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A BANNER TO BE DISPLAYED

A SERMON preached at Albert Street Chapel, Oxford on March 26th, 1931, by Mr. Herbert Dawson (Pastor, Union Chapel, Bethersden).

Psalm lx, 4.

“Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth.” Selah.

The subject is one of unspeakable importance because it refers to a character that has the mercy to be taught of God, and a character that the Word of God speaks well of all the way through, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, one with godly fear within. “Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee” — “that fear Thee.” You will find in the Word of God wonderful statements concerning those who have godly fear. The person who has this is one that rises above all others. “It shall be well with them that fear God”; well in time and eternity alike. Things may not seem to be going well often, but the promise is put in the future tense — “It shall be well.” Things will go well ultimately, and that is because the Lord has spoken great things concerning them that have His fear within their breast. One word is, “This people have I formed for Myself.” God has a vital interest in this people, they are His people. “They shall shew forth My praise.” And so it be well for us to consider this matter if the Lord shall give us grace — and much grace is needed by preacher and people alike; grace to examine ourselves. Does the character fit you? O that each of us may weigh the matter up! You will notice this subject concludes with the word “Selah,” and that means “Think upon it.” O that you may have spiritual minds to think upon it! Read it from that view-point. “Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth.” Think upon it in this way; in the first place, do I possess this godly fear referred to?; and in the second place, have I this banner that God has given to those that have this godly fear?; and in the third place, having this banner, do I display it in the life I live, so that men may take “knowledge of me that I have been with Jesus”? A banner is not to be wrapped up, it is not to be hidden, it is not to be placed in some corner cupboard, but it is to fly and blow in the breeze and to be displayed. And so where godly fear is put in a sinner’s breast there will be this banner accompanying it.

Let us weigh this matter up and think upon it, as the Lord shall help us. I should like to feel that some of you are con-

cerned about this matter. You may not be able to boldly join with Jonah, "I fear God." This is a definite statement. Yet you may join with the Psalmist in another place, "I am a companion of all them that fear Thee," and when you sing a hymn of ours — you can go with that hymn-writer:

"Then cry we to heaven with one loud accord,
That to us be given the fear of the Lord."

To us — what will evidence that a sinner has this godly fear within? It will be well to search out the character in the first place. "Thou hast given a banner," not to the world at large, not to dead professors. No, "to them that fear Thee." Man comes into the world an enemy to God and godliness, and in growing up the attitude of man is, "We will not have this Man to reign over us. Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thee or Thy truth." As man comes into the world and grows up, he is after the flesh and the things of the flesh, and the Word of God states this, "There is no fear of God before their eyes"; and so man will live and will be altogether unconcerned about his never-dying soul and the welfare of it, until God in infinite mercy looks upon him and puts this godly fear within. Then a man will be concerned about it. The earliest sign of this godly fear being put into a sinner's breast is when that sinner begins to know that he is a sinner and to feel a solemn concern about it; to look within and to realise what he is by nature. Like the publican, that man begins to smite his bosom because of what he is the subject of there, and he joins with Job (and realises it to be a solemn truth), "Behold, I am vile"!

"The heart once hard as steel,
Now made for sin to feel,
Bears tokens of a ransomed soul."

Where this godly fear is dropped into a sinner's breast it will bring with it a solemnity, a becoming solemnity. The things of God will not be a trifling matter to a man with godly fear within. As soon as a man has this godly fear that man begins to feel, "I am a sinner; I have to do with a God who will not look upon sin with any degree of allowance and I am full of it from top to toe. God is Holy, Holy, Holy, and I am altogether sin-polluted — filthy." That man will feel like Job did, "And dost Thou open Thine eyes upon such an one and bringest me into judgment with Thee? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." How can such a sin-polluted soul, undeserving and hell-deserving, be brought into contact with the great God! Godly fear in a sinner's breast will produce a trembling. You

will notice in the Acts of the Apostles how that trembling was made manifest when they were "pricked in their hearts." The Philippian jailer came trembling. It is a good sign in a man's religion in such trembling. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at My Word," and there are words that make a sinner tremble when God begins to deal with him. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." What a word is that to make a sinner tremble! And there is a word like this, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh living be justified." This godly fear works in the sinner's breast and brings him to know what he is by nature and that is a solemn experience. You do not learn it in a week, or a month, or in a twelve-month. You have learned, O so little of it in a life-time, and as you go on through life you begin to understand the prayer of one hymn-writer which you may not have entered into in your youthful days. "Make us well our vileness know." If you have this godly fear within, I say you will have a trembling. You will tremble at what you are by nature as your eyes are opened and you look within.

