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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Wednesday evening 28th. October, 1970.

Hymns ⁴⁴⁹~~469~~, 426, 427

Reading Acts 16 from v. 8 - 34

Text Acts 2.41

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Then they that gladly received His word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

This blessed chapter records what must have been a truly wonderful day. It was a day when the Lord's promise that had been given to His disciples that the Holy Ghost should come upon them was fulfilled in a very striking and remarkable way, so that we read as resulting from Peter's preaching and the mighty power of the Holy Spirit upon this people who were at that time pricked in their conscience that "there were added unto them about three thousand souls". Perhaps we may say there has never been a day quite to compare with this, for this remarkable day resulted evidently in establishing the first Gospel church at Jerusalem, and this was the opening of a blessed Gospel dispensation which evidently appears now to be closing. Since this remarkable day the blessed trumpet of the glorious everlasting Gospel has been sounded throughout the length and breadth of the earth, and probably millions and millions of people have been brought out of nature's darkness to know the Lord for themselves and to walk in His ways.

It is said of these primitive converts, "they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers", so it was a real work in them. It was something more than religious excitement. These people had been pricked in their hearts, and were now evidently delivered from those solemn convictions, and their guilty condition through the confirming words of the apostle Peter in his exhortations. "For the promise is unto you and to your children and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call". That blessed promise, dear friends, stands good in this day, and has stood good in the case of our beloved sister in the faith who has gladly received the

Gospel here and has felt the sweet love of her Lord shed abroad in her heart, so that it is her desire to honour Him, and to show her love to Him Who has done so much for her. What a mercy it is for poor sinners to be delivered from that state of death that sin has brought them into, to be raised to a hope in the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, to receive a word from Him, and to feel the pardon of their sins!

There are one or two points I desire to refer to here. First of all there is the word which these people gladly received. What are we to understand by this? I would like to say that the word is the blessed Gospel; in the highest sense we may say it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, for the Scripture says "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." The Lord Jesus is the Word, and it is in His Name and Word that His dear people desire to walk in His ways, but here particularly we must understand that it was not just simply the words that Peter gave expression to, but it was the blessed doctrine that was involved in these utterances that came from his lips. It was truly Christ the Word that he preached, and this is the solemn duty of all the Lord's ministers as in the exhortation by Paul to Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season".

The precious truths that Peter refers to here incorporate the fundamental truths of the blessed Gospel. He refers in v.23 to "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God". This was one feature of the doctrine. He emphasises that all events, whatever they may be, were all fore-ordained in the purposes of God, and particularly in relation to the salvation of the elect of God that were eternally chosen in Christ according to the counsel of His own will. We

read in the 2nd. Epistle to Timothy that, "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His". The seal of divine foreknowledge is stamped upon that blessed covenant of grace as relating to all His dear redeemed people and their eternal redemption through the obedience, blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It can be sweet to feel this. We find the Apostle Paul saying, "whom He did predestinate,

them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified". The striking links in that golden chain are all according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; and so was the crucifixion of Christ, although it was by wicked hands, yet even so this blessed substitution was divinely appointed otherwise we should have no hope whatever. Though He was crucified by wicked hands, and that murderous deed was brought to pass by those who hated and despised Him, as did those chief priests and rulers, and probably those also who crucified Him; yet the Lord in His infinite wisdom brings to pass His secret will even by means that are not according to His revealed will. He sees the end of a matter from the beginning.

Another feature of this word relates to the Person of Christ. The apostle's point was to emphasise that this Person, Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the true Messiah, whom God had fore-ordained should complete the work of redemption on His people's behalf. So it is said here, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ". These earlier apostles were firm and steadfast in their belief in the glorious and blessed deity of Christ as the eternal Son of God. We find the Lord saying on one occasion to His disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" and Peter said to Him, "Thou art the Christ". I emphasise that word "the", "Thou art the Christ" - (for there had been false christs) - "the Son of the living God" and the Lord said to him "Blessed art thou . Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven". What a blessed thing it is in a poor sinner's heart when the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed as the Christ, the true Messiah, the sent of the Father, the Anointed One, the Christ. It is sweet to be brought to this point. It sinks deeper than a mere theological conclusion does, and will be a revelation in the heart as the Lord said to Peter, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee". Flesh and blood can never reveal a precious Saviour or make Him precious in a sinner's heart

but the Holy Spirit can and the Father does this by His Spirit. It is sweet to get a view of Him in His eternal glorious Godhead as a Person in the blessed Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

The Apostle Peter's word also related to His blessed substitution, He died and was buried, as predicted in the Old Testament. This is a vital point friends. When we speak of the precious blood of Christ we understand all that He suffered, the death He died, the blood He shed, and everything that relates to the deliverance of His dear people from the chains of legal bondage, to bring them into the sweet and glorious liberty of the children of God. What a solemn contemplation is this of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross". What was involved in this surpasses all our conceptions - the terrible agony of His mind in Gethsemane when He said "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death" and His excruciating bodily pain when He was upon the cross.- It would appear that His agony was greater when He was in the garden, for that was the agony of His soul. The crucifixion was terrible bodily agony, but Gethsemane was the agony of His soul. Waves and billows went over Him there so that the cup given Him was amazingly bitter, and to drink this He had strength enough but none to spare. This is what is set forth when a believer in the precious Lamb of God is immersed beneath the water. How sacred it is and yet how blessed.

