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Sermon preached by Mr. G.M. Shaw
at Hope Chapel, Nottingham, on 9th February 1988

Reading Acts. 9

Hymns. ① 991
② 83
③ 921

Text: Philippians ch. 3 v 9

And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith

and it is especially the first phrase "And be found in Him".

We read together in the Acts of the Apostles how Saul, a blasphemer, an opposer of all the things that pertained unto the Lord Jesus, was met with in the way, and it is evident that while he now expresses this desire "to be found in Him", the Lord came and found him ere he had this desire.

It is necessary to be found of Him before we can desire to be found in Him. Yet the wonder of God's grace is this: though we must be found of Him before we desire to be found in Him, yet we were in Him before the foundation of the world.

Our Lord Jesus Christ manifests these glorious truths in His coming and in His Person, in His life and in His death, in His resurrection, in His ascension and in His exaltation. I believe that many truly treasure those words that He himself spoke "I am the Good Shepherd". He speaks concerning the shepherd seeking out the sheep that was lost, and He is come even unto that end to seek and to save that which was lost.

Isaiah speaking in prophecy concerning the Lord's people speaks a word that has been made precious to many, and I can speak with some experience of my own, for the Lord by the prophet Isaiah says "Thou shalt be called Sought out, A city not forsaken". O, dear friend, what a wonderful thing if the Lord comes and says to you and me "Thou shalt be called, Sought out". All the mercies, all the blessings, all the favours of God are in those words "Thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken". Are you and I among them, those with whom the Lord has met in the way? For it is needful that the Lord find us.

You know, Saul could say respecting himself that if any man had whereof to boast he had more and he catalogues all his own glories. Yet he has to say in those earlier verses "But what things were gain to me those I counted loss". They were detrimental, they opposed and were impediments, hindrances, that which blinds the eye, the mind and the heart, and they are of no profit, rather are they a weight and a burden. And he expresses the desire that is now chief among his desires "To be found in Him".

I wonder whether this is the desire of your heart and my heart. If it is, what do we mean by it and what do we expect from it? There is no point in our saying "Yes, that is my desire" if we do not know what we are talking about. We do well to assure ourselves that when we use such words or meditate upon them, we are assured in this that it rests upon a sure foundation.

Over/

What is it that the apostle says by these words ? His desire is "To be found in Him". Evidently he has a hope in Christ but where does this hope rest and upon what ? If you say you desire "to be found in Him" what is the ground of your hope ? Does it rest upon some vague theories that you have heard, does it rest upon the accumulated knowledge that you have written in the Scriptures, or is it resting upon the promise of God himself applied unto your soul ?

When the Lord met with Saul, consider that for three days he was in darkness and when the Lord spoke to Ananias to go to speak unto Saul, Ananias was timid and afraid. "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints in Jerusalem". But notice how the Lord sees him ! "Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me". This imperious, impetuous, zealous, blasphemous, opposer of the church, a chosen vessel in the eye of the Lord Jesus in the purposes of Almighty God. And you know that when Ananias went he went with that gracious confidence which the word of the Lord is applied unto those that believe upon His name. For he went in - and consider that if his old nature had triumphed and unbelief had been rife in his heart, he was going into the presence of that man who would bind him and take him to Jerusalem - but he went in, and O how sweetly he went in: "Brother Saul". You see, Ananias knew what he was, he knew his reputation, he knew the evil that he had done but the Lord says "He is a chosen vessel", and Ananias could only say "Such was I".

There is no difference between the Lord's people, they are all sinners, and they are all chosen vessels. And Ananias went in, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared to thee in the way as thou camest". I am sure Saul's heart leapt when he heard those words, the confirming of that which had taken place on the way. For in those days of darkness do you not think there were doubts, many fears, many questions, much unbelief which rose in his heart: did I dream it, was it really addressed to me, what about all the others ? But Ananias did not go to the others, he came to Saul and called him "Brother", and confirmed that it was "The Lord, even Jesus" that appeared unto him in the way. Ananias was not even there but he confirmed that it was the Lord "Even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest".