"Crowds of ill thoughts their bane diffuse,
Proud, envious, false, unclean,
And every ransacked corner shows,
Some unsuspected sin."

And this will bring you to be the character Solomon refers to, "Which shall know every man the plague of his own heart." This character with godly fear will know a little of it, here a little and there a little, and the outcome of this knowledge will be this: You will feel to be such a sinner as the Word of God describes a sinner to be, and when you try to tell the Lord what a sinner you are, what will you do? You will often take up Scripture language to do it. You will solemnly agree with the Word of God in the solemn confessions of His dear people in bygone ages, and you will often find Scripture words express what you feel to be better than you can find your own words to do it. This godly fear will bring you alongside Isaiah, "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores." It will bring you an abiding conviction of sin — do not forget, an abiding conviction. Conviction of sin that God is the Author of will not die until you die. As you go on through life it will be intensified, and deepened and enlarged. O, you little realise in youthful days what a sinner you are. It is here a little and there a little you are made conscious of it, and as the years go over your head and you are led into this and that experience, the matter is opened up to you and at length you come to this,

"No sinner needed mercy more."

You will notice this — when God begins to put this godly fear into a sinner's breast, that sinner has to deal with things at home, it is his own conscience; his own soul.

"How stands the case, my soul, with thee?
For heaven are thy credentials clear?
Is Jesus' blood thy only plea?
Is He thy great Forerunner there?"

This man wants to be right for Eternity at all costs, and his concern is "O, give me a real religion, a religion that will do to live by and die by alike."

This godly fear, then, produces in the first place a knowledge of what sin is; and then it brings this — a knowledge, a little knowledge (and some of us must be very cautious in speaking about this) of that great God with whom we have to do, and the early knowledge of that great God will be such that you will tremble indeed. The majesty of God, what He is as a Holy, Holy God, as you are helped to consider it (and godly fear will help you to consider it, and to tremble in the consideration) will bring you to feel at length,

"If my soul is sent to hell
Thy righteous law approves it well."

This then will be the evidence that you have this godly fear within. You will have a knowledge of what you are as a sinner, an abiding conviction of it. "When He" (the Spirit of truth) "is come, He will convince the world of sin." And what will accompany this? He will teach the sinner to sigh and cry and groan for mercy. This is how the filial fear of God will work. Natural fear, which makes a sinner dread God, will never lead that sinner to want to get into touch with God. He will want to depart into some secret place, if it could be, where he could be out of the reach of that God he fears. But filial fear brings with it a solemn concern and exercise, and although the sinner knows he is altogether unfit to approach such a Holy, Holy God, yet he wants to get into touch with Him; and that is because he wants a religion which God Himself is the Author of. You find when this godly fear was dropped into the bosom of Saul of Tarsus it is said, "Behold, he prayeth!" Here is a great evidence. There is no greater evidence than this. If there had been God would have produced it (we speak with great reverence). When God would make this matter plain to Ananias, this was produced as an evidence, and Ananias was satisfied with it. The Word of

God tells us, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

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

You will find where this godly fear is, a spirit of prayer is also. The spirit of grace and supplication is found in the sinner's breast, and it is often evidenced by solemn thoughts within — prayers that cannot be put into words.

"Those feeble desires, those wishes so weak
'Tis Jesus inspires, and bids you still seek."

