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Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, Sunday Morning
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"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"
Romans 8:31

This text has a solemnity about it; it is a kind of pause in the epistle and it would be as well if we were brought to a spiritual pause. This verse could well be in parenthesis for the chapter could have continued without any damage if it were omitted. "Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified....He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" It would not have destroyed the meaning, but you see how solemnly this word drops in, and think of it with respect to our own cases. "What shall we then say to these things; if God be for us, who can be against us?"

Well, we might just briefly examine ourselves upon that point. The things referred to immediately are the great doctrines of the everlasting gospel; what we are occupied with from time to time, things that accompany salvation; things that we profess. Well, if you come to a pause and consider how many thousands of sermons you have heard and how much we may know, and then come to the text: "What shall we then say to these things?"

We may perhaps just bring two familiar Scriptures to show the force of this pause. In the first chapter of Lamentations, where it is spoken of the grief of the Church, but in type the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, there is a pause: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

There is another such occasion when the Pharisees and Sadducees came to the Lord Jesus to quibble with Him and argue with Him about the resurrection, and so on. The Lord Jesus really took up this text in a concentrated form of the whole Gospel. He said to them, "What think ye of Christ?" Everything is there: "What do you think of Him? Is it anything to you?" "What shall we then say to these things?" And not only so, this saying is not a mere assent to them, but it has the same import, as I view it, as that conversation Paul speaks of to the Philippians: "Our conversation is in heaven." The intention there is the whole of our conduct – how our feet converse, our eyes, our ears, our spirit, our heart, our affections. Our citizenship is in Heaven our final home. And so here: "What then do we say to these things?" In our life, what part have they in our experience, not only in our profession? "What shall we then say to these things?" But there are some humble hearts who feel they could not say much, but perhaps say more than many a proud professor can say.

It comes to my mind, when reading once to an old pilgrim at Tunbridge Wells, when I had finished, she said: "Those blessed truths are too good for me." I said, "Do you want them?" She said, "I cannot do without them." Now can you answer the text in that way? What shall we then say to these things that we attempt to preach from time to time? If you can say nothing else, can you say, "I cannot do without Him"? Can you say, "Thou, O Christ, art all I want"?

Well, as enabled, we would come more particularly to what these things are. "What shall we then say to these things? Aid whilst they more immediately refer to the chapter and the Epistle, yet they embrace the whole compass of the universe; the whole creation and the providence of God, as well as His blessed work of salvation. Indeed the Apostle opens the Epistle with this word, that those who are ignorant of God, their ignorance is not innocent; for the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; "therefore they are without excuse" for their ignorance of God or denying Him. See the terrible utterances of modern scholars today, what they say about the things of God's glorious creation, that majestic account of creation in the beginning of Genesis. Why, my friends, there is something very blessed when a tender broken heart views the glorious works of the Lord which work faith. David praised Him. Especially if you view through that creation your Redeemer, and look, it may be, across the cornfields that provide food, the sustenance of the body. The glorious works of the Creator are the factory, the mighty factory of the earth which produces everything, that is, all the clothing we wear, all the food we eat, the bricks and mortar with which we build, the wood with which we build - all must come from the earth. No noise, no hammer, nothing at all declares His eternal power and Godhead of the creation. What shall we then say to the glorious works of creation? Well, I believe there is many a troubled soul - especially in days gone by when poverty was known - who could endorse what the hymn says about those things of creation. To look up from their troubled circumstances by faith to this great God and confess -

"With heaven and earth at His command,
He waits to answer prayer".

We must not dwell on the lesser things, although I do feel there is a warrantable application. "What shall we then say to these things?" The text is two questions. But in one sense it may be taken that the second question answers the first. "What shall we then say to these things?" We will say this - that "if that God is for us, who can be against us?" While He is rich," a poor man might say, "I can't be poor; what can I want beside?" So that, looking at creation, all the beauties of it, in air and earth and sea, sets forth His majesty. It might have been given as a confirmation to your faith and a consolation to you in your pathway, in your journey through life, to behold the works of God; and faith looking at them would say, if that God, which created all that there is and maintains them by the same word of His power, if that great Creator is for me, no circumstance, nothing, no enemies can ever be against me. "What shall we, then say to these things?" We will say this, "If this God is for us, who can be against us?"

Then we might for a few moments look at providence. Indeed providence is in the chapter: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." All things! What shall we then say to "all things"? - the worst of things, the greatest of calamities, the most dire circumstances, the most severe losses, the greatest afflictions and distresses - "What shall we THEN" - and this "then" has a force in it - THEN - it has respect unto the greatness of God, of His things, His immutability, His sovereignty, His omnipotence, His infinite wisdom. And seeing it is so, THEN - what shall we say to the worst of our things? Well, Paul tells us what to say: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." It does not always appear so. There have been some gracious people who have answered in unbelief. You take, for instance, poor old Jacob. O the sorrows that

he bore! O how his sons did deceive him when they took Joseph's coat dipped in blood! But when he came down to the end, as he thought, bereaved of his sons, he said, "All these things are against me." That is what he said, but he was wrong, he came to a wrong conclusion. And so do we often, and when we come to wrong conclusions it is when we are looking at second causes, and looking at things instead of at the God of things.