The Apostle's word also relates to His resurrection from the dead. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses". In a later chapter it is said of these witnesses that, "The place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul". "And with great power gave the apostles

witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus".

Another point here with the Apostle Peter is not only His resurrection but His exaltation. "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted". What a transporting view is this to one who gets a sight of Christ, by faith at the right hand of God, exalted there in heavenly glory as a priest for ever after the order of Melchisidec, able to save to the uttermost. He will save every poor coming one. He says so, He said in the days of His flesh, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest".

Now it is said here of the Apostle Peter's words that these people gladly received them. They had been pricked in their heart; they were wounded in their conscience; they were under a deep sense of their personal guilt; but when the Apostle held forth the promise saying, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call", they gladly received his words. This is beautifully experimental, it is a real experience in a needy sinner's soul. Even naturally speaking, if a person is ravenously hungry, he would gladly receive a piece of bread, if he were thirsty he would gladly receive a little water; so it is spiritually those who gladly receive His word must be in a suitable condition. You see the world have no joy in this, with ungodly people, the people of this world, as we say, there is no receiving of the blessed Gospel gladly. They have no heart for it, no desire for it, no love to it. They are like we read of in the parable when a certain man made a great supper and bade many, they all with one accord made excuses, one thing and another, because their heart was in the world. When a poor sinner is convicted of his lost and ruined condition and feels something of the bondage and fetters of the law holding him like chains about him, he is in a suitable case to receive the Gospel gladly. It is blessed tidings to such

as are under a sense of personal guilt and ruin. "They gladly received his word".

Those who gladly receive His word are those whose hearts the Lord has opened, as we have been reading of Lydia. After the Apostle had been speaking to the women by the water side, it is said of Lydia that the Lord opened her heart. It was not just something that she decided upon or some accomplishment of her own, it was the Lord's work in her heart. He opened her heart to gladly receive the Apostle's word. It is not recorded what convictions she had or what trouble or distress she had, but we know that she was prepared to receive the word gladly, because the Lord had opened her heart.

These are the characters then who receive the Word with joy and to whom the Gospel is glad tidings as we read in the Psalms, "I will run the way of thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart". That is like to opening the heart. When the Lord opens the heart, friends, He makes the spirit willing; He removes those things that may have been stumbling-blocks and temptations of the enemy. He makes the truth precious in the heart when He opens it then there is a gracious receiving of it; these dear people are like those Thessalonians who when they received the Word of God, "received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe".

Has the Lord opened your heart? Have there been those times when you felt a little sweet softening, when the ice began to break, when your poor heart began to soften more and more until you were brought down in sweet contrition before your Lord with your heart opened to hear what He would say? O it is sweet to have the heart opened, and I am sure the Lord does this. Sometimes He opens the heart in confession. When He does this it something more than a verbal confession. When the Lord opens the heart there is a sweet drawing near to Him in confession of sin. You are a companion then to the poor dear publican who said, "God be merciful to me a sinner". The Lord opens the heart in repentance, and when He

does this it is a sweet repentance. When the Lord opens your heart in repentance it will not be the fear of hell's torments but grief for grieving Him. This is Gospel repentance, when you see your sins as so many nails that nailed Him to the cross, when in your heart you feel that you were a party to His sufferings, and yet under a sweet sense of His amazing mercy and grace in forgiveness, you repent of your guilty sins and confess them before Him. You feel there is nobody worse than yourself and that no one can know a more blessed Saviour.

I have been reading a little, while watching the water rise in the pool this afternoon, of dear old Mr. James of Brockhampton. When he was in distress about his sins, poor dear man, one day the word came to him "Washed in the blood of the Lamb" and it broke him down. This is what brings repentance. The Lord's grace never puffs one up with pride, when He comes and fills your heart you will weep at His blessed feet. This is real Gospel repentance which He Himself gives, and this is bound up in forgiveness, for the Lord is exalted to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. The Lord opens the heart sometimes in a sweet hope. How good it is when something seems to lift the veil a little and the heavy gloom that has been hanging over you as it were seems to disperse gradually or partly and a good hope springs up in your heart, perhaps after all He died for me. This is how the Lord opens the heart and moves His dear people gladly to receive the blessed Gospel.

He opens the heart in faith. This ordinance is an ordinance of faith. Every true believer who is rightly baptised is a witness to Christ, as I believe our dear sister is. She has witnessed to the blessed truth that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ and all the Christ that she can desire, for He has shed His love abroad in her heart, and now she desires to show her love to Him. That is as it should be. This is a sweet response of faith. The effect of this receiving gladly was that "they were baptised." We believe they were baptised by immersion, and that the Apostles baptised by immersion. We are

"for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins," that the Lord has forgiven her sins, and what does she now say in her heart? Is it not what doth hinder me? There is nothing to hinder her. May the Lord help us now by His grace to observe His commandments, and show that we are not ashamed of Him on Whom our hopes of heaven depend. Amen.

At the Pool

Dear friends we have a solemn and blessed duty to baptise our dear sister upon her confession of faith in her Lord, and her testimony when she was warmly received by this church; and who are we that we should refuse her request? We gladly received her with all our hearts, felt a warm union to her, and now we hope she will feel blessed in following her Lord. May the Lord be pleased to open the hearts of others so that this may be but as a sound of abundance of rain. May the Lord be with us.

Now my dear sister I hope the Lord will help you to obey His commands and give you a sweet sense of His presence.