

Sermon preached by Mr. H. Dawson at Union Chapel, Bethersden, on Sunday, 26th April, 1959.

Ezekiel 9:6. "But come not near any man upon whom is the mark".

This is a word which stands in solemn connection in a chapter concerning the dealings of God with Israel of old. Israel had been long in a backsliding state, and the long-suffering of God had been lengthened out, but even to the long-suffering of God there is a limit, and the limit had been reached, and now, as the setting of the subject will show, the judgments of God were to be poured out in an amazing fulness upon Israel as a nation. God, in His infinite mercy, made a blessed provision for those who made up the Israel of God; His eye was upon them to deliver them in the time of trouble which Israel as a nation was to endure. The context tells us: "And the Lord said unto him, 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.'" The setting of the subject is indeed a dark background. Sometimes when an artist is painting a picture he puts in a dark background that the picture may stand out upon it in relief; and the dark background to our subject is the judgments of God which were abroad in the land of promise, and in relief upon it, the mercy of God that it might be made manifest: "It shall be well with them that fear Him". Down through the ages there is that guarantee: "He that feareth God shall come forth of them all."

"In every state secure
Kept as Jehovah's eye,
'Tis well with them while life endure
And well when called to die."

I want, as the Lord shall help me, to look at this subject from two or three viewpoints. The setting of it is very significant and instructive, and while, primarily, it refers to a chapter in Israel's history, the Word of God tells us :

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort in the Scriptures might have hope." So there is teaching in this subject, which it will be well for us to lay to heart as being seasonable, if grace is given to the preacher to open it up before you. The context tells us that Ezekiel saw in a vision: "And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth towards the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brasen altar." And what is read in going on is very solemn to contemplate: "And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house." The reference is to the cherubim that were upon the top of the Mercy-seat, denoting that God was approachable, making known the presence of God in the midst of Israel; but Israel as a nation had so departed from Israel's God, and godliness was at such a low ebb in the Land of Promise, the Word of God tells us: "The glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house", suggesting that the glory of God was about to depart from Israel as a nation. "Ichabod", the glory is departed. It is very solemn to contemplate - I must not take up time in going into the details of what can be read in the preceding chapter - it is indeed a very solemn picture of what sad departures there were from the God of Israel, and by those who were in high-places, and in authority, who were responsible for carrying on the worship of God in the land. You will read in the second of Chronicles what is very solemn reading to do with the judgments of God being poured out at this time: "And the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathens; and polluted the house of the Lord which He had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy", margin reading "no healing". What a very solemn picture that is of Israel of old, and it could be made plain, if the time allowed, that it is

equally, at the present time, a much more solemn picture of England as a nation. When you look back over England's history, and consider what great things the Lord our God has done for us in bygone chapters in our history; when you think of the glorious Reformation, and what followed on in England's history then; when you think of the great men of God that have resided in our Land, and preached the glorious Gospel, and the wonderful signs that have followed, so that England, as a nation, became an Empire upon which the sun never set; and then, when you look round England nowadays, and realise what the Word of God declares: "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people"; oh, what a great change there is in England as a nation, and what sad and solemn departures there are from God and godliness. How God is set aside in high places, and not regarded; His wisdom is not sought; His blessing is not sought either; "To us belongeth shame and confusion of face" in England, much more, even, than it did in Israel as a nation when Ezekiel was inspired of God to pen these words before us. You will find in the opening up of this subject the Word of the Lord went forth concerning these men, six men, each one with a slaughter weapon in his hand, and the word was given; first of all to "the Man clothed with linen which had the writer's inkhorn by His side," who went through the midst of the city, and marked all who were born again with a mark, - heavens hallmark, - what might be called "the mark of distinguishing grace"; and the Word of the Lord was: "Come not near any man upon whom is the mark. The word to the slaughtermen were: Go ye after Him through the city and smite, let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity, slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark". Then it tells us, and this is a very solemn consideration, "and begin at My sanctuary." And why was it that the command was issued to begin there? The root of Israel's defection as a nation had begun there, and so you read in the preceding chapter of the wickedness of the priests, who should have been patterns of holiness; alas, that it should be so. Cowper has some lines like these :-

"When a nation is to perish in its sins,
'Tis in the church the leprosy begins."