Gideon, when he was threatened with defeat from the Midianites, said unto the Lord: "If the Lord be with us, why is all this happened to us?" But when by faith we look through, beyond second causes and things seen, and beyond to an unseen God, then we have a different answer: What shall we then say to the worst of things that we may be passing through? You will say this: that, if that God is for us, who can be against us? Nothing can hurt us. I have been brought to that conclusion in my own case, very solemnly. I believe that I am being taught a little, very late in life, but I believe that sin is my only real trouble, and that myself is my only enemy. I am certain of this, there is nobody else in this world can do me any real harm but myself - and perhaps presently we may come even to that - and what have we to say to these things? God is greater than our hearts. If we are His, we will say even to self and sin: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"

The blessed challenges in this chapter are based on divine sovereignty, based upon the infinite, incomprehensible Being of Jehovah. O to believe in God! It does strengthen a poor trembling sinner's heart. And I felt weak enough this morning, but the text was a little help. Why, you will look at your weakness, look at the condition of those in the Word of God who were brought to their wits' end and are written there for our instruction. There was a leper, there was a man that had the palsy, and there was a woman that had an issue of blood, dire loss of blood. O, "what shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" O the precious Word of God; what a light it is in a dark world, what a mercy if it is a light in a dark heart. "What shall we then say to these things?"

But we would come now more particularly to the things of salvation. Where to begin, I really don't know. It is like an ocean – a poor insignificant worm going down to the mighty ocean. But I will tell you this, my friends, that if you can go down to that ocean by the Spirit and take a teaspoonful of the water of life, you will have the properties of the whole ocean - and a little has eternity in it. Yes, a grain of faith is saving.

Well, we would begin as enabled with the eternal God, and if we are taught of the Spirit we shall have to continue under a sense of the all-sufficiency of God, as that all-sufficiency is in the fullness of Christ. And you will prove this that in all the changing scenes of life, the one purpose that God has in the discipline of His people, in His chastening and leading them about, is this, consequently to bring them back to Him. As we have sometimes said, so the type is very blessed and real, as with Joseph and his brethren. Whatever Joseph says – and he answers his brethren very roughly – the one mystery about it was that Joseph knew his brethren but they did not know him. He loved them, his bowels yearned over them when he was talking roughly to them, but everything he said to them and everything he required of them had this effect, that they were compelled to come back to him every time. And so it is with God.

Let us then, in the first place, apply the text: "What shall we then say" to this great God? He has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture. No man has seen God at any time, He is incomprehensible. "Well then," you might say, "we have nothing to say to that which is incomprehensible, and it is of little use or profit talking about things that are incomprehensible." Well, do you feel that these things of God, and God Himself, have a definite connexion with your being, with your salvation, with eternity and where you will spend it? Have you ever thought of the incomprehensibility of Jehovah, and been thankful that He is no less?

It would be of no profit to us, except that in His infinite wisdom and sovereignty it pleased God that in His eternal Son incarnate should dwell all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and that is why He is precious. "What shall we then say to these things" – God in Christ? Well, my friends, one great thing and comfort of the Gospel is this - that it is for sinners; and that everything in the Gospel is of God, and it comes to us through Jesus Christ. It partakes of the divine nature. Everything in the Gospel and everything in the work of grace partakes of immutability; and it is unfading, undying. It does not make a creature immutable. Omnipotence cannot be transferred to a creature, but - and we are speaking now of this great God in Christ - but the blessings of grace that He bestows are immutable and omnipotent graces in themselves. What shall we then say to this great God who has made it possible to communicate by the Spirit through His dear Son those blessings which are irreversible blessings of salvation? Blessings that make you truly rich.

"If this God is for us, who can be against us?" That brings us to the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace was a covenant between the Eternal Three. It was not a covenant made with man; it is made over to him, it is made for him, but it was not made with him. The covenant of God in creation was a bilateral covenant; it was made with man and it was conditional; and that covenant was broken. But this covenant can never be broken; and in that covenant of grace were all the councils and purposes and decrees of God concerning the redemption of His people. Blessed covenant! Where there is a covenant there is an oath. In that covenant the divine Father, who foreknew and chose His people for His praise, gave that people unto His dear Son. The foreknowledge of God is a mystery.

"What shall we then say to these things?" Ah, there are some hearts who would say:

"'Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord, or no?
Am I His, or am I not?"

It is a very great mercy to find a living response in your heart to the gospel, for that is what the text is. It is really asking what response there is in your soul to the whole of the things of God. Wherever they are revealed and manifested, it will have an effect, it will cause a response. The covenant of grace. In that covenant of grace there was gathered together, if I might so speak, all the materials for the building of the Church. All the grace that shall be needed in the Church throughout all ages, all the life, the mercy, the righteousness, the merit – all was in the Lord Jesus. He was there, set up from everlasting or ever the earth was. He was set up in the councils of Jehovah as the foundation of the Church, the Head of the Church. He was appointed in the covenant of grace to all the offices

necessary to His work. He was appointed to all the characters that He should assume to His dear people. He was appointed as the Bridegroom of the bride. O the covenant of grace! In speaking of it, Paul to the Ephesians refers all the blessings that are in Christ Jesus in this: "According as we were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world." Well, what shall we then say to the covenant of grace? Do you ever pray for an interest in it? The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show His covenant to those that fear Him; He will show it to them. Have you ever asked Him to show it to you?