You see, those happenings in the way, the occasion when the Lord met with him and found him evidently raised up within him a hope. And if it is that you and I are met with of the Lord as the Lord speaks to his people, there is a bringing of life because it is by His word that we are begotten, and the consequence of His word applied unto us will be to generate a hope for there is the manifestation of the life that we now live in Christ Jesus. If we live, if we are possessors of that life, we have it by the way of hope. I know there are many people in the day in which we live who say that you should not use the word "hope", it should be all assurance, all certainty, and yet hope, by God's own word, is the token and evidence of Christ dwelling in us: "Christ in you the hope of glory".

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Now it is evident that when the apostle speaks the desire of his heart which is "To be found in Him" he has a hope in the Lord Jesus. What is the hope that he has? Well I want to refer you to one or two parts of God's word where this hope and the promise, the promise of God, whereby this hope is nourished within the souls of his people, where it stands, what it is and by what authority, for surely that is the most important.

In the Epistle to Titus, 1st chapter, in the 1st and 2nd verses we read this: "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness: in hope of eternal life which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began". Now God promised, before the world began. He, who cannot lie, promised eternal life. Evidently when the apostle says that his desire is "To be found in Him" the expectation of being found in Him is in hope of eternal life.

Dear friend, when you and I read those words "To be found in Him" does our heart feel and know a union to Paul for we have a hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ, the Lord. Now consider that the apostle declares "In hope of eternal life which God, that cannot lie".

We have therefore one immutable thing: God's promise. It is immutable because he cannot lie. He says "I will not alter the thing that is gone out of my mouth". He declares that "None shall pluck them from his hand" and it is written "They shall be mine in the day when I make up my jewels".

Again, He says "They must come" and they shall come. It is further written "For who shall say unto Him what doest thou?" and who shall turn Him and who has a power and might greater than he?

"In hope of eternal life which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began". Here is a very deep and precious truth wherein we may rest, and rest with comfort, with joy and at peace, secure, because it is evident that it is not the promise that is made over unto us in this time state that is referred to here, because it was before the world began. It was the promise the Father made to the Son in the covenant of grace. This was one half of the covenant of grace, one half of those eternal transactions entered into by the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. O, to think that the promise of eternal life was made unto Christ in the covenant of grace respecting all those that are his. "All my members were written in a book when as yet there was none of them", but it was for these and in respect of these that the promise was made.

In John's gospel, chapter 10, we read these words "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand". O, what a precious thing it is! This is the promise - eternal life, and they shall never perish. These were given unto him to hold, to preserve, to keep, and this is what the apostle sees when he says "To be found in Him". O what a wondrous desire, to receive by Him eternal life and to be held in His hand, the Father's gift before the world was.

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In the Epistle to the Colossians, 3rd chapter, and the 3rd and 4th verses, we read "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear then shall ye also appear with him in glory". Now consider, the promise of eternal life for all these, given before the world was, is confirmed in all these words, "Your life is hid with Christ in God". There was no separation, they were given into his hand, he held them, he kept them, and "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory". An indissoluble union. For consider, it was a promise of eternal life given unto Him for these before the world was, by God "who cannot lie". This is no weak, this is no changing word, this is a word of almighty power and grace, a word of love: a word of mystery, yes, but the mystery is made known to them who are His for they have raised up within them hope of eternal life by that word whereby they are quickened of Almighty God himself.

In the 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians, 1st chapter, we read this, "For all the promises of God in him are Yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us". Now consider that word very carefully. "All the promises of God in him are Yea", not in you are Yea. "All the promises of God in Him are Yea, and in Him Amen". That is, those promises which the Father hath made unto Him are Yea and Amen in respect of these "Unto the glory of God by us". So we see, this promise, the promise which the Father made, before the world was, unto the Son respecting those whom the Father hath given unto Him which he holds and keeps and preserves and redeems.

And the Lord is pleased not only by one immutable thing, His word of promise, but also by an oath, to give a strong consolation unto the heirs of promise. Consider it. Because he could swear by no greater he swore by himself. So that by two immutable things "In which it was impossible for God to lie" - He could not lie in making the promise, He could not lie in making the oath - by two immutable things consolation is brought unto the heirs of promise. O, how well the Lord understands, how perfectly he secures the hope of all his people.

