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Substance of Sermon preached by our Pastor

on Sunday Morning. March 13. 1983.

Lesson. Acts 26.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55. vv.8-9.

One of the monumental Scriptures of the Bible has now been read before you as the basis of our meditation. I would suggest to all who fear God, that these Scriptures must have at various times by the power of the Spirit, greatly exercised and searched you. I wonder how many times in your little span of life the Lord has said to you, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways"? The exercise of your soul has been initially, you really wondered where you stood before God in a variety of matters. The word searched you, tried you, and if sanctified it brought you to seek that the Lord would reveal to you His will, thoughts and way, and that by divine teaching, grace and power your thoughts may be in harmony with His, and your ways enjoy the sunshine of His divine approbation and the wonderful terminal blessing. I want to pause to ask you who are very godly and spiritual - "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." - to the spiritually minded we make an appeal on this Lord's Day morning: has the word crossed your spirit and considerably exercised and searched you as before God? I should pause to give you the opportunity to come to an answer that is correct and truthful before God, and in accordance with what He sees. Let it be said, being frail, sinful mortals, erring creatures, and I speak concerning those who love and fear God, looking back over the span of life since you have known the Lord, I ask you a question. Have you made mistakes? or, how many mistakes have you made? (This includes the preacher.) In the school of Christ you are being educated for Heaven, and I hope for this Church. In every lesson you have

received from Him have you had the right answer? How many mistakes have you made? Dear Mr Eli Ashdown said that much of his religion was made up of his mistakes and he had learnt most by his mistakes. Have you made mistakes? I will enlarge. Have you had false exercises? and how much false faith have you had? I am not beating the air. These are deep things. Many of the people of God, and those of former generations renowned for grace and godliness, made tremendous mistakes, they knew false exercises, and they knew in some things a false faith and it has been proved. Have you had an exercise that is false? Because it has never come to pass it dies. Some have professed faith to believe that a thing would come to pass and it never has. The only conclusion is that it was a false exercise and a false faith. I do not apologise for naming this to you. We are so frail and erring and things have to be proved. That is why in the Scriptures there is an exhortation to prove things. "He that believeth shall not make haste."

I wonder what the response is from your spirit concerning these truths? Some godly people in the Church have said in years past they knew, believed, were certain that they would marry a certain man and it never came to pass, so it was a false exercise and a false faith. There are false things. You want reality. The devil can so transform himself to appear as an angel of light, and he can activate an area of your mind to such a degree you think you have got something real. You can go on with a so-called exercise perhaps for years, with a false faith and it never comes to pass. I wonder what you are thinking, for God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." Let the whole of our thoughts and ways be exposed in our knowledge to the scrutiny of His piercing eyes. Let Him show us where we are deceived, or if there is a spurious, false, unholy faith; any dead exercise that proceeds from the pit or from the flesh. This applies to Churches and ministers. Some have said, "It has been revealed to me that a certain man is to be our pastor. The Lord has shown me and I am sure," and the man has never become their pastor. What do they do with it all? "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, saith the Lord."

Let this word this morning search all of us. God only knows what is true and what is false. There is nothing in between. A thing is either of

God, or of the devil or men. Tiptaft said, "I stand before you as a servant of Christ, or a servant of the devil." Where do we stand? If we think of the Church we have the parable of the wheat and the tares. Shall we gather up the tares? No. The Lord said, "Let both grow together until the harvest." The angels know who in the professing Church are the tares. It is not the work of God's ministers to root them up. The last day will come and they will be rooted up and burned. You think solemnly of these things. How awful to grow with wheat and be a tare! We have made these few preliminary observations because of the nature of the text. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." I tell you, this word if God uses it, can demolish false things in you, knock them down. There are certain things in the minds of people sometimes, and the Word of God comes and knocks them down; they crumble, and the people go out of the House of God and the thing is gone. Don't you think this is a solemn word? How do we stand before Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire? There is one other thing. Why should we speak thus in the Name of the Lord and by the Holy Ghost? Because all of us are dying sinners surrounded by Eternity, and we shall soon be facing the Judge of all the earth. "What wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan?" If the Lord said to us in the last moment of life, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts," what should we do? It shows how at variance with God's thoughts ours can be. It is a matter for great searching, and only the Spirit of God can do this. I ask you who are listening attentively - I know from your appearance - what conclusion you have come to? I will give you a prayer and may the Spirit put it in your heart. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Do you ever hear it prayed in twelve months? What about it? How often does it come out of your lips and heart? You have only got to ponder; it is seldom if ever heard. I do not know the last time I heard it. This prayer in the Name of God I give you to plead before Him in view of the imminence of Eternity, and the possibility that our thoughts are at variance with God's and our ways with His ways. I go aside to say "For my thoughts are not your thoughts" may often apply to a child of God in some things, not basically in vital things. I want to be lucid, You can be right before God and a child of God, but you have

made some mistakes. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts."

