

Sermon preached by Mr. G.M. Shaw
 at Hope Chapel, Arcal Street, Sedgley, on 18th September 1996

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 GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Hymns: 87 pt 1, 372, 51

Reading: Psalm 105

Text: Psalm 105 v 39

Trusting that the Lord may help us let us turn to the Psalm that we read together, Psalm 105 v 39

He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to
 give light in the night

and it is especially the first part of the verse, "And he spread a cloud for a covering".

As we read this 105th Psalm, verse after verse sets forth the loving care of the Lord for his people. It is a testimony of the grace, the love, and the mercy of the Lord God of Israel and an evidence of his faithfulness, and of his truth. I would suggest that when you get home you read Psalm 106, and in the 106th Psalm all the deceitfulness of a man's heart, the evil, the wickedness that is therein, their murmurings, their rebellions, their idolatries, all the passions of sin against this faithful, caring, loving God is discovered unto them, so much so that in the 6th verse of the 106th Psalm "We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly" but, dear friend, the cloud that he had spread for a covering was not withdrawn.

How precious is that word that says "My covenant will I not break, I will not alter the thing that is gone out of my lips". So it is I And the ground for these dealings with Israel is in the 8th verse of the Psalm we read, "He remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant". Then in the 42nd verse "For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant".

O how precious then is that covenant of Almighty God which he hath made with his people. What glories, what wonders of the Almighty, the Holy One, is set before us in the covenant and in the Lord's dealings as he remembers, fulfils, his covenant unto his people.

In the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians there is a word that is directed unto us in our day. In the 10th chapter, the 11th verse, the apostle says "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples". It speaks of the iniquities of Israel, their murmurings, their provocations, and we are reminded "All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come".

Over/

So let us not suppose that those things we have read together, and particularly the words of the text, have no part, no place, no influence, no association with us in our day and generation. The word of the text I believe is a most precious word, "He spread a cloud for a covering".

There are many, many references in the Word of God to the clouds but I only want to mention three.

When Noah came forth out of the ark the Lord made a covenant with Noah and He undertook that he would no more drown the world, and that seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, day and night, cold and heat should not fail. As a token of that covenant He said "When I cause a cloud to pass across the sky, in the cloud the bow shall be seen", and we see it to this day. That bow in the cloud is an evidence that God has remembered his covenant and the mercy is this, he does not say to his people "you must remember it", He says "I will remember it". There is a great mercy there because if we know anything of our own hearts we should forget, we should put it out of our minds, or we should ignore it.

Then we read "His way is in the storm and the tempests, but the clouds are the dust of his feet". If we can see the dust of someone's feet they are very near and the Lord says "The clouds are the dust of his feet".

We know that when Israel went forth out of Egypt, the Lord gave to them a cloud, which is what is referred to in this Psalm, and I want briefly to mention what that cloud was to them.

When Pharaoh sent his armies forth he sought to ambush Israel for he saw them in a cleft: the sea before them, the mountains on either hand, and he said "I will destroy them". The Word of God tells us that the Angel of His presence - for that is what the cloud is declared to be - stood between them and the Egyptians and they could not get at them. The cloud that the Lord spread of fire by night was a light to Israel and confusion to their enemies.

When they had passed through the Red Sea that cloud was to them, O, a multiplicity of benefits. We read concerning the cloud and Israel, "When the cloud moved, Israel moved: when the cloud stayed, Israel stayed". So it was to them a commander, a leader, a director, and it was also an orderer of all their steps. When you think of it, when the cloud stayed it ordered and determined the period of rest that the Lord would give unto his people: when the cloud moved it brought them into a period of toil and of striving, but it was all according to the Lord's purpose, at His will, at His good pleasure, at His command.

Consider, all those forty years in the wilderness all their affairs were arranged and ordered and settled. Though they bitterly complained, nevertheless they were most wonderfully provided for in every matter by that cloud. In the heat and the burden of the day without it they would have perished: it was to them a shade, a refuge, a defence from the heat. Equally, in the cold of the night in the barren wilderness, the light, the fire was a light, but it was warmth also. There was not one thing that was not covered when the Lord spread the cloud because he provided it for a covering for his people.

