I knew where I might find Him". He did not ask to have back the camels that the Chaldeans took away; he did not ask for his sons back; he did not complain because his

property was broken down, he did not ask for anything back but, O that I knew where I might find that blessed God. Did He regard it? Look at the last chapter and see; the Lord gave him double what he commenced with. It would be a blessed reviving when it is the set time to favour Zion. We can pray for it according to this Word. I do like that expression, "according to Thy word" runs through the 119th. Psalm about two dozen times, "according to Thy Word". Have you prayed this prayer? "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer". It will be a ground, a warrant greater than your destitution if you plead with the Lord, Lord not only according to my destitution but according to Thy promise, according to Thy Word.

"This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD." I do feel in these solemn days we need to direct the people for their encouragement and consolation to the Word of God. O look at this Psalm. I have not felt to say much about it but look at the first eleven verses and then look at yourself and then look at the rest of the Psalm and see the glorious God. "When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. This shall be written for the generation to come". The generation to come is here now in the young people. There is a hope for the future my friends. Yes, I will close with this hymn because it seems to touch the point. We get exceedingly cast down and we should mourn over the small things and the desolation of Zion -

"What! has the Holy Ghost forgot  
To quicken souls that Christ has bought,  
And lets them lifeless lie?

No, thou Almighty Paraclete,  
Thou shedd'st thy heavenly influence yet,  
Thou visit'st sinners still".

It is still written for the generation to come. May He appear in His glory and build us up. Amen

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