Now that desire which the apostle speaks of "To be found in Him" is founded on a hope which God hath raised up by means of His promise, before the world was, unto Christ respecting the elect vessels of mercy, which God hath confirmed by an oath. I want to read a verse from hymn 83

The gospel bears my spirit up,
A faithful and unchanging God
Lays the foundation of my hope
In oaths and promises and blood.

That is what the apostle meant when he said he desired "To be found in Him". You see, the gospel bears the spirit up, for the foundation of the hope is in oaths and promises and blood. The apostle was not one who depended on theory, it was oaths and promises and blood.

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the apostle, being conscious of his sinnership before the Lord, for while according to nature he had more to boast of than any man, yet under the teaching of the Holy Ghost he had to say concerning sin "of whom I am the chief". But his confidence was in the oath, the promise and the blood of the covenant for he said "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord". The oaths, the promise, the blood.

Now, if you and I consider that we know a little of these things, our expectation, our hope is of eternal life but, surely it is greater than that. You may say, what greater thing is there than to be an heir of eternal life? But I mean the spectrum of that life is far greater than we can appreciate by nature. As our hope is nourished and faith is exercised, the breadth of God's promise is opened up to us.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, the 1st chapter, we read this "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus". Now when the apostle says his desire is "To be found in Him" he has an eye to these "Spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus", being made a partaker of them in Him.

Dear friend, do you know and do you enjoy these spiritual blessings? What are they? We may have walked many, many years and yet it seems that we walk and we are not always conscious of the greatness of our calling. You see, first of all it is a heavenly calling from earth to heaven. But also it is a holy calling, it is a calling that separates, but a calling that bestows.

What are these spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ Jesus? In the 1st Epistle of John we read these things, "Truly we have fellowship with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ". This is one of those spiritual blessings that are ours in Him. If we are in Him, consider, we are heirs of eternal life. That life is manifested in us by the hope that is raised up and nourished by the expectations that we have in Him, and He testifies to that union by the bestowing of these spiritual blessings.

For is he not the Mediator of the Covenant, is he not the One whom Job saw by faith with his hand upon God and his hand upon the sinner? Is it not said of the Father himself "Ye are complete in him" and also "Ye are accepted in the Beloved"? It would not be possible for God in His word to bid the sinner "Draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" except there were a "New and living way consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh". But that way is made and one of those spiritual blessings that we possess in Him is to "Draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" confident in His blood, in His love, in the promise, in the oath, in the covenant.

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We know that the Lord when he was upon the earth promised to send the Comforter, and by the Comforter those gifts of grace, those spiritual gifts, and we possess in Him those gifts of grace.

But I want - I see the time has almost gone - to pass on and just mention these two other which are important I believe: important as the promise of eternal life and of spiritual blessings. For it is given unto those that are in Him to be like Him. O dear friend, what a blessing this is. What glory there is in this. To be like unto Him, God's eternal Son.

The Psalmist saw it and O how his heart desired it and he looked forward to that day, "I shall be satisfied" completely, perfectly satisfied, "when I awake with his likeness". And God himself hath declared his purpose: they are predestinated to be conformed unto His image. This is the end of his people in Christ Jesus, to be conformed unto His image, to be like Him. O, what wonders of grace to take the beggar from the dunghill and to "set him among princes, even among the princes of his people".

But not only shall we be like Him: it is written concerning that which lies before the elect vessels of mercy "We shall see him face to face", we shall be with Him where he is. "I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye shall be also".

The Father says concerning these very things, "He shall see the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied". O, that promise was made before the world was. Of all that which Christ undertook that God's Name might be glorified, that the sinner might be redeemed, that he might be an heir and a joint-heir with Him throughout a never-ending eternity, the Father says: "He shall see the travail of his soul, and be satisfied". Not one of them is lost, not one.

Do you wonder then that the apostle, moved, directed of the Holy Ghost, looks up and looks out and looks beyond all the things of this world and expresses the deep things of his heart and the chief desire within him, "To be found in Him".

O what glories there are pertaining to these, the promises of God, the covenant undertakings of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. These have been given unto us and set before us all our lives. O that we might possess them in all their fulness in that life which is hereafter.

May the Lord add his blessing.

Amen

Hymn 921

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