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The Tender Mercy of Our God

A Sermon preached at Union Chapel,
Bethersden, on Christmas Day, 1962
by MR. H. DAWSON, Pastor.

THE TENDER MERCY OF OUR GOD

Luke 1.78.

"Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day spring from on high hath visited us."

You will not need the preacher to tell you that this wonderful word is to do with the coming of Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners, but it will not do just to accept that as a general truth; everything hinges on you and I having a living interest therein. In our subject there is this little word "US" — "The dayspring from on high hath visited us." — and, ere I come to open up the subject, I would just ask you a question: you might search into the matter as to whether you are shut up in this little word us, for if you should live and die outside it you will be lost. The question is: "What think ye of Christ?" As you think on Christ Jesus coming into the world to save sinners, blessed be His name that He condescended to do so, but what does it mean to you? Are you concerned that you might be found amongst the sinners making up this little word 'us' that Christ Jesus came into the world to save? "What think ye of Christ?" Do you find something living and moving in your heart:

"Lord Jesus, make Thyself to me
A living, bright, reality."

In your everyday life do you ponder in your heart thoughts about Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and that you might have an interest in that which He came into the world to do, and that when He died on Calvary's cross it was for you:

"He hung and suffered there."

Do you in your life and in your lips let other people see, hear and know what you do think of Christ, so that your:

". . . life and acts express,
The holy Gospel you profess,"

and others can take knowledge of you, that you have been with Jesus. Do answer that question as you are here before God in your consciences. "What think ye of Christ." Remember:

"The soul that with sincere desires,
Seeks after Jesu's love,
That soul the Holy Ghost inspires
With breathings from above."

If it should be that

the truth of the matter is that you do not think about Christ, and do not intend to do it, but you still will live as you were born, and declare: "We will not have this Man to reign over us," alas! what a solemn conclusion to come to — to live your life as you were born, "After the flesh, the things of the flesh," I say, alas! "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;" and "He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption," and, O, what a mercy to contemplate: "He that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." Do you seek to get something from God, such as the Holy Spirit alone can bestow, my dear friends, young and old, that you may be able to declare: "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us."

I want, as the Lord shall help me, to look at the subject from three viewpoints: first of all, a Wonderful Fountain, "Through the tender mercy of our God." The wonderful fountain is tender mercy, a fountain ever flowing, full, and free. The second viewpoint is a Wonderful Fact. It is not just a myth, a fable, something that is sentimental to contemplate; and it is not just a piece of history, although it is history, but it is a wonderful fact; "And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh." The third viewpoint is a Wonderful Favour: "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us." Try to pray while I try to preach, and it maybe we shall be able to feel: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

Look first of all at the Wonderful Fountain. This adjective "tender" is very beautiful, suggestive, and instructive. "The tender mercy of our God." I would like, as grace is given, to open it up a little, although it should be no more, even if as much is done (I hope it will be), it will be no more than to take a bucketful out of the ocean depths in setting forth "the tender mercy of our God." Mercy is essential to God, and "He delighteth in mercy." You find in the Word of God that mercy is referred to under various characteristics of it. Sometimes it speaks about the Lord Who is rich in mercy, so there is rich mercy; then it tells us again that He is plenteous in mercy; and we read also of great mercy; and the word of God sets forth mercy as abundant mercy; and it also speaks of it under this heading: "A multitude of mercies," and it does say this, and say "Thank you" to God that it does, everlasting mercy.

"They who once His kindness prove,
Find it everlasting love"

But when all is said and done, there is no adjective used in the Word of God that is so suitable to the mercy of God as it known by His people wherever they are, tender mercy. What does it really mean?

You see it is not **common** mercy. The man in the street, the worldling, lives his life receiving common mercy, as we read: "In Him we live and move, and have our being;" nor is that tender mercy which God displays as our Creator in His all-wise providence whereby "The Lord is good to all" man and beast. Dear friends, **tender mercy is uncommon mercy**, it is mercy that reveals the heart of our God, and you get the opening up of it in that oft quoted scripture: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Through the tender mercy of our God." Tender mercy implies pity, compassion, love. What do you read the Apostle Paul penned to the godly Ephesians: "But God, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." There you see tender mercy manifested, the tender mercy of our God. It was hidden in the heart of God, and then He revealed His tender mercy first of all in His eternal purposes when, before time began or the world was built, He purposed that He would fill heaven with sinners saved by grace; and they should be, each one — a number which no man can number — the recipients of tender mercy, pardoning mercy; mercy displayed through the sovereignty of God: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy," and so "In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth," and that was the unfolding of His purposes, as it were the earth was to be, speaking with great reverence, His workshop wherein He would work out through the ages of time His eternal purposes, and reveal His tender mercy to all whom He had ordained to life eternal. The aggregate making up His Church, of whom the Word of God says: "Upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." That church down through the ages has been built up irrespective of any denominational label whatever. Sinners born again, sinners made the recipients of tender mercy make up the church of Christ wherever it is to be seen. "Through the tender mercy of our God." He says of each one, every one: "This people have I formed for Myself, and they shall show forth My praise," and when they do it the theme of their praise is just this: "Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us." Tender mercy, dear friends, what a beautiful theme it is! I thought, as I pondered the subject, how the Lord Jesus when He did visit us, when He dwelt on earth awhile as "Emmanuel, God with us," how often He displayed tender mercy. What tender mercy that was

