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PASTOR'S ANNIVERSARY SERVICES

74/F

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham on Monday
afternoon 27.5.74

Hymns 2, 176, 329

Reading Acts 20 from v.17

Text Acts 20.24

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

"But none of these things move me neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

The verses I have read, as you are aware, are a charge the Apostle gave to the elders of Ephesus, evidently godly gracious men, to whom he spake on this solemn occasion. As you can see, he makes a personal reference to himself, how he had kept back nothing from them but testified to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. This appears to be the principle point with him, experimentally speaking, but writing to the Corinthians he says, "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified", that was the doctrinal feature of his preaching, and they are both very sweetly linked together. If we are brought to any saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in our soul's experience, it is sure to be attended with repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a mercy to have a little feeling of gracious repentance, to feel like one we read of in the prophecy when he said, "Woe is me for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips", as every true minister will feel himself to be in the sight of a holy God, and in the discharge of his ministry; but it is a mercy to know something of a revealed Christ, to have some sweet humbling view of His glorious Majesty, the Lamb of God. That will melt us in the sweetest repentance we can ever know, for nothing really can make sin more bitter than to see it borne away by the agonies of a suffering Surety.

In these verses the Apostle gives various admonitions and also warns them of what will follow in days to come, which it certainly did; but here referring to himself he says, "I have not shunned

to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers; to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood". It is the sacred duty of a pastor to feed the flock; this is one essential feature, or should be, of his ministry; so that his hearers may be established and built up in the faith and hope of the Gospel. The Apostle here was about to go up to Jerusalem and he realised what would be involved in this perilous journey. The Jews would lie in wait for him to take his life and bonds and afflictions would abide him, so that he had nothing to anticipate but opposition, persecution and suffering and ultimate martyrdom, but even so he could say, "None of these things move me". I realise, he would say, that bonds and afflictions abide me, and I know not what shall befall me later at Jerusalem where I go bound in spirit; I do not know what will befall me or what I shall suffer but "none of these things move me."

I have had intense conflict about venturing to take such a subject for I cannot of course in any way compare myself, but this refers to the Apostle Paul who could say, "None of these things move me" - not the bonds and afflictions, they do not move me, what I may suffer, or even if it cost my life, yet "None of these things move me". We are not to understand that he had no feeling about them but the prospect of what might lie before him did not move him from the resolve upon which his mind was set. Although the Jews were lying in wait and watching every opportunity to take his life, yet he said, "None of these things move me". His friends tried to prevent him going up to Jerusalem but nothing could move him. This can be considered in more of a personal sense, as though he would say, nothing will move me from the foundation on which I stand. What was that foundation? Why, it was Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. That was the foundation upon which the Apostle stood; and not only apostles and ministers, but every one truly taught of God will stand upon this one same foundation, Jesus Christ and Him crucified. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ". This is prophetically referred to by Isaiah;

"Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation". This was one of the things that he would not be moved from.

What a mercy it is to be on a firm standing, a firm foundation.

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word"

In his epistles the Apostle bears testimony to the foundation, to the hope that held him and that nothing would move him from it, "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. "None of these things moved him from this foundation, none of these things moved him from this hope, not all the dangers and persecutions that he was liable to suffer; and which he did suffer on a number of occasions; yet none of these things moved him. We have a blessed example of this in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 16, when Paul and Silas were apprehended for their preaching, many stripes laid upon them, were cast into prison and their feet made fast in the stocks. Did that move them, not in the slightest, for at midnight Paul and Silas sung praises to God, although the jailor had laid many stripes upon them; but none of these things moved him. It is true the Apostle Paul could say this with more confidence than we might venture to affirm of ourselves, but even so dear friends we do need a religion with a foundation to it that nothing can move us from. A mere form of godliness, a superficial profession of religion, will never open the gates of paradise; but saving faith in a suffering, bleeding, dying Saviour will open them. May we be helped to hold fast the profession of our faith in a gracious way, realising our need of divine help and succour. May nothing move us from our faith and confidence in the glorious Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. "There are three that bear record in heaven the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one", and may nothing ever move us from it. We may not dare to say that nothing ever will, but I would say, May nothing ever move us from it;

and not only the glorious eternal personality of our dear Redeemer but the work that He accomplished upon the cross; the nearer we get to the cross the nearer we are to heaven. May nothing move us from the vital necessity of a once crucified Christ. I have so often felt what the hymnwriter says on this,

"I'd creep beside Him as a worm

And see Him bleed for me"

May nothing move us from the atonement. I have said this here many times, but we are in days when there is a lot of religious profession and preaching without the atonement, but the atonement is vital, there is no heaven apart from the blood that does for sin atone. What a sight it is for a poor sinner to see a crucified Saviour by faith. I do not mean literally with our mortal eyes, but a sight by faith of a suffering Saviour, and to see a way to heaven through His wounds and blood. Oh may we, may I, be kept close to the atonement. We live in days when there is a drifting away from it, may nothing ever move us from it. Oh to feel the efficacy of that precious blood, that will take us to heaven, for there those that have already crossed the flood adore the Lamb once slain and cast their crowns before the throne. May nothing ever move us from it.