Over/

Then let us notice that in this provision it was neither spasmodic nor did it fall short, for the Lord took not away the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night all the forty years that they were in the wilderness. As long as they were in need they were covered. Such is the mercy of Almighty God and the richness of His grace unto his covenant people.

Now I want to come as helped to consider this covering in the spiritual sense and I trust as it concerns us, every one of us, for, dear friend, we shall not come safe through this wilderness save only as the Lord has spread a cloud for a covering.

The first token of this covenant, for it is the covenant that I want to speak of first as one of the aspects of this covering that the Lord has spread as a cloud for his people, is in the Book of Genesis, the 3rd chapter and the Lord speaks to Satan. The Lord said "I will put enmity between the seed of the woman and thy seed". The Lord speaks of a warfare and said "and he (the seed of the woman) shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel". I believe there is a sweet, a deep, a precious setting forth, an unfolding of God's grace in the spreading of the cloud for a covering of his people, for there are the beginnings of the precious things of the Lord Jesus Christ set forth in the Garden. So it is Jesus who is the cloud, the covering for his people, Jesus only, the One thing needful.

I believe there is a particular beauty in considering the covenant of grace as the Lord hath caused it to be made known and manifested unto his children, because by that covenant they are kept from all harm and from all hurt, and I do not mean only physical though it applies physically - many have had to prove that - but keep them from all hurt and harm for ever, from all the powers, the infernal powers, and from the power of the prince of the air and of darkness.

If we meditate upon the covenant, it was undertaken before any of those things that we see in creation: its terms, its settlements, its promises, its blessings, its way, its means, its end were all determined.

We read that the Lord made heaven and earth and all that is therein. Now the work of creation was subsequent to the covenant and, therefore, it is an impossibility that aught of creation can have any effect or any change or alteration to that which has been settled, determined, purposed and the end predestinated. The Scripture says most clearly "Thy word is settled in heaven". Now if it were possible for the things of creation, the created things, to affect, to alter, to change or diminish aught that has gone before in the purposes of God in the covenant, then the created things would be stronger than the purposes of God in the covenant. That is an impossibility for He made them and they are subject to His will and to His order and to His command.

Over/

If we want to assure ourselves and be confirmed and strengthened in the matter, when the Lord Jesus Christ was upon the earth and they were in the midst of the sea, a storm arose and the disciples feared they would be drowned. They went and woke Him and he came and spoke, and by his very word created things subsided, were obedient and subject to him.

Now our God does not change. Therefore, that covenant is a covering, it is as the cloud that He has spread for a covering of his people, and there is a sweetness in this aspect of that covering in its undertakings and in its determinations that those whom the Lord loved in his foreknowledge, He speaks to them by that covenant of the predestinated end, and that predestinated end was determined before the mountains were raised, the seas were filled with fish, the air with the birds, and man and beast lived upon the earth.

See the love and the beauty in the spreading of that cloud because He gave them unto Jesus. The hymnwriter viewing this covering that is spread over them in that eternal donation, says

In union with the Lamb,
From condemnation free,
The saints from everlasting were;
And shall for ever be.

They are covered I The Lord has spread the cloud for a covering. He gave them unto the Eternal Son, they are His.

We know also that the means for their eternal salvation was settled and determined before the world was. We see throughout the Scriptures how the Lord remembers His covenant and that there are those preserved and kept, sometimes in the most strange and wondrous way, until Christ is brought forth. And is not the covering that is by the covenant of grace manifested in His coming forth ?

Job says "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes". He perceived the Holy One and declares "He is not a man as I am". He needed a covering, he needed One who should stand betwixt them both. Dear friend, so do you and so do I. I have felt this much laid upon my spirit over the last many months, and it is a solemn question the hymnwriter puts

How shall I come to thee,
O God, who holy art ?

I need a covering. And God sent forth His only-begotten Son to be the Daysman, the One who should stand between, to lay his hand upon the Almighty and upon the poor sinner.

