

Sermon preached by Mr.F.L.Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Lord's day Evening April 8th 1962.

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." Song of Solomon 8:7.

This sacred Song is like a sanctuary, a nuptial chamber, a Song of divine love. It follows on from the Ecclesiastes. The whole of that wonderful Book is occupied with a search for true satisfaction and happiness. The writer surveys every avenue. He was in a position, by his immense wealth and wisdom, to know everything concerning this world, and possessed just what his heart desired. He tried it out – built beautiful houses, and had gardens and made pools of water, had men singers and women singers, and instruments, and that of all sorts. But having grace in his heart, he came to the conclusion, that all was vanity and vexation of spirit. There is nothing here to satisfy that new creature in the soul, which must live upon God Himself. But immediately he entered, as it were, into this sanctuary, he found what he could not find throughout this universe, and he recognised **Him**. The first thing he says abruptly without any Introduction: "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth: for Thy love is better than wine." The whole of Solomon's Song is an experience of sacred intimacy between the Bridegroom and the bride.

Therefore the love mentioned in the text is essentially divine love. Natural love may perhaps be contrasted with it, but the contrast would leave natural love infinitely beneath divine love, and different in its nature. Divine love is inimitable. Nobody can imitate divine love. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." The preceding verse shows us the vehemence of this love: "Set me as a seal upon Thine heart, as a seal upon Thine arm: for love is strong as death." Therefore the church here desired that she might be set as a seal upon the heart of the Lord, and then as a seal upon His arm, that she might see that love there. But there is another place where she is sealed, and we read of that in Isaiah: "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me." (ch.49:16) So that the people are engraved upon His heart, as the names of the twelve tribes were engraved upon the breastplate of the high priest when he went into the Holy of holies. The church is also a seal upon His arm, so that she can see it; and the Lord has said: "I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands," so that He can see it, for the church had many fears. "Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands."

I would say this at the outset, that whereas many waters cannot quench the love of God, neither can the floods drown it; yet those waters and floods will quench and drown everything else that has not the love of God in it. There doubtless is a tremendous lot of religion where there is no divine love in the heart. This love is very different from universal charity, and that error of universal redemption.

Therefore we would, as enabled, look at this love, and how nothing can quench it or drown it. It is then the love of Jehovah, the love of God, His electing love. It is the redeeming love of His dear Son, and it is the love of the Holy Ghost in His infallible work of grace in the hearts of sinners. Three

Persons, but one eternal God. Not three loves, but one love. Not three wills, but one will. O to know that incomprehensible God as revealed in His dear Son is eternal life!

Many waters cannot quench the love of the Father, because His love is immutable. It is immutable because God is what He is. He is immutable, and can know no change. He has no second thoughts. Therefore His people are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father; and the love of the Father is sovereign. Nothing could influence Him to love a sinner. O how cheap is that universal charity and love! We may see it painted on religious vans: "God is love." But where we want to see it, my friends, is in the Lord Jesus, and see our names written on that blessed breastplate. The love of the Father. And such was that love that the Trinity entered into a covenant of grace, a covenant ordered in all things and sure, unalterable; and it all derives from the infinite Being of God. O the ignorance of men that would attempt to revise His holy Word! Men ignorant of God, yet in religion, and supposed religious leaders, are evidently religious atheists! But to know this infinite God in Christ is indeed a great mercy.

So that it is covenant love, the love of the Trinity entered into the covenant. In love the Lord Jesus Christ consented to be set up as the Head of the church, there to be the foundation of all the counsels and purposes of God. The Lord Jesus manifested His love in the covenant in undertaking the redemption of the church, to become her Surety and Mediator, her Redeemer, and that through sufferings. The love of the Lord Jesus also was manifested in His condescension to veil His glory; and He who was infinitely rich, for the sake of poor sinners emptied Himself and became poor, that they through His poverty might be made rich. It is the love of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore as nothing could influence Jehovah to love a sinner, so nothing can influence Him to divert the overflowings of that love to any other object.

"Many waters cannot quench love; neither can the floods drown it." When we come to consider the love of God in Christ, and the many waters which cannot quench it, or the floods to drown it, you look at the floods and sorrows that overflowed this sacred Mediator. "He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. He was oppressed...brought as a Lamb to the slaughter...for the transgression of My people was He stricken. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief." (Isaiah 53:3-8) But it did not quench His love nor drown it. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow." (Lamentations 1:12) "Then saith He unto (His disciples), "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." (Matthew 26:38) But "love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame." (Song 8:6) And that flame of divine love can never be quenched, neither can the floods drown it.