There is a Lamb's Book of Life in the covenant of grace, and the names of everyone whom the Father foreknew are written there, the whole election of grace. Therefore He said to His disciples who returned from their preachings, and the spirits were made subject to them: "Rejoice not in that the Spirits are made subject unto you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Is there something attractive here? And that covenant is ordered in all things and sure. The whole of the circumstances of His people are in the covenant. It may be thought by a natural man: "Then I should think that His infinite wisdom and omnipotent power had made a covenant with those whom the Lord loved with an everlasting love, and that is ordered in their pathway. I should think this – it would be a very nice pathway if the Lord ordered it. I should think they would occupy the highest places of the land; I should think they would occupy the best places, seeing they are the children of a King." No, but: "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." But the covenant is ordered in all our disasters – in all our pathway. We see this covenant ordered right through the books of Job and Jeremiah. And have you ever felt the blessedness of it, and the wisdom of God in the covenant, whose people were predestinated in the covenant of grace to be conformed to His image? And not only so, our pathway was predestinated – the course that we should take, the race that we should run. "The lot is cast into the lap" and the lot of His people was cast into the lap of the covenant, and the whole disposings of that covenant were by Christ Jesus, who disposed the covenant and disposes the blessings and dispenses them. What shall we then say to the covenant of grace? Why, if that covenant God is for us, who can be against us? What can harm us? It is a powerful word, this, if the Lord would bring us to this pause, to stand still. We may go rushing on, but this is the conclusion of the truths that we believe; this is where we stand in the midst of them, and what place have they in our hearts and in our lives?

"What shall we then say to these things, if God be for us who can be against us?" So the Apostle, through this Epistle, speaks of the righteousness of God through faith. He speaks too of Abraham's faith, that it was imputed to him for righteousness, and that His people are justified by faith – and what shall we then say to these blessed doctrines of the gospel? Do you feel to desire to be united unto Christ in every blessed doctrine, in every part of His work which He finished? To be justified in His righteousness, to be pardoned through His precious blood, to be taught and led by His Holy Spirit? O my friends, what an inheritance, what a portion there is in the gospel! I sometimes feel it is full of vital life and living things, a living portion. When you view it, you will view the world as it should be seen; it will put things in their right places; a poor dead world, its dead blessings, its fine gold that can become hankered, its best garments which become moth-eaten and decay. Disappointment stamped upon everything here below. But "What shall we then say to these things?"

The contrast when the blessed Spirit brings you, lifts you out of the dust of the world and off from the dunghill even of a depraved nature, and brings you, by the Spirit, to look from things that are seen to things that are not seen. "What shall we then say to these things" in the method of grace – how those things could ever be made over to worthless sinners, and that by the condescension of God's dear Son? Look at the coming, look at the outlet, if we may so speak, of divine love. God, the same God as we commenced with, incomprehensible in Himself. O, I have admired Him, I have thanked Him that He is not knowable, that we shall never know God, never know Him as He really is; but He has made Himself knowable in Christ so far as is necessary to our salvation. And is it not a strength to you, poor, weak, trembling sinner, that one who is incomprehensible has condescended to make Himself knowable, approachable, possessable in the Person of none less than His own eternal, begotten, incarnate Son, to bring immortal blessings down? "What shall we then say to these things?" Do you find a little enlargement, and move out toward Him? Does it put the world beneath your feet? "Sacrifices and offerings thou wouldest not" - they were ineffectual; they were a divine institution; for the time being they were types and figures; but when it was said, "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not" ..."Then said I" – O this voice, O this love! – "Then said I" – as those sacrifices are useless, rather than lose my beloved people – "Lo, I come." "I come!" Have you ever seen Him by faith, coming? Ever heard that voice, and John introducing Him? "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world." "What shall we then say" to them? What do you say to them? How does your heart respond under the preaching of the gospel?

He came, He was sent, sent of the Father. He was an Apostle, a great Apostle and High Priest. Not born by ordinary generations, but born of a virgin; and that most sacred foundation truth is denied today by our Church leaders. O, they are in a solemn position! Have you ever loved the incarnate Deity, my friends? If God, the holy, eternal, co-equal Son was not born of a virgin, then His humanity was peccable, capable of sin and capable of death – and where's your hope? Where is the blessedness, where is the sacredness? Hold fast to the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. But what do you say to it? Has it any connexion with your experience, with your salvation? Do you feel even now a union to Him, even in His sacred birth? I believe I do.

No sinner would ever have union with Christ except for His incarnation. There was the point of contact, of union. I see the time is more than gone, but "What shall we then say to these things?" May we answer the question in our own conscience, looking at our years of profession.

Amen.