By reason of that cloud throughout the ages, throughout the lives of all His own dear people, they are kept from hurt and harm, for the Lord says "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end". That is why they are kept, because of His covenant, because of His love through Jesus Christ the Lord.

Over/

There is another aspect of this cloud that I want to try and speak about a little. When the Lord spread a cloud for a covering it was by agreement, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, that the Lord should bear in his own body our sins upon the tree: and the crucifixion, the sufferings, the blood-shedding, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is a cloud spread for the covering of the poor and needy sinner. You may say: well, how and why? Dear friend, what is it that alone shall save us from wrath and from hell? Nothing but the sufferings, the blood-shedding, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you and I are concerned for our souls by reason of that light, that teaching that God has most graciously caused to shine in our hearts, like Job we shall need to know and to see by faith our Redeemer. Job said "I know that my Redeemer liveth". And what was it he saw? He saw One who shed his blood, "for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin". That is a word that we need to muse upon: no blood-shedding, no remission. How precious then is the blood of Jesus Christ.

The apostle declares "I desire to know nothing among men but Christ and him crucified". We read in the day in which we live of religious men and they talk about temporal, material, political matters: they are interested in putting all manner of opinions respecting the preservation of this and the preservation of that and the preservation of the other, and they know nothing and they care nothing for that one thing that is needful but, dear friend, I trust it is not so with you and with me. What other covering can there be that shall afford reconciliation and atonement for those that are under condemnation and the wrath of God because of sin. Will this preservation society or this catalogue of duties and expectations of temporal and natural things speak in that great day?

Let us also remember that the wrath of God fell upon Him, and I believe in every aspect of this cloud it is the Person of the Lord Jesus that stands between and is our covering. Some delight in offices. Yes, they are precious but, dear friend, it is the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ that stood between. One of the hymnwriters puts it in the most clear terms,

'Tis He, instead of me, is seen,
When I approach to God.

If we are taught and led into the wonders of God's love and grace in the crucifixion, in His sufferings and in His death, for only by His death is the demand of the law that lies upon us met and answered - for the law demands the death of the transgressor - as we are found sweetly sheltering under this cloud that the Lord has spread for a covering, I believe faith rises up and says

My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of thine;
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.

Over/

O, what comfort, what blessing is made over unto the soul as the Spirit takes of these precious things and seals them; seals them upon the heart and the conscience enjoining the covenant by the sprinkling of the blood upon the conscience.

Well, I want to mention finally this other aspect of the cloud that is spread for a covering. It is the cloud of communion with his people as their High Priest. The apostle says concerning the Lord Jesus "Such an high priest became us" that is, he is suitable and necessary to us, "who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens". Unlike Aaron and his brethren, He did not enter into the holy places made with hands, neither did He go in with the blood of bulls and of goats, but by his own blood He entered into heaven itself for us. And His communion with his people from heaven is as a cloud both to nourish them, to make them fruitful, to keep them in times of temptation, of trial, of sorrow and of grief.

Dear friend, if you and I look back over this week thus far, can any of us say we have not sinned at all, we have been perfectly free from sin? It may be that we have been kept from many outward matters that are sinful but, O, the thoughts that arise in the heart, the unspoken desires at times, the deceitfulness that works within us but, dear friend, if we have only sinned once we stand in need of a covering and "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father". O, how precious is Jesus as the High Priest of his people: how glorious and wondrous He is in his Person and, O, the tenderness with which he regards and speaks unto his children with words of love, "Rise up, my love". He sees you in trouble, he sees you in distress, and he comes and he ministers: the words of His mouth are sweet and precious.

There are times when because of weakness in ourselves we may feel that we cannot go any farther, it seems as though we come to the end of our tether, no strength left, and He comes and he says "lean on me", "lean on me". He is a shield, a shade, a defender, a director, a provider, a Redeemer, He is the lover of the souls of his people, He is precious in all things unto them. When we come to that great day and see Him there, for the Word declares it "And He shall stand at the right hand of the poor when they shall accuse his soul", dear friend, who shall speak for you and me? There is only One able, there is only One willing - Jesus, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of Man.

May He add his blessing,

Amen

