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Sermon preached at "Ebenezer" Clapham by Mr. J. Delves on Sunday evening, 29th. May, 1938 - Text: Acts 28.24

"And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not."

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Very few today believe in the solemn realities of eternity. Although God has revealed the truth to man, and although we have the Bible in our hands, there are but few who receive the truth in the love of it savingly, who believe in the heart unto righteousness and with the mouth make confession unto salvation. Why is it, may we not ask? What is the reason of this prevailing scepticism? Why do so many reject the open testimony of God's Word? Is it because the things of eternity do not concern us? They do concern us incomparably more than the things of this life can, for the things pertaining to this time state pass away, but eternal things abide. There is an eternal state approaching, a state that can know no change, wherein, according to the Word of God, as we read, "In the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be." "He which is filthy, let him be filthy still:..... and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Why is it then that men are so incredulous in relation to God's open and clear testimony? Is it because something is hiding it from their view? There is something hiding it. What is it hiding the solemn, awful, blessed issues of eternity from the eyes of men? Paul has an answer to that inquiry: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid from them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." O that terrible, prevailing power of unbelief which hurls thousands into eternal woe! O what a mercy to have the eyes opened to the solemn revelation of the divine will concerning the destiny of man! What a mercy to be brought down, wounded in our consciences before God, and to have to cry from felt necessity, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" to be hungering and thirsting after life, truth, grace, salvation, peace and heaven. To be sure, there is a great day

approaching when we shall all be judged according to the deeds done in the body, whether they are good or bad. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment." But O it is a mercy, is it not? that there is a word of comfort and hope for those who are looking for Christ. "Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

In a previous chapter here we have an account of the Apostle's adventurous journey to Rome, wherein all suffered shipwreck and yet all got safely to land, "some on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship". They all got safely to land, though they all suffered shipwreck. Then we read how he was kindly entertained by the barbarians on the island of Melita, and of the miracles that he wrought while he and the other prisoners remained there, and of the honours that were conferred upon them. Then they proceeded on their journey to Rome and, on arriving there after perils by sea and land, the prisoners were handed over and the Apostle Paul was given some liberties which were not allowed to the common prisoners; he was allowed to dwell under guard of a soldier alone, by himself, and was allowed, as we read later, to dwell in his own hired house, and have liberty to preach the gospel to those who came to hear him, no man forbidding him. After he had been there three days he called the Jews in that place together, and gave them some relation of the cause of his being brought there, and testified to them concerning the truth; and they, being interested, arranged with him that on a certain day they should all gather together, and that the Apostle should give a further account of this sect of people that seemed not to bear a very good name; and accordingly a day was appointed and the Apostle testified to them, "concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not."

The first point I would like to consider then, is the subject matter, namely, the things which were spoken. I believe that the Apostle always had good, wholesome matter to preach. He was never lost for matter or for words either, I should believe, as some are,

but could, in the boldness of faith, and in the strength of God, preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, being determined to know nothing among men but this; "testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" doctrine, experience, practice; the essential, vital truths of the Gospel centring in the Person of the Son of God; a gracious experience thereof in the soul in repentance for sin, "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Some of them believed the things that were spoken. What were the things that were spoken of Paul? They were the things concerning Christ, the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. He "expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening." He, like the Lord Jesus Himself, invariably brought before them the doctrinal truths of the Old Testament - out of the law, out of the prophets, the things concerning Christ; out of the Levitical law, how those sacrifices prefigured Him, set Him forth; how they all came to an end in the Antitype, the One Sacrifice offered for sin in the end of the world; and of the prophets, how Isaiah and others testified of the Son of God, that He should come; and the point with the Apostle in his ministry was this, to show that that Person, the Messiah who was clearly prefigured, prophesied and promised from the fall onwards to the end of the Old Testament prophecy, was Christ, this Man, Jesus of Nazareth; and that it was He of whom the prophets spake and that He had come upon the earth in very deed and truth. Their ministry invariably centred in the Person of Christ, to evidence and to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the promised Messiah and no false Christ, but He of whom it was said that He should come. Thus he testified out of the law and out of the prophets the things concerning Jesus Christ.

This would bring us on to the blessed doctrines of grace which centre in that blessed Person; the things concerning His eternal Deity, His eternal Sonship. O how necessary to believe that! We

can never conceive or apprehend the mystery, yet how essential it is for faith to receive such a truth, namely that the Lord Jesus Christ was from everlasting the Son of God in His divine nature, "the Son of the Father, in truth and love." This the Apostle testified and expounded; and the truth concerning His incarnation too. This was a great point with Paul and the other Apostles, to show that the Babe born at Bethlehem was the Saviour; that He was Jesus who should save His people from their sins. They preached the truth concerning His humiliation, suffering and death; those vital truths, the things which accompany salvation, which are essential to it, a part of it; the truth concerning His blessed resurrection, (for we read that, "With great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ"); and of His blessed mediation in heaven. How wonderfully the Apostle sets this forth in the Epistle to the Hebrews. You may depend that when the Apostle expounded there at Rome before these Jews, he set forth in no indefinite manner the authority of Christ's Priesthood, and exalted Him, and set it before them in his ministry that He is exalted at God's right hand "to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." He taught the things concerning Jesus Christ and concerning the Kingdom of God, that is, the gospel dispensation; that the old dispensation had passed away. The kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven, is frequently mentioned as intending the gospel dispensation, or the gospel Church state. Thus the Apostle testified of the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. This was not in a feeble oration lasting for about a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes with a few flesh-pleasing things to help take up the time; no, but from morning until evening he testified concerning the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ; from morning until evening. It would need more grace than I possess so to continue, but in those days I believe they did not have very short services; no, but when they met together it was for a whole day or for some hours together.