when Peter fell, and then you read a little while afterwards: "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter, and Peter went out and wept bitterly." Peter felt it to be tender mercy, and in the ultimate issue it restored unto him the joy of his salvation. Think too of the prodigal, when he said at length, being in want: "I will arise and go unto my father, and say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee," and as he went on his way, what did he see? He saw his father running to meet him: "While he was yet a long way off his father saw him and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him;" yes, showed him tender mercy, and had compassion on him. Do remember God is just like that: He delights to display mercy, tender mercy, and the word of His grace still is: "Him that cometh unto me, I will" never, no never, no never "cast out." There is one more thought too: "Through the tender mercy of our God;" think of the Lord Jesus when "they brought unto Him infants that He might put His hands upon them," and the disciples rebuked those who were doing it. Jesus said: "Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," Tender mercy! "Even so, it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" "He put his hands upon them and blessed them." You dear children, sometimes in the Sunday school you sing: (how do you feel about it)—

"I could wish that His hand had been placed on my head,
That His arm had been thrown around me;
And that I might have seen His kind look when He said,
Let the little ones come unto me."

Do you wish His hand could be placed on your head? Do you wish that you might have such a blessing that would come from Jesus Christ doing it? The Lord bless you, and do remember what I have told you, not once or twice:

"Children, Jesus answers prayer,
May you on Him cast your care;
If you truly feel your need,
He will be a Friend indeed."

He displays tender mercy, it is a wonderful fountain. What do you sing? (What a wonderful mercy it is!)

"The fountain o'erflows our woes to redress,
Still more He bestows, and grace upon grace."

I have not yet told you how it is that this mercy is tender mercy, the answer is very simple, beautiful, and deep down. Tender mercy is mercy that flows down to poor sinners like you and me through what was done on Calvary's cross long ago;

remember that; when: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" — there you see tender mercy.

"Thee we own a perfect Saviour,
Only source of all that's good;
Every grace and every favour,
Flows to us through Jesu's blood."

Think of what that favour is. When the angel declared: "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people," amongst those good tidings were the tidings that God and man can now meet together on friendly terms; good tidings that God is approachable; good tidings that there is a mercy-seat, and Jesus Christ reigns thereon, and He declares "I will commune with you from above the mercy-seat;" and O, what good tidings were these: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness:"

Jesu's blood through earth and skies,
Mercy, eternal mercy, cries."

"The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." O, that precious blood flowed through the tender mercy of our God. What good tidings it is for poor sinners who are:

"Stripped of all their fancied meetness,
To approach the dread I AM,"

to realise there is
"The righteousness of God, which is by faith in Jesus Christ." Tender mercy whereby Jesus Christ says to a poor sinner who is saying:

"Naked I come to Thee for dress" —

"I bring near my righteousness to you." "Take his filthy garments off, clothe him with a change of raiment." I hope you can see, dear friends, just a little, that this mercy is **TENDER MERCY**. "Through the tender mercy of our God."

I would look at the second viewpoint of the subject, which is a Wonderful Fact: "Whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us." What an amazing consideration it is! "Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?" Blessed be His name, He was pleased so to do. If you and I by living faith can go to Bethlehem, and see the thing that came to pass there, and if our eyes are opened, and our hearts, we shall see "the Dayspring from on high hath visited us;" but do remember one thing — you must not read the Word of God cursorily — what did the shepherds say? "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." Remember that! "The Lord hath made known unto us." Here you get down to a bedrock truth, that

this religion "Whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us" can only be known by **revelation**. You cannot enter into it by any dint of intellectual study, although that is good in its place, but it can never bring you into the sweet reality of what it is to realise "The tender mercy of our God whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us." By dint of study you can search out every proof the Word of God affords, and corresponding proofs also to strengthen those proofs as it were, to make it very plain that this is indeed a wonderful fact, a blessed reality, but when all is said and done, something must be known **and felt**, and that something which must be known and felt, is that "Which a man cannot receive except it be given him from heaven," and that brings you right back to the starting point: "Ye must be born again." When you are, what happens? "A new heart will I give you, a new spirit will I put within you; I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh; **AND I WILL GIVE YOU AN HEART OF FLESH.**" and that heart of flesh will appreciate, delight, in "The tender mercy of our God, whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us." What a wonderful consideration it is, I say, that God into this world came down. He, Who is the eternal Son of God in His Divine nature, came down into this sin-cursed earth, and was seen in the manger cradle at Bethlehem as a little babe, a holy babe. "Born a babe, by birth mysterious," but:

"His shoulders held up heaven and earth,
When Mary held up Him."

"Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Pleased a man with men to be."

"The Dayspring from on high," the blessed Sun of righteousness, "hath visited us." See, first of all, the unfolding of this visit when you go to Bethlehem, but I have no time to work it out in detail as I should like to. When it says "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us" it means this, as I understand it, that Jesus Christ came down into this world — I quote again a scripture I often quote to you — "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His own Son, made of a woman, made under the law;" now as verily man, God in our nature, He lived His life under the law and kept it in every jot and tittle. What else did the Saviour do? O, there is a word here which will help you to get just an inkling of what the Saviour did. It says in the parable of the Good Samaritan: "But a certain Samaritan as he journeyed came where he was" — where the poor man was in his dire distress — "and when he saw him, he had compassion on him." Now the Word of God tells us that there is no circumstance that can befall any sinner born again but what Jesus Christ can visit that sinner in that circumstance, and

be a Saviour of quick understanding, and He will know every detail of that circumstance, because when He dwelt on earth. "In all our afflictions He was afflicted." Remember that. His heart overflows with sympathy, a wondrous fulness of it:

"The Physician understandeth,
All disorders of the soul;
And no payment He demandeth,

When He makes the wounded whole."

As He lived His life under the law, and as He went about He was in all our afflictions, as I have said, afflicted. Think how He was tempted, beyond what any preacher can begin to describe, and then, as He lived His life, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." He was set at nought by the world at large, and He was mocked, spit upon, persecuted as much as earth and hell could conspire together to do; then at length taken by wicked hands, and crucified, and slain. Yet, ere He died, what did He say? "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;" and sometimes He says concerning His people: "Father, forgive them, although they do know what they do," and here you see the "Tender mercy of our God." It is a wonderful description: "He delighteth in mercy." He delights to dispense it when a poor sinner is before the mercy-seat desiring it, He sends that poor sinner on His way in the possession of it.

"No sinner was ever yet empty sent back,
Who came seeking mercy for Jesus' sake."

"Whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us." He came down into this world, "Emmanuel," "God with us." Wonderful in His birth, wonderful in His life, wonderful in His death, for when He died He

"Vanquished death by dying."

When these people, on whose behalf He came, go down at length into death's cold flood at the end of life's journey, each one, every one, finds: "O death, where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory." Then on that Easter morn long ago the Saviour rose from the dead, triumphant over sin, and death, and hell, and He ascended up on high, and there He is reigning on a throne of grace. He delights to visit poor sinners still, He still displays tender mercy, and He says: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, I will give you rest." "I am the door, by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." Any man, if he shall enter in, he shall be saved, "and go in and out, and find pasture." "Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us."

There is this thought too, we will look at the third viewpoint, a Wonderful Favour. You all know the Dayspring is the

dawn of the day, heralding the rising of the sun, and it follows on. It is a beautiful setting forth: "Unto you that fear My name, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings;" and it is a sweet, blessed experience which some of us do know just a little about, and we can say before God this Christmas morn, I hope, quite a few of us, "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us." How does He do it? He visits His dear people in what we call the means of grace, and I want you to remember what His Word declares: "In all places where I record My Name, there will I come, and bless thee." When a poor sinner is found knocking at mercy's door — and a very great privilege that is, and a very great mercy to be brought to do it — but when that poor sinner is found before God as He reigns on the mercy-seat, he will know to His soul's joy: "It is good for me to draw near unto God;" and sometimes specially he will find that he is visited in his soul's experience with "The Spirit of grace and of supplication," and he will have sweet, wondrous, access to God with Whom he has to do, and he will go on his way, realising "The tender mercy of our God," declaring "Blessed be God, for He hath heard my prayer, nor turned away His mercy from me." "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us," and it must be said that He, Who is the Incarnate Word, visits His people as they are helped to search the Scriptures, which are the written Word, and that you will find as you are helped to look into the sacred pages, when the Spirit of God opens up the Word of His grace, you will say: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." "Good is the Word of the Lord." "I rejoice in Thy Word, as one that findeth great spoil," "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, a light unto my path." Do remember:

"The Scriptures, and the Lord,
Bear one tremendous Name,
The written, and the incarnate Word,
In all things are the same;"

and the underlying reason why the Word of God is so much assailed nowadays by earth and hell, and godless critics who seek to undermine the divine authority of it, is because in their hearts the Word of God condemns the lives they are living, and they have this attitude: "We will not have this Man to reign over us." Aye, but some of us say, by the grace of God, "We will;" "We will have this Man to reign over us;" we desire that He will do so, it is just what will rejoice our souls to realise He is swaying His sceptre over us in our everyday lives, and to know that with everything to do with us: "The government shall be upon His shoulders." "Whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us." Then, sometimes we get

a visit when the Gospel is being preached. Some of us have been trying to preach a long time, and I have long desired to be a good minister of Jesus Christ, but I do not feel I have yet attained to that character; but I do know that if I cannot preach, as I should like to do, a good sermon, I can preach a good Gospel, blessed be God. Sometimes the Gospel, in the proclamation of it, the Spirit of God attends it, then you get a visit, such as your soul desires: "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God, for our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power" — then you know the gospel is "good tidings of great joy," and you can understand the Psalmist's words: "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound, they shall walk. O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance." Some of you dear people have said many a time:

"The Gospel bears my spirits up."

"O, what amazing words of grace,
Are in the gospel found,

Suited to every sinner's case,

Who knows his soul's deep wound."

Sometimes you get a visit from this glorious Dayspring, and your darkness is turned to day, and you go on your way rejoicing when you gather in the worship of God, and realise His presence therein, and say: "Lord, it is good for us to be here."

You will sometimes get a visit when you do what does not seem to be done very often nowadays (I am not fitting any caps on): "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another," and when they do about the dealings of God with their souls, and the tender mercies of our God, O, there is such a thing as flowing together to the goodness of God, and your hearts are warmed and you feel the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; and you feel this: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

"Saints fellowship, if it be managed well,

Will keep the saints awake, and that in spite of hell,"

as good John Bunyan says. O, that it might be known more often:— "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what He has done for my soul."

As I come along towards the Amen, there is another thought too: "Whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us;" sometimes He visits His people when they get together as you do in the attitude of worship, when you sing the songs of Zion. Yes,

"Praise ye the Lord, 'tis good to raise

Your hearts, your voices in His praise."

The Word of God speaks about making melody in our hearts, and "Sing ye praises with understanding," and you are able

to do it when the Dayspring from on high visits you, you feel then that you must do it; you feel that if you did not do it then the very stones around you would cry out, and you must attempt to do it, and "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak." Another thought is: "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us," and some of us can go back over life's journey, along which we have journeyed far, and remember:

"When trouble like a gloomy cloud,

Has gathered thick and thundered loud"

and in many a time of trouble we have known this mercy: "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us." He has visited some of you dear people in hospital wards, when you went down to the operating theatre, and returned again, and found your hearts wrought upon by the Spirit of God as you realised: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the time of trouble, and He knoweth them that trust in Him;" aye, and I must make this plain: "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us." Sometimes in a time of trouble the Dayspring from on high will visit you, and show you wherein you have erred and strayed like a lost sheep; remember that. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth;" and you will learn: "Blessed is the man whom Thou chasteneth, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law, that Thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity." What is the outcome when you have a visit from this blessed Dayspring in a time of trouble, a time of testing, a time of trial? O, you can say "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes:" but O, best of all is when this Dayspring visits a poor sinner born again, and so shines into his soul that he is lifted up above every if, and but, and how, concerning his soul's eternal welfare, and he can feel:

"Oh, my Jesus, Thou art mine

With all thy grace and power;

I am now, and shall be Thine,

When time shall be no more;"

when you can say: "My Beloved is mine, and I am His, and His desire is toward me;" when you can declare: "My Lord, and my God." A wonderful favour, dear friends. "Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us." Coming down to what Bunyan called the "Practic part," if the Dayspring from on high hath visited us, then it should be with us (I was going to say it will be), it should be with us as the dear Saviour said to His disciples, and what did He say? O, He said what it will be well for you to ponder in your hearts prayerfully: "Ye are the light of the world, a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a

candle stick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house."
"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." There is another lovely Scripture which you will remember the Pastor often quotes, and do you ask God to help you live in accordance with it: "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." Go back a moment to the shepherds long ago: "And when they had seen it, **they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.**" Now that is what you should be concerned to do. As the Dayspring from on high, in His wondrous condescension visits you, as you realise His tender mercy, and that it is the tender mercy of **your God**, you should be concerned every day, all day, to show Whose you are, and Whom you serve:

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

"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

Amen.