Now how will the man live who is the subject of this godly fear, and is brought into concern about his never-dying soul, and feels to be such a great sinner? Godly fear will make that man feel an aching void within which the world cannot fill, and he will therefore be separated from the world. It is a great mercy if this evidence is stamped upon us, preacher and people too. Godly fear in Moses' breast worked out like this, "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," and in the Psalmist like this, "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." As a man goes up and down in the world with this godly fear in his breast he will not be at home in it. He will be a pilgrim and a stranger therein. And why? O, he cannot find that which will do his soul good in the world. Time things cannot supply that which his soul needs. The things of this life cannot ease a guilty conscience; they can bring no balm to a troubled breast. And so a man with godly fears goes about the earth as the Psalmist did, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." He feels,

"Nothing else can satisfy,
Give me Christ, or else I die!"

Thus there is a separation from the world. He lives a different life altogether from that which the worldling lives. "The ungodly are not so." The worldling is in the world, and of it, but the man with godly fear is living, not for time; he lives for eternity — you weigh these things up.

There is another thing about this godly fear. What a

reverence it will bring into a sinner's breast for all the things of God, what ever they are!

"And everything that's dear to Him
To me is also dear."

How it will help you to look at the Word of God and realise it is the Word of God! And sometimes it will help you to read it and prize it. It will help you to value one word of it that is made spirit and life to your soul, one sweet promise that has gladdened your heart. When men assail it and find fault with it and criticise it, godly fear in your breast, if you have it, will rise and cause you to feel a solemn — a holy indignation against the enemies of God and of His truth. It will produce a jealousy, a holy jealousy, for the truth and the honour of God.

Another thing, not only will there be a reverence for the Word of God, realising it is the Word of God to you, but godly fear will prompt a solemn feeling in your breast for the House of God. You will go to the House of God with willing feet. How concerned you will be when you get there to be a spiritual worshipper, a true worshipper! How you will bow your head ere the service begins and beg a blessing, like Asaph did, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." "I will hear what He will speak to me for the good of my soul." Where godly fear is, it causes people to remember that the House of God is the House of God. It is not the bricks and mortar that you are concerned about.

"What is all the house to me,
Unless the Master I can see?"

A hymn-writer tells us this,
"With joy they hasten to the place,
Where they their Saviour oft have met,"

And it is godly fear that causes their heart to be thus warm. In going to the house of prayer at times you will feel a solemn gladness. "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy House, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth." Another thing will be this: When you get to the house of prayer, godly fear will help you to feel at home there. At times it will cause you to be sweetly sensible of God's Presence and you will feel "This is none other but the House of God and this is the gate of Heaven." And I must tell you this — godly fear within you will cause you to have some of your worst times in the house of prayer, too. You will have not only good times, favoured times, but if godly fear is active within you will sometimes feel in the

house of prayer, "Guilty, guilty!" and will have to go on your way with a burdened conscience, and realise that things are not right between the Lord and you. This will make you feel like Ezra, "O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to Thee."

One more thing, this godly fear will help you to single out other people round about you with godly fear within. It will give you a keen eye. It will give you a sensibility within. When you meet a brother or sister who begins to speak of the things of God, this godly fear in you will bubble up. You will find your heart warmed at times with the love of God shed abroad when you hear one and another speak of His goodness and His dealings with their souls. Love will be there. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "He that loveth is born of God." "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Remember this, too; if you are given a love towards a brother or sister and that love is spiritual love, it will last, not only in this life but it will last beyond the grave.

"Love is the golden chain that binds,
The happy souls above,
And he's an heir of heaven, that finds
His bosom glow with love."

And so God in great mercy drops this godly fear into poor sinners' breasts — "a number which no man can number." God the Father has chosen the number that will be taught by His Blessed Spirit, the number that will have this godly fear within, and each and every one will have a banner.

Now in the second place, let us look for a little while at this banner. "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee." The banner is the evidencies without of godly fear within—in a word, a consistent life. Has He given a banner to you? Think upon it. If He has given you a banner, what are you doing with it? Are you keeping it clean? Are you displaying it? Do people round about you know you have got it? The Word of God is plain, "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed." And where? I will tell you.