Here we have fire and water representing all things which, if it were possible, would quench the love of God in Christ and drown it. It cannot be drowned because it cannot be suppressed. Therefore says Paul: "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able

to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39) Jesus said to His disciples: "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50) He referred there to the baptism of His sufferings. He endured the curse of the holy law, the hidings of His Father's face when His Father forsook Him. O look at the overwhelming floods of sorrow in the Garden of Gethsemane! But He did not fail; He was not discouraged. The great point is, my friends, whether we are objects of this love of God; and the only indubitable evidence is whether we love God, because, if we do, it is consequent upon His love to us. So these many waters could not quench the love of God to poor sinners, neither can the floods drown it.

Look at Him hanging upon Calvary's tree:

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride. (Gadsby's 439)

Look at Him before His enemies, before Pilate. View Him in the judgment hall, when His judgment was taken away from Him. Look at Him led as a lamb to the slaughter. He opened not His mouth. View Him as those soldiers in mockery clothed Him in a purple robe, and smote His sacred head with a reed, and spit in His blessed face. Many waters cannot drown the love of God to sinners. O He will be precious to you! And –

If once the love of God you feel
Upon your heart impressed,
The mark of that celestial seal
Will never be erased. (Gadsby's 344)

But I want to look at it the other way round. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it", in the experience of those in whose hearts this love of God is shed abroad by the Holy Ghost. That is given to them, because it is God's love. We cannot love Him except by His own love. There is nothing in nature that loves Him, for the natural man is enmity against Him. Well, my friends, if love is not the motive power of our religion, it will sooner or later be burned up, quenched, and drowned. It is only love that will survive. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity, or love." (1 Corinthians 13:13)

But love shall still remain,
Its glories cannot cease,
No other change shall that sustain,
Save only to increase. (Gadsby's 793)

Therefore this love of God is not only manifest in the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ – "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." (John 3:16) And we were reading in I John 3: "Behold what manner of love the Father bath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." And therefore this was love's gift, the gift of His eternal Son; and "how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32) So with the gift of Christ all things, without exception, were given to the church with Him. Therefore the love of the Father flowing through the Son, making a provision in the covenant of grace, a sufficient provision that would supply His people

with eternal life and grace, a fulness of infinite merit, that they would receive the benefit of, a fulness of infinite wisdom to direct them, of omnipotent power to deliver them. Love made that provision, and the love of Christ undertook the whole work of redemption. He is set forth as a propitiation for our sins, and love brought Him right into the position of His people, so that He was made sin, that they might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

But then that love, in all its richness and power, is shed abroad in the hearts of those who are born again; and where once that eternal life has entered into the soul, all the graces of the Spirit will be there, and all the graces of the Spirit are imperishable and eternal. They will never decay, never fade, and never die. And the greatest grace bestowed is that of divine love, by which His people love the Lord, love the Gospel, and love His people and His ways; and where that love is, many waters cannot quench it, nor floods drown it.

Now if you look at the Word of God almost anywhere, you will see what this love of God in the heart of a sinner has to contend with. There were three hearers of the Gospel. There was only one that had the love of God in the heart. You remember especially that which was sown on stony ground. It is said: "Some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: but when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away." (Mark 4:5,6) It was not the love of God. It might have been universal charity, and mere free-will love, that kind of love that people talk about – you can love Him if you like, and when you like. But my friends, we shall live to prove, if taught of the Spirit, that all godliness and vital experience proceeds according to this rule: "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world." (Ephesians 1:4) So that every professor of religion who is not rooted and grounded in the love of Christ will come to a time when he will make shipwreck. You take the 6th of John. They appeared to be very friendly with the Lord Jesus, heard what He had got to say, many of them cried "Hosanna." But when the Lord pressed home closely upon their consciences that: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you" – which means, unless you have vital union with the Lord Jesus and are joined to Him in regeneration, unless you are so united to Him that He is your life, ye have no life in you. "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." They had no love, and therefore no knowledge of Him. If you know the Lord Jesus, you must love Him.

"Many waters cannot quench love." You take Ruth, in that beautiful simple history and narrative. There were two sisters. They were both idolaters, but the love of God from eternity was fixed upon Ruth. And when Naomi spoke to these two daughters-in-law about Christ and salvation, it entered with power and life into the heart of Ruth; the love of God entered there. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; she had no fault to find with her. Very solemn to be an Orpah in religion, and hear about the Gospel, and to kiss the ministry, find no fault with it, but to go back as Orpah to her own country and to her gods! But Ruth said: "Intreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee: for where thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried." Love! And Naomi had told them both that if they followed her, they would have no material advantage, would have sorrow, a path of tribulation, and losses, and crosses. But says Ruth, as it were: "Never mind how rough the way, what losses I must suffer, intreat me not to leave thee."

