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Substance of Sermon preached by our Pastor
on Thursday Evening. October 10. 1974

Lesson. Habakkuk 3.

In wrath remember mercy. Habakkuk 3. 2.

Two observations are desirable. The first is, the preacher has been very hard pressed to night concerning the subject and message to bring to you in the Name of God, because there has been excessive travail and labour to bring to you that which is from the mouth of God and relevant to the present time. So I have to own that only shortly before leaving for the holy place did this word dawn on my spirit, so I hope we shall know and sweetly experience the blessedness of the divine record concerning Moses when Aaron and Hur held up his hands.

We have before us a household word in the living family of God. We are persuaded that in many seasons of your life and pathway, personally in your own solemn state in the sight of God as a guilty sinner; whether inside in a relative way concerning your family and friends and others who rest with a heavy weight on your souls; whether you solemnly and prayerfully ponder the retrograde state of this dear land, or the Churches of God, it seems often there is only one word suitable to come from the agony of your spirit to the Throne of God through the mediation of Jesus Christ; that is, my Text. "In wrath remember mercy."

Just a brief comment on Habakkuk. He was associated with the period of captivity in Babylon. He had sad, solemn things to pass through. The Chaldeans had been successful, yet in the midst of woe, distress, pain, solemnity,- what happened? As it has been this day, the sun penetrated the clouds. With all the thick gloom that enveloped Israel because of sin and the wrath of God, His displeasure and judgment, the sun penetrated the clouds and the Lord manifested to the prophet and the dear remnant the sweet perfection of mercy.

So I mention to you as I open this occasion in the prophecy, and it could not be a prophecy apart from the testimony of Jesus, "for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." In the midst of distress,

agony, pain, self-procured and imposed for sin by the displeasure of God, the prophet says; "Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die." Beautiful word! "We shall not die." Here is mercy. In the second chapter is an amazing word that has been made precious to the Lord's dear people. "And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

What is the vision? do you know what it was? It was a vision of the incarnation of the Son of God, of the birth of the Saviour, of the coming of Jesus, over six hundred years before the birth of Christ. "The vision is yet for an appointed time." And in verse two; "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it," applies to the sacred ordinance of the ministry of the gospel. Those ordained of God and know the precious vision in their souls, by the command of God run to proclaim it. So there is the sun breaking through the clouds, my friends.

I want, by the help of God to come to the verse. I might read the whole of the verse. "O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy." I feel to try, by the grace of God to concentrate on the one clause. "In wrath remember mercy." How shall I begin to expound the word, "In wrath"? What do we understand by the wrath of God? It is His just anger, ire, displeasure manifested against sin and sinners. It is very terrible because to spell ~~it~~ out the meaning of the wrath of ~~the~~ God, it is to contemplate the everlasting punishment of the bottomless pit, and it includes all the fiery judgments of God that descend as lightning, and this has been done in various times in history on this planet. The wrath of God is consuming.

I must say this: you will appreciate that to speak of the wrath of God makes me tremble. I want to put it to you: we may consider the wrath of God in two categories. If we know the wrath of God in the abstract, if we really experience it, what hope is there for us? A poor sinner, born again, under condemnation of the law, feels it in himself, and he feels the wrath of God poured on him. I remember this period of my life it was

not a matter of fearing, it seemed settled and sealed. I felt like a condemned criminal in the cell, waiting for the time to be brought forth and for the wrath of God to be poured on me. I knew nothing of mercy. O the wrath of God against sin!

The two categories are these, if I am able to take them up. Sin being against God, - and it is a mysterious thing, the doctrine of sin: how it entered the world and the fall of man 'wrought the channel for mercy to flow'. Sin being an affront to the divine majesty of God, God must deal with it or cease to be God. You must face this. If God never deals with sin, how can He be God, the Supreme Being? He has given in the moral law a perfect expression of His character in relation to the human race. We are lost before we are born, and by our perpetual violation of the moral law. It is not something that is occasional. You who are taught of God know you come before Him in solemn confession that "your best is stained and dyed with sin; Your all is nothing worth." (959) Our very breath is corrupt; our thoughts, imaginations, motives. It is impossible for us to cease from sin. It is a great mercy to be preserved from external sin, and to have a capacity to hate it and long to be holy.