Remember the word I read to you: "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God, and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" When England as a nation began to go down, was when those who professed the Name of Jesus, and were regarded as Christians, whether church-goers or chapel-goers it matters not, began to fail in their profession of Jesus' Name, and to become slack therein, then the things of God began to decline in their importance, and their weight, and worth amongst us. Remember that. I want, as the Lord shall help me, to look at this subject from this viewpoint: "But come not near any man upon whom is the mark", especially remembering, too, "and begin at My sanctuary". You may look round England as a nation - and I could take up all the sermon time descanting upon England's wickedness as a nation - but that would not be profitable although it would be the truth. You and I can look round England, and generalise about the wickedness that is evident from Lands End to John o'Groats, but what you and I must seek grace to do is not to generalise but particularise, and think of our own contribution which we have made. Preacher and people alike must all plead guilty here; each of us here has made some contribution to England's guiltiness as a nation. Have you been all that you ought to be in what you profess to be? Have you always walked before God in the light that has been given you? Is it not the truth that you have sinned against light and knowledge often? Preacher and people alike must confess it. I say it will not do just to generalise; you and I must particularise, and that means we must seek, as grace is given, to be found amongst the men who sigh and cry for all that is being done in the land that we live in; and, whilst we confess England's guiltiness before God, we must say with Ezra: "Oh, my God, I am ashamed, I blush to lift up my face unto Thee." "But come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary." It means to begin at the pulpit, and every man who is found in a pulpit must enquire what right, what authority he has to be there. Has he a warrant from heaven? Has he got "Thus saith the Lord" to attempt to preach the everlasting Gospel? How did he come to step up into a pulpit? Was it as he was ordained of the Holy Spirit to be made a minister as the Apostle Paul declares:

"Whereof I am made a minister?" It is very solemn for those of us who try to preach to think about it. I go back to my beginnings, and think over what I hope was a commission to preach, how it needs to be weighed up: "And begin at My sanctuary". Let every man who is found in a pulpit have sure work before God as to his warrant to be there. "And begin at My sanctuary", and that will mean to begin at the church, too, and enquire of each one with a name on a church-roll: How did your name get on the church-roll? Was it of God that it was recorded there? How came you to be concerned to go down into the baptismal waters to follow Jesus? Was it the outcome of an exercise unto godliness? Was it through sheer necessity that you had to make it manifest that you were on the Lord's side, and that you must, as grace was given, be a witness for Him and His truth? You must not take it for granted that things are right between God and you because your name is on the church-roll, because it is to be feared that there have been thousands, tens of thousands, either baptized, sprinkled or confirmed, and therefore purporting to be Christians, of whom it can be said: "Like sheep they are laid in the grave," but, alas, they were goats. I want you to think these things over because unless you and I have got this mark upon us, - the blessed teaching of the Spirit of God, we shall come in the other category, and we shall fall a prey to the judgments of God when they are poured out. "But come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary". Not only to begin in the church, and see how matters are conducted there; but it means all who gather together for the worship of God. Why do you come? What do you come for? Is it to get in touch with Him Whose house it is? Is it to get some good for your soul? Or do you really come nonchalantly because it is the custom, and there is no real aim, yet you come week in, week out. "Begin at My sanctuary" the Word of the Lord is. Remember what the children sing in the Sabbath School - or at least, they used to do:-

"Children, why have you come here?
Not to see or to be seen."

So all who are taught

of God have to analyse their aims in going up to the house of prayer; they want to have matters right between God and their souls, and they want to catch a glimpse, if it is possible, of the mark which makes them manifest as being sinners born again. "And come not near any man upon whom is the mark." Now, it might be well to search a little into what this mark is, and to begin at the beginning, it is a mark which can only be written by this Man Who has the writer's inkhorn by His side. This is a reference to the Eastern custom that would be very familiar in the days in which Ezekiel prophesied, and it says of this Man that He was clothed with lincn. Now that is to lead our thoughts to the fact that the high priest, on the great Day of Atonement, when he went into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for Israel as a nation, did not wear then what were his beautiful garments with the jewelled breastplate, and other ornaments; but he was just clothed in pure white linen robes. That is to lead our thoughts to Jesus Christ as our High Priest on high, the holy, harmless, undefiled Son of God, Who has wrought out a righteousness for poor sinners, who have none of their own wherein to appear before God. You read of it as "fine lincn, pure and white", such is the righteousness of God. This Man is still going around marking poor sinners ordained to life eternal. His great work is not yet finished because the Word of God tells us: "And the Lord added unto the church daily such as should be saved"; and down through the ages, generation to generation, poor sinners, a number which no man can number, have been marked; and in the age in which you and I are living, there are many beneath the sun who have this blessed mark of distinguishing grace, showing that they have been made to differ from the world at large. Everything hinges on this: Do you and I possess the mark? What evidence can be found, if you weigh matters up in your life, that you can say with the Apostle Paul: "And He called me by His grace"? "Come not near any man upon whom is the mark." Now, looking at this mark, one evidence of it will be that you will have wrought within a concern about eternal realities. When a sinner is born again he has to live his life onwards, from that epoch therein, for eternity as well as time; and eternity takes precedence of time. A sinner born again has that concern within:-

"Jesus is the One Thing needful,
I without Him perish must,
Gracious Spirit, make me heedful,
Help me in His Name to trust,
And with pleasure
In Him as my Portion boast."