Another beautiful point here is the obedience of Christ to the law. We are under the curse because of our transgressions, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them". We are under the curse - what hope have we then, only in Christ who redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. This must bring us to the cross again, and to the atonement where the ransom price was paid.

"He saved us from the wrath of God

And paid the ransom with His blood".

May nothing move us from the atonement. It is the foundation upon which we stand, may nothing move us then from the hope of the precious Gospel. The hope of the Gospel is eternal life, which God Who cannot lie promised before the world began. How sweet it is to feel it; and if you should get a sight of Christ it will bring into your heart a hope of eternal life upon the foundation and merit of

Calvary, what a blessed hope this is! I remember when I felt it myself and I have never forgotten it. It is a good word by the hymnwriter -

"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness"

Nothing less - that will hold us, for it is an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, it will hold us - it is not so much you holding it, it will hold you. May nothing move us from it.

There is another point here in the complete and absolute satisfaction that Christ's substitution gave to the hand of justice. Justice raised the sword and smote Him, and here is our protection; it will either smite the Saviour or the sinner: but justice smote Him. The substitution of Christ gave absolute satisfaction to every claim of justice.

"Hell is vanquished, heaven appeased,
God is satisfied and pleased"

A beautiful thought, transporting thought, all the powers of hell combined can never overthrow Calvary.

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"None of these things move me, neither count my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy". That was what moved the Apostle, not the bonds and affliction that awaited him, none of those things moved him; but what moved his heart was that he might finish his "course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus". He certainly could claim this, for the history that we have of him clearly shows that the ministry the Apostle exercised was received from the Lord Jesus, this was confirmed by what the Lord answered Ananias when he said, "I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem", "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles". He was to be a minister, and these chapters in the Acts of the Apostles are some record of his ministry with many things that attended it, and the wonderful results of it; that was the one thing that moved him, "that I might finish my course with joy", and that is the thing that moves me often in the silence of the night, when I pray that I might, by the grace of God, finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus - which I would say I hope I have, if I

am not greatly deceived. This is a point with every minister of the Gospel to finish his course with joy, not to have any self satisfaction in a natural sense, but to feel that by the grace of God he has been enabled to declare the whole counsel of God and so can finish his course with joy. It is a very, very solemn thing to be a minister, a preacher of the Gospel, it is a solemn position to stand before a congregation, to bear witness to the precious truth of God, to testify to the truth; and this the Apostle did in a remarkable way. Ministers of the Gospel have often felt themselves fed with this Gospel and while they have been preaching it to others, it has become life and power in their own souls, and has given them a door of utterance to proclaim it to other poor sinful dying men; so that the Apostle Paul here says, "I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God".

It is the Gospel of the grace of God in several particular aspects, it is the Gospel of the grace of God in predestination. There is a remnant, and yet at the same time the remnant is a number whom no man can number, a mighty multitude, but comparatively speaking it is a remnant according to the election of grace. The Gospel of the grace of God has its rise in eternity, it is an everlasting Gospel, it was in the eternal decrees of God in appointing a people unto eternal life through Jesus Christ. This is the Gospel of the grace of God; the grace of God the Father in making a choice of poor sinful people, determining their everlasting destiny and appointing it unto them that they shall one day be in glory with Him. I wonder how many of us are incorporated in this glorious, blessed decree in this congregation and whether I am myself. I desire to be kept from a vain confidence such as many religious people seem to live and die in, but beloved friends, it is a mercy to know a revealed Christ. I remember when I believe I had this experience and how I loved Him. I had never felt such love before, never. He became in my soul the altogether lovely and the chiefest among ten thousand. The beauties of our glorious Emmanuel surpass all words to describe, they are referred to beautifully in the Song

of Solomon, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love". I do want a sight of Him again. I know I cannot be here very much longer, I feel my natural powers are failing; but I have been enabled by His grace to testify, to bear witness to the Gospel of the grace of God, nearly 40 years here. I have just entered upon my 40th. year and when I agreed to come in 1929 on probation I wondered how I could hold out preaching to the same people for three months; but I found the Gospel was all sufficient and I felt more liberty preaching to the same people than going hither and thither. I began to live for them and I believe some were helped under my ministry, so we have continued from 1935 when I actually officially became pastor here. It is a long time and during all these years I have seen many changes; I have buried many of the congregation that were here when I came; but I have not buried the Gospel, I preach the same Gospel now as I preached when I came, and I do not want any other Gospel. So now for a short space longer as I may be helped I desire to bear witness to this Gospel of the grace of God, so that I may finish my course with joy if that is according to the will of God. I have much to be ashamed of, but here it is, "that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God". Now I must leave it, I have spoken in much felt weakness physically; but I can say this, I believe, I am not ashamed of the Gospel. Why not? Because I have felt it to be the power of God to my salvation. May the Lord very graciously help our dear friend this evening, may he bear a witness to the Gospel of the grace of God, and feed our souls with that living bread which cometh down from heaven. Amen.