Sin being an affront to the divine Majesty of heaven, God must vindicate His very Being and character, and He is just and holy and righteous. So He must deal with sin. There is no such thing as the Lord excusing sin. I said there are two categories: in both the wrath of God takes effect in different ways. There are those who are eternally loved by God, and there are the wicked. There are those in the Covenant of Grace, bound up in the bundle of life, and there are those who perish in their sins. With those who are bound up in the bundle of life, in the Covenant of Grace, they do not stand before God in their own persons, but in their Surety. They stand before God in Christ from all eternity. O the wonder of the Suretyship of the dear Son of God incarnate! They stand in the Beloved. God has never looked on those eternally loved outside of Christ: never. From all eternity, because His love never commenced, He viewed His chosen in the Person of His beloved Son. O the wonder of it! When He looks on you, child of God, He looks on you in His dear Son. What about all your sins? They have to be dealt with, because the forgiveness the Lord grants to His dear people is not based on the

remission of the penalty: your Saviour suffered it. The time came in the life of the Lord Jesus, and it would appear as He entered Gethsemane the holy Father imputed to Him all the sins of the election of grace. As He laid them on His dear Son, He gave Him His cup, and it was wrath. That is why you can say; "In wrath remember mercy." He gave Him a cup full of wrath: there was no mercy in it; it was not mitigated. Do you wonder that your Saviour, as the hymn says;

"Backwards and forwards thrice He ran,
As if He sought some help from man." (153)

Do you wonder at His agony in the garden, and the sweat of blood; at His prostration when He fell on His face to the earth, and prayed, saying, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." and, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." There was wrath in the cup, and the Saviour drank it. God awakened the sword against the Shepherd, "and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones." Your Saviour suffered the wrath due to your sins.

The other category is, those who are out of Christ, poor creatures! Good were it if they had never been born; never had a being. They are out of Christ; living and dying destitute of spiritual, divine life and grace and the indwelling of the Spirit and a vital knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and vital union to Him. It is a profound mystery to me that vast numbers of God's human race are left in such a state. I hope it may please the Lord yet that there will be millions round the world called by grace, and in our own land. It is a plea in my soul to Him that He will fulfil the word of prophecy; "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." How dreadful to be in the category to live and die in sin: to die in the world or be lost in religion! Some are lost in the world: they go into vice and crime. Some are lost in religion: it is superficial, nominal, formal; it is a quasi-religion; a seeming religion. It seems to be: there is no reality in it. God says; "I never knew you." and the wrath of God is poured out. When the Lord banishes a poor soul from His presence for

ever, that poor sinner departs into everlasting fire, "the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." to be tormented for ever, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." We can never contemplate how awful it is to be lost for ever! no hope!

"How they shrink with horror, viewing
Hell's deep caverns opening wide." (495)

This is the wrath of God.

So before I take a further step, I feel there are two things to say. One is a great desire that the Lord will use this word to quicken dead sinners into life, for "Death is now upon the road." Presently the icy hand will grip our bodies and steal away our breath. As I look on you I feel perhaps there is no unregenerate person in the Chapel to night: it may be all have grace. So would to God that others might hear it, and it penetrate their hearts. I want to get back to the people of God and say to you, if the Lord Jesus drank the curse for you; if He suffered wrath for you, you will know this. When your poor soul seemed sinking in despair there was a Rock, a Refuge, and the everlasting arms and a revelation of Christ, When I felt I was falling through space, and it was black, the next moment I found myself in the everlasting arms of Christ. It was all light, glory, beauty; no sin; forgiveness, deliverance This the people of God know: and divine love commenced to flow into my soul. I thought I could never stay in the world. There was no wrath. I feared it and anticipated it, but in wrath He remembered mercy because of His covenant, because of the decree of salvation, because of His boundless love. He speaks this word to you; "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Now you see from that time you are not under the law; you are under grace You have a relationship with the law and the law with you, and it is a righteous one. The law, or God's justice is your friend for ever, because Justice has received complete, full payment and the law of God has been magnified and honour restored to it by your Saviour. He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it, and the fulfilled law is your relationship. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just" The justice of God that called for the pouring out of wrath on the wicked, calls for your pardon and justification for ever. Think of it; because