Is that mark found on you, - to be "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit"? Are the things of God first and foremost in your life? "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Such a solemn concern wrought by the Spirit of God in a poor sinners breast leaves an aching void which this world cannot fill," and that is a sure mark of being born again.

"I cannot here contented live
With all the dainties earth can give."

Another mark, a sure mark is: "When He, the Spirit of truth is come, He shall convince the world of sin." I have told you often about the needs be for a gracious conviction of sin. It is such a solemn necessity, especially in our denominational life, if God is to return to us and revive His work in the midst of the years. And that conviction of sin is referred in the context: "Set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." Such a conviction of sin wrought in you will make you realise that, whatever you see the wicked doing in the world at large around you, the grace of God alone can deliver you from doing likewise. "For Who maketh thee to differ from another, and what hast thou that thou dost not receive?" And that knowledge is very humbling, and very salutary, and it is very needful, and it will cause you to be concerned to watch unto prayer. You will realise :-

"Myself I cannot save,
Maysself I cannot keep,
But strength in Thee I fain would have,
Whose eyelids never sleep."

And while you look round

the land in which you live, and your heart is sad and sore as you discern the iniquities prevailing, you will sigh and cry most of all for what you feel within, arising from what you are as a sinner. "Which shall know every man the plague of his own heart." I have thought often about the publican, and it says that "He stood afar off, and would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner.'" The dear man was conscious, through a gracious conviction of sin, of his own sinnership.

"Here on my heart the burden lies,
And past offences pain my eyes."

In thinking of this mark, godly sorrow for sin, remember of the leper of old, how he had to live his life as he journeyed about with a concurring on his upper lip, and crying: all the while? "Unclean". There is that solemn awareness wrought by the Spirit of God in His people so that when they appear before God, they have to tell Him all the truth of what they are, what they feel to be; and they realise that the leprosy lies deep within; and they sigh and cry because of what they feel they are, and because they come, so short in all that they would be and would do. Much might be said along that line of thought. Then there is this mark, a sure mark, an indubitable evidence of being born again: "Behold, he prayeth." "I will pour upon the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplication." Let your consciences tell you, my friends, young and old, what you really know about that line of things. I do wish you well, but I do want sure work, I want you to be well grounded in the things of God; I want you to be helped to live right, and at the last to die right. I say, let your consciences tell you, as before God, what you really know about that line of things: "Behold, he prayeth", behold, she prayeth, - do you? And if you do, you have to sigh and cry because of what you feel within. "From the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores." You will look within and feel :-

"Is this polluted heart
A dwelling fit for Thee?
Swarming, alas, in every part
What evils do I see."

"Come not near any man upon
whom is the mark." It is a sure mark, I say, when a poor
sinner is taught to pray.

"How would the powers of darkness boast,
If but one praying soul were lost."

Then this mark
comes to my mind: "We are the true circumcision, who
worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in the
flesh." A great statement: "and have no confidence in the
flesh." None but the Spirit of God can bring any sinner
to "have no confidence in the flesh"; because it is much to
be deprecated that even people, who are being taught of God,
put quite a bit of dependence at times in the flesh and the
doings of it, until God strips them

"... of their fancied meetness
To approach the dread I Am."

If you are one of
these men marked by this glorious Man with the writer's
inkhorn, you will "have no confidence in the flesh" as regards
your appearing before God aright.

"Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil the laws demands."

You will have to
tell all the truth:-

"Naked, I come to Thee for dress
And helpless, look to Thee for grace."

"And have no
confidence in the flesh." I have thought, too, of Toplady's
hymn, and I have heard people singing it - you have sung it,
so sweetly, it does you good to listen to the singing of it,
but what about this wording in it?

"Nothing in my hand I bring."

Now, that must be
your attitude to be "saved with an everlasting salvation".
"Salvation is of the Lord."

"Nothing in my hand I bring."

"And have no
confidence in the flesh." A blessed mark, a very painful
experience. There is that about the great "I" in us that
would be something and somebody, but before God -

"Nothing in my hand I bring."

"And have no con-
fidence in the flesh." Think it over, as God shall help you.
"And come not near any man upon whom is the mark." Here is
another mark: "He that loveth is born of God." You may
listen to the truth, but not love it. "Ye did receive the
love of the truth." You have long listened to it, many of
you; the Lord bless you, but, do you love it? And loving it,
do you live it? It should be a great concern to :-

"Hoard up the sacred Word
And feed thereon, and grow,
Go on to seek to know the Lord
And practise what you know."