In the first place, it will have to be displayed at home. If your religion does not work out at home, so that those who live in the house with you realise that there is of a truth godly fear within you, I am very sorry for you, because there

is no well-grounded evidence that you are the subject of it. I love that word in the Acts of the Apostles, "They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." Many a youth, many a maid, has been made to begin to think about having the religion that his or her godly father or godly mother possessed, and to begin to cry and sigh and groan, "Be this religion mine!" It is a mercy of mercies when a husband and wife can take their stand with Joshua (as some of you have been helped to do), "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The banner, I say, is to be displayed at home. I hope some of us are on the right side of that word, "And the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom." And why? The ark of God was under the man's roof. I want the ark of God under my roof. I want the banner to be displayed there. When you go into a house sometimes you find something like this on the wall: "Christ is the Head of this house, the unseen Guest at every meal, the silent Listener to every conversation." It is a great mercy if you are concerned about such a solemn statement, and if you realise that Christ is the Head of the house. I say, the banner is to be displayed at home, and there are none beneath the roof with a keener eye than the father and mother to detect when this godly fear is dropped into the breast of their children, and how the father and mother will look on and rejoice and will watch for the banner to be displayed! And it will not be long before the banner is displayed. A change will be manifest. One is made to differ. The banner will be displayed in the home life.

Another thing. It will be displayed in the world at large, too. The Word of God tells us all the way through its sacred pages that when this godly fear is dropped into a sinner's breast he lives a different life altogether. Men look on, but they cannot understand it. A change is manifest. Think of Lot, who "vexed his righteous soul from day to day with the filthy conversation of the wicked." He could not join in it; he had to hear it, but O how it grieved his soul and burdened his conscience! He was not at home in it. Yes, you will sometimes have to display the banner before the world and be silent when worldly conversation is going on that you cannot enter into without getting a guilty conscience. "I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me," and sometimes in the world the banner is to be displayed thereby. Yes, it will be displayed by those who have godly fear. You will not find such folk at the pictures; you will not find them in the theatre; not on the football pitch; not on the cricket pitch. You will not find them in the club room, nor on the ballroom floor, where the world at large can gather together and be at home. Do not forget it. Are you displaying your

banner if you are found in any place where the worldling can be at home? You must not, you dare not, if you have godly fear, go into any place where you cannot do what you do in the house of prayer — that is, bow your head on the pew rail and ask the Lord to bless you. Do it in the pictures if you dare; do it in the theatre. You cannot do such a thing. The banner is to be displayed because of the truth. People will look on and watch you, and your profession of the Name of Jesus will be weighed up by what you do. Words may drop from your lips, but when all is said and done, it is what you do that will tell. This banner is to be displayed, and when you get an opportunity to speak a word on God's behalf and stand up for the truth and vindicate the honour of God, as it were, how glad you will be to do it! Read the Word of God from that view-point. I love to read about Nehemiah; I like his line of things. The good man went to the city gates when they were going to have a market on the Sabbath Day and he looked over and said, "Depart with your marketing. The Sabbath Day is to be kept by the Children of Israel. If you do not go I will come out and lay hands on you." I call that displaying the banner because of the truth. Yes, there is a time to speak and it was a time for Nehemiah to speak. Look at Daniel in the lion's den. The dear man goes into the lion's den for the truth's sake and he takes what I hope each of you who profess the Name of Jesus will take wherever you go — that is, a good conscience. If you have not a guilty conscience, no man under the sun can give it. So Daniel, with a good conscience and godly fear within, a man of prayer, goes into the lion's den and displays his banner there. It was a good time to Daniel, a time of refreshing, and he found the Lord nigh to deliver. Look at the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace. What decision for the truth! I love to read it: "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter. Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O King, but if not, be it known unto thee, we shall NOT bow down"; "and if it means the fire we shall face it and leave the issue with the Lord our God." There is a word like this — "Them that honour Me, I will honour."

"Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear;
Make you His service your delight,
Your wants shall be His care."