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." All the chastenings of the Lord, and the appointed afflictions and sorrows cannot quench this love. If adversities and calamities could have quenched it and drowned it, Job would have sunk into despair long ago; but says he: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." (ch.13:15) He had the trial of an ungodly wife, and it would appear to fallen reason quite reasonable as she pointed out to him his bereavements, his losses, his poor afflicted body, the temptations and fiery darts of the devil, when she said: "Curse God, and die." – I would not own such a God as that, but tear Him to pieces, as He has you. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." And even though God would pursue him like dry stubble, as he says, yet when he could not find Him he cried: "Oh that I knew where I might find Him" – that God who has desolated, and stripped, and afflicted me – "that I might come even to His seat!" (ch.23:3) Those floods of affliction could not quench his love, nor drown it.

It is because that love is invincible, being divine. So Paul says: "Who shall separate us from the love of God?" and brings forth things that would if they could. "Shall tribulation?" O love will survive tribulation. We have a line of a hymn which refers to the Lord Jesus, but His dear people are made to have fellowship with Him in His sufferings: "What beauty e'en in grace appears!" (441) O the beauty of wounded love, dying love! Although it is said: "His visage was so marred more than any man", yet that marring of His sacred visage has a beauty in it, as those eyes of divine love looked forth from a suffering image. (Isaiah 52:14) "I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep." (John 10:11) Many waters could not quench love. Therefore "the righteous shall hold on his way." (Job 17:9) How is that? Because the love of God can never be quenched or drowned, and because the love of God is in that "shall" – the wisdom, and power, and omnipotence are in that "shall". It is God's "shall"; therefore "the righteous shall hold on his way." A mercy to possess this love which can never be quenched or drowned!

"Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors." How is that? "Through Him that loved us." (Romans 8:35,37) And how did that make His people more than conquerors? (Romans 8:35-37) Because we love Him because He first loved us. And faith works by love, and an earnest seeking after what love has provided and prepared eclipses the world, and so faith gets the victory over the world.

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." Time will never wear it out. This is a blessed Song, but it makes me feel exceedingly sad, because I look into my heart and my life and see things so very different there.

O could I know and love Him more,
And all His wondrous grace explore,
Ne'er would I covet man's esteem,
But part with all, and follow Him. (Gadsby's 771)

"If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." And that means this, among other things: that this world could not offer you, if it offered you all that it contained, that for which you would part with the love of God. Moses had this love, and therefore he refused all the substance of the house and court of Pharaoh.

I wonder if we have that love that would stand the test? That is how the Lord tested the young man. It looked as though he had this love. He had a good deal of religion. He had kept the commandments from his youth up, and said to the Lord Jesus: "What lack I yet?" – Look at the religion I have, how I have kept the commandments. The Lord tested him upon this text: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor...and come and follow Me." (Matthew 19:16-22) He went away, for he had great possessions, and these were more to him than the Lord Jesus. Why was it? He did not know Him. O this glorious Lord, who created heaven and earth, whose is the earth and all that is therein, the world and they that dwell therein, He who has the fulness of all things, He whom the Father gave, and gave with Him all things that pertain to life and godliness, He in whom we have obtained an inheritance, eternal, incorruptible, and that fadeth not away, He who is in heaven and has gone to prepare a place! O says faith, moved by this love, "If any man would give all the substance of his house, I would not accept it!"

If what we have been feebly saying is true, how do we stand? Have we any evidence of this love of God in our heart? If you could go out from this chapel, and go home and find that your possessions had been lost, but the Lord Jesus manifested Himself to you in all His unsearchable riches, what would you say of it? Would you rather be possessed of, and possess, Christ, by the manifestation of Him through His Spirit, than possess the whole world? Could you be satisfied without Him? Are you satisfied with Him? I wish I could speak as I ought to, but I never shall. I hope in one sense I shall always be short in preaching the Gospel as to my own satisfaction. Paul was, perhaps, the greatest minister, and his love to the Lord Jesus was such that he esteemed all else but dung that he might win Him, yet he said: "I count not myself to have apprehended." (Philippians 3:13) O that I knew Him! I suppose no living man knew Him more. "Oh that I knew Him!"

And so, my friends, this love is immense and eternal. If I could preach Him so as completely to exhaust what there is in Him, I should be under a delusion. Ruth, dear gracious Ruth, when she went to the supper, it is said: "She was sufficed, and left." (ch.2:14) And so it will be; if the Lord fills your poor heart with this love, there will be as much love left. If I preach with that ability that God gives me, there is as much left. We shall never exhaust the love of God as in His everlasting Gospel. It is eternal. Blessed is that man who will endure, having that love that nothing in this life can quench, who shall enter into the fulness of His love as provided and prepared in heaven.

Amen.