Blessed mark, to
love the truth, and love them who love it; and to listen
to it, and find a sweet echo in your heart, a gracious
response. "Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot
be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God
acceptably with reverence and with godly fear." "We know
that we have passed from death unto life because we love the
brethren." I believe, as these last days and perilous times
become yet more difficult and dangerous to live in, that all
people who are taught of God, and who are marked with heaven's
own hallmark, will come more and more together in the reality
there is in godliness. "He that is joined to the Lord is one
spirit." You must aim at that as grace is given. I remember,
long years ago, going through a notable flour mill, and

watching what was done therein, and one thing impressed me, although at the time I was still a teenager, but I hope I was born again. I went into one large chamber in that mill where the wheat came in from the various quarters where it was gathered round about the neighbourhood, and it was placed in huge silos, all in a row, and there was this kind of wheat in this silo, and another kind in another, and so it went on down the long row, and at the bottom of each silo there was a channel, and in that channel there was a long Archimedian screw. There were little doors at the bottom of a chute from each silo to allow so much wheat to go in at a time, so much of one kind, and so much of another, and it was moved along the channel, and all mixed together in a tremendous bin called a conditioning bin. When you looked in that bin - this is the point I am making - you could not tell which wheat was grown in this field, or which in that, because they were all mixed up together in that conditioning bin to partake of each other's nature, and that is how the flour produced in that mill came to have such a hallmark for perfection. I simply tell you that because that time has got to come in the history of the church of Christ, when you look beyond denominational labels and realise "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit". Remember, when all at length are gathered at Jesus' feet in the realms of bliss, you will not be able to tell who belonged to this denomination or that. Whatever field it was the wheat grew in, the main thing is this :-

"Lord of harvest, grant that we
Pure and wholesome grain may be;" -

To have a mark set on us that the Writer, with the inkhorn by His side, has made. When all is said and done, "God is love," and the Word of the Lord is: "Grace be with all those that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." "Come not near any man upon whom is the mark." If a poor sinner has been taught to love the truth he desires to live, he will know mercy when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth; he will escape; yes. "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, and upon them that hope in His mercy". Much might be said under that heading.

"But come not near any man upon whom is the mark." The Psalmist said: "I am a companion, O Lord, of all them that fear Thee", and that will mean irrespective of any denominational label. When a sinner can tell out: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what He has done for my soul", you should be like Barnabas, "who when he came to Antioch, and saw the grace of God, he was glad." It is the grace of God which is the mark; I said it was distinguishing grace; not only so, this mark will stand out very clearly at times

"When trouble like a gloomy cloud
Gathers thick and thunders loud."

You will see the behaviour of these people who are marked with this mark for the evidence of it will be seen in their lips and lives; and you will see, that, as the Psalmist declares, they will acquiesce in his words: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes." It is a good mark to be made submissive to the will of God in His dealings with you, to have within a gracious, blessed quietness, so that you can be still, and know that He is God; to be reconciled unto God in His dealings, and feel:

"It is the Lord, enthroned in light,
Whose claims are all Divine,
Who has an undisputed right
To govern me and mine."

If this mark is set on you, it will be discerned by other people round about where you live. You will be concerned to

"Let your life and acts express
The holy Gospel you profess."

"Come not near any man upon whom is the mark." And there should be a concern, in these solemn times, to show on Whose side we are, and to give evidence in our lips and lives that we do belong to Him, Who is referred to in the context, "the Man, clothed in linen, with the writer's inkhorn by His side." "And they

took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." "But come not near any man upon whom is the mark." Then, there is one reference I would call your attention to as I come toward the Amen, and which is a kind of parallel Scripture you read of in the Book of Revelation, and that brings the subject I have brought before you to be seasonable for these last days and perilous times in which you and I are living. Godly John says: "And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the East, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea. Saying: 'Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.'" I told you, earlier on, that "whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort in the Scriptures might have hope." Now, it is evident that the judgments of God are abroad in all the earth nowadays. Dark clouds are hanging over all the nations, and men's hearts everywhere are failing them for fear as they survey the things which are coming on the earth; but the great mercy is, if you and I are numbered with these people who are marked with heaven's hallmark of being born again, - sinners taught of God, - then, come what will, it shall be well. It can all be summed up like this:-

"In every state secure,
Kept as Jehovah's eye,
'Tis well with them when life endure
And well when called to die."

Here is a word of exhortation for you: "Watch ye therefore, and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling, and your election sure"; and God grant you the mercy to be able to feel -

"On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand."

Amen.