And so the banner was displayed because of the truth, and the three Hebrews went into the fire and came out again, too, and the Word of God tells us

there was not so much as the smell of fire upon them. What a waymark they set up in that fiery furnace! And they never, never forgot it. You may go through the Word of God and search out how this banner is to be displayed in the world.

Another thing. **It must be displayed before the Church of God.** It is not to be hidden. The banner is given to be displayed, and there comes a time with God's people when they are brought to this point, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul." Read the Acts of the Apostles — and you need go no further. Do we not take our stand on the Acts of the Apostles? And as it is laid down in its sacred pages, so our desire is to walk, and act and live. "Then they that gladly received the Word were baptized." O, they displayed the banner in the Apostles' time. And so with the eunuch. Godly fear was dropped into the eunuch's heart and the truth was made very, very precious. The God of truth was enthroned in his affections. What a wonderful confession, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." That is a great statement. See how the dear man displayed the banner — "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." And so the banner was displayed by the eunuch, and he was baptized, and went on his way rejoicing. There is no need to bring forth a multitude of arguments concerning baptism, because if you read the Word of God the thing speaks for itself. If one is led to be baptized aright it is not through force of arguments, but as he is constrained by loving obedience to the Lord's commands concerning it, and it must never be overlooked or forgotten that Jesus went into Jordan's river and set an example for his disciples to follow in ages to come.

"Jesus says to each believer,
'Be baptized in my name';
He, Himself, in Jordan's river
Was immersed beneath the stream."

And so when poor sinners come and come as believers and go down into the baptismal pool, the banner is displayed because of the truth. And what is the truth displayed in it? The believer, in being baptized, desires to make it known to the world at large that he wants to be dead to this world and alive to that which is to come, seeing that to go down and to be immersed under the water means that he is buried with Jesus in baptism and rises to live a new life — a life to God's honour and glory.

There is another thing I must tell you. "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed be-

cause of the truth." **It will be displayed in times of trouble.** There is one thing has been to me a little surprising, and that is the connection of this word — the surroundings of it. God had been solemnly dealing with His dear people, the Children of Israel, when the Psalmist penned this Psalm. Things had not been going well, and you will notice the Psalmist speaks like this, "Thou hast shewed Thy people hard things." Some of the Children of Israel had come up against difficulties, hard things, intricate problems, and some of them may have felt like Jacob, "All these things are against me," and so we have this lamentable statement, "Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment." And yet this follows, "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed." I say, it will be displayed in times of trouble. You need a breeze to make a banner float. When the wind blows strong the banner flows out and you can read what is written thereon — you can see the pattern of the banner. So it is when winds of trouble blow:—

"When trouble, like a gloomy cloud,
Has gathered thick and thundered loud,"

then the banner has begun to fly. So it did with Micah, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him." And depend upon it, each one who is taught of God will have to put his mouth in the dust in a time of trouble, and admit the needs-be of it. "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good." Then the banner begins to fly to God's honour and glory. The Psalmist knew a little of this. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes."

And in weighing this matter up when you get home, you must not overlook this — a banner speaks of warfare. This is not a banner that you bring out on coronation days, high days and holidays only. This is a banner to be flown every day you live, until you wave it in a better, fairer world on high. "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee." This banner denotes warfare — yes, a warfare with what you are by nature, too; a warfare with the evil one, and the world, and trying circumstances. Yet, what an infinite mercy it is to have this godly fear within; what an infinite mercy if God has given you a banner, and if from time to time you are helped to display it to His honour, to His glory! And when you do display it in a time of trouble, what will be read on the banner? "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knoweth them that trust in Him."

"Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth, Selah." Think upon

it. The Lord give you grace to examine yourself, cause you to rejoice that you have this godly fear within, and, O, do remember that the banner given to those with this fear is to be displayed — displayed because of the truth. May you never, never disgrace it. May you never, never sully it. May you have grace given you—

“The fruits of godly fear to give,
And show the world how Christians live.”

The Lord help each of you to
think these things over.

AMEN.