Having said that in the Name of God I will begin to show you some of the sections of the subject. It is clear from the context that the word is spoken generally in a merciful way, to arrest and quicken and convince poor sinners. So I will give you the context. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts - ways, thoughts. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord." Is that the end? No. "and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." I wish to make it clear that generally the word is spoken in great mercy. It is a word that is calculated to illuminate the mind, unstopp deaf ears, anoint the eyes with eyesalve, give a new heart. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." It is a lovely word. "and let <sup>him</sup> return unto the Lord." If you are returning to the Lord it shows you had gone from Him and that is sad. "Let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Can you have anything better than that?

There are two things in the subject: there are thoughts, and ways. Think deeply on these two matters. Why are thoughts put in the priority? why do they stand before ways? Because the sequence here is first your thoughts. Thoughts are the activity of the faculty of the mind. No one can see your thoughts nor read them, not fallen creatures. People think things, and in the course of five minutes thousands of thoughts revolve in the mind. We are always thinking, and our thoughts cover the earth, every subject, conceivable and inconceivable. Amongst our thoughts emerge those that claim priority, and from those further emerging there may be one that is premier to the rest. You think more of that than of anything else, and the likelihood is the next thing will be speech on the thoughts. You will utter some of them and it goes on to the third step, from speech to perpetration. You do things. That is your way; the way you act. Take all the diabolical acts of sin in the world: they start with thoughts in the mind, then there is speech and action. You may have been thinking about something for a long time, and one day you do it. So how needful it is that the Lord should cleanse our heart and mind within us. You see how important thoughts are. You would not like your thoughts over five

minutes to be displayed before the people, would you? or before the population or congregation. You would take to your heels and be gone because of shame. You think of a thing and you ponder; proud, envious,<sup>false</sup>, unclean, malicious thoughts. I cannot begin to name it to you. I believe one said to Rabbi Duncan, (and this is different) "A penny for your thoughts," and he said, "I was thinking there are better men in hell than I." I know what he meant, and you do if you are taught of God. What would you say if I said, "A penny for your thoughts"? This is why thoughts have the priority over ways. Everything springs from thought. I know a thing can be done rashly without premeditation. Aren't you glad the Lord overturned a good many things in your thoughts before you went further? Aren't you thankful that what you thought never came out of your lips? Aren't you thankful that many things in your thoughts you were never allowed to put into action? Shall I startle you? If the Lord had not overthrown some thoughts you would have been a murderer. Is that too strong? What is in the heart and mind of man? What thoughts do you have? It is solemnly true, so thank God you are not in one of Her Majesty's prisons. Thank God you are not under a life sentence. Everything begins with thought.

They said of Joseph - who? not a lot of strangers, his own brethren. Let us slay him, and we will see what becomes of his dreams. This is a great, deep subject. Your old man is a man of sin, corrupt as the pit, and your ways are ways of sin and wickedness. It is terrible when you think of it, with such a wonderful creative act of God and the construction of the human body, that that wonderful faculty of thought is used in the service of sin and Satan.

I can bring forward and illustrate for you that which will highlight the Scripture read. The Lord is saying, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," and let the demonstration be the case of the prodigal. He had thoughts and he translated them to ways. He thought he would be emancipated, get away from father and his house and enjoy himself, gratify the lusts and appetite of his flesh and be satisfied. They were his thoughts, and presently he goes to his father and asks for his allocation of funds. It seems strange that he received it. Now it is translated to ways, and off he goes. All he wished to do he did. His money was gone, he was debauched, a wreck of humanity. The

Lord is saying, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts. Your thoughts are to go out into the world and stay there, but I have thoughts of peace toward you. You think you are going to stay in the world and gratify your carnal appetite." It is a wonderful word if the Lord is looking on a wayward sinner as the prodigal was, and He says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts. You hate Me. You are doing everything contrary to Me, but My thoughts are not your thoughts. I love you with an everlasting love. My thoughts toward you are thoughts of peace. neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. My ways are ways of holiness, truth, purity; of confession and repentance and returning to the Lord. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man has thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon," Amen.