the law has been magnified in your behalf! It is wonderful. Some have entered into a deep spiritual experience of justification. They came to the place where they stood before the Trinity in view of eternity, with all the character of God,- all His perfections, and not a single voice was raised against them. Love, mercy, justice, faithfulness,- every attribute of God stands for you, - His very justice.

With all you come into, all you pass through, and death, the finality, you will find there is no curse in it, no wrath; no. Afflictions, trials, sorrows, deep distress; there is no wrath; it is mercy. Because there is no wrath, no sting, no terror: wrath does not consume you; it does not overwhelm you; it is made a blessing; the love of God is in it.

"Not in anger,
But from His dear covenant love." (758)

"In wrath remember mercy." He looks on His dear Son; on the Covenant; on His own character, and He remembers mercy. O the beauty, wonder, and comfort of it! There is no wrath on His countenance: He chastens, but there is no wrath. This will prepare you for your death. When you come there, there is no terror, no servile fear, no sting. You will look back to Calvary: you will speak to Death and say; "O Death, thy sting was removed for me when my Saviour died and rose again. O Grave, there is no terror. Thou art a downy bed. My Saviour conquered death by dying, and rose again and ascended for me." There is no wrath: it is love. I should try to go on, - I shall stay here till I am Home, then, O the glory of it! to be safely landed on the happy shore!

I will make two observations on cases where there was wrath, and the Lord remembered mercy. First, the case where the Lord created man and he was very wicked, and it repented the Lord that He had made man. I can well understand it a little, though it is an unfathomed truth. God repented that He had made man, and you can understand it when you feel a worthless sinner; guilty, filthy, wretched within. God said; "I will destroy man whom I have created (here is wrath) from the face of the earth." So you have the great flood that drowned the world, but God remembered mercy. There was a little remnant,- Noah and his family, and God gave him a prescription, the plan He drew and has drawn,- the Covenant of Grace. He gave Noah the plan; it was the ark. He remembered

the law has been magnified in you

mercy. The ark was built, and the flood came, and God told Noah to enter the ark with his family and with the beasts and creeping things, "and the Lord shut him in." He remembered mercy. "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." The Lord shut him in. He remembered mercy, and vengeance retired, went back; so mercy came forward. God said He would never drown the earth any more, and He put a bow in the cloud. He remembered mercy, and He gave a promise.

"While the earth, ^{remaineth} seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." Every time you see the bow in all its wonderful hues, as you see it, God sees it. He said He would look on it, and He remembers mercy. However black the clouds over you, the Church of God, the nation, He looks on the bow and He remembers mercy, and you will learn by spiritual experience to see the bow in the cloud in your trials. You come into dark things, as a cloud over you. One day you will see the bow, and you will know God will deliver you. He remembered mercy: they came out of the ark. Do you know He has shut you in Christ, the Ark? He put His bow in the cloud, and the bow is over the Throne in heaven. John saw a rainbow round about the throne,- all the divine perfections in sweet harmony in Jehovah Jesus.

I will name the other case. To vindicate the character of God, you remember that Elijah "prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months." Here is wrath. There was a terrible famine. One day the Lord manifested that He had remembered mercy, though there was only a little remnant. Elijah "went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees".- This is where you will find mercy. He was there until mercy appeared. This is a simile, but you will find vengeance will retire and mercy come out. As long as the Lord has a people on earth, mercy will come out. "He said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times." Mercy came out. "And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." Mercy had come out. I do not feel in despair. Mercy keeps coming out. It came out in the harvest. It has been out this week: I have felt it. You will know in your own soul,

in the pulpit, in the pew, in trials, afflictions, sweet mercy comes out.
"In wrath remember mercy." Amen.