We read in the twentieth chapter that the Apostle Paul was long preaching and one Eutychus, who was sitting up in a window, fell asleep; rather a dangerous place to get drowsy, but he fell asleep and fell down too, but the Apostle Paul raised him back to life again. The Apostle Paul was long preaching and doubtless some of his hearers never wearied, never got tired of hearing the precious things he delivered before them. Things are different today; but he testified of these things.

When he had spoken these things, some of them believed and others believed not. This is very solemn, is it not? These were Jews who undoubtedly possessed a very strong prejudice against the new religion, and were loath to receive anything as Gospel concerning this much hated Man, this despised Nazarene, and they were very sceptical concerning this sect that was everywhere spoken against. Therefore we observe the two-fold effect of his ministrations here. Some of them believed the things which were spoken and some of them believed not. Why should there be that difference? Did it arise from any lack of clearness or authority in the Apostle's delivery of the truth? Not at all. The difference arose just in this - the sovereignty of God; not excusing those who disbelieved and remained under the power of unbelief, but the difference can be allocated here, "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed"; the others remained where they were under the hardening effects of sin, rejecting, (which is the course of nature) the things of God, and as sealing themselves up against the day of destruction. But some of them believed. This has ever been the case in the public ministry of the gospel. The Lord has seen fit to raise up His servants here and there throughout the history of the Church, and has made some eminently useful instrumentally for the ingathering of precious souls to Christ; their word being attended with signs following, many have been brought in. This we may observe in Church history, where God has raised up men here and there, mighty in the Scriptures, when there has been an awakening, a reviving, and when the Spirit of Christ

has worked among the souls of men, to bring them to the knowledge of the truth; but I do not suppose it could be said of any minister of the gospel that everyone universally who heard him received his testimony. Some believed, other believed not. The difference is not of a minor nature, is it? The difference is of an all-important nature, a vital matter. Does it matter whether we believe or not? It does, vitally so. To receive the truth is life; to reject it is death. Yet at the same time we realise, do we not? what is necessary here too. It is not the work of man, a decision in the mind of a person to be religious. Believing is the work of God alone, and herein we see the sovereignty of God. The Word is preached and yet "One shall be taken and the other left." As God has a separate people in the earth, His own people of whom He will say, "I will be his God and he shall be My son," so the other people are left to fill up the measure of their iniquity and to perish for ever. Very solemn! While we see the doctrine of God's eternal choice of some to salvation, all alike lost in their sins by the Adam fall and actual sin and transgression, we also see the two-fold effect of the ministry of the gospel in the quickening of some, while in other instances it seems but to harden them the more. Paul defines this very solemnly and clearly in the Epistle to the Corinthians when he says, we that are ministers of Christ "are unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life." O what a contrast there! In the one case the preaching of the gospel seems, as it were, but to seal their condemnation; they wilfully and persistently reject the truth of God, which men will ever do if grace prevent not. But to the other, it is life unto life.

Life! In the first instance, life in regeneration, life in the soul. Life unto life; life to sustain, life in communication, life here in grace, life eternal in glory. Some believed, others believed not. Now we can observe this teaching traced out in some

measure in the parable of the Sower. A certain man went forth to sow; very well; he takes his seed, some good seed; not a basket of good seed and a basket of bad seed, but apparently, as far as we can perceive, the same seed. Where does the difference lie then? In the way in which it fell, and the ground. Out of those four, only one bore fruit. In three cases it withered and died, and in the other it bore fruit. The wayside hearer; such hear the Word and understand it not and in time of temptation very soon it withers away. The devil came and caught it away. Then there was the stony ground hearer; the seed fell there and it did not bear fruit any more than with the wayside hearer; but the difference in the stony ground hearer was that he received it with joy at first, but it was very short lived, and it soon withered away because there was no root. Then there was the thorny ground hearer. What about the thorny ground hearer? He heard the Word, but the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches choked it, and it was unfruitful. But in the fourth instance we read that the seed fell on good ground. What is the good ground but that ground prepared by the Lord Himself, a heart prepared by grace to receive the Word of life? It dropped there, you see, the same seed, but the difference was in the ground; and it bore fruit there, some thirty, some sixty, some one hundred-fold; a varying degree in regard to the fruit bearing, but it bore fruit. O what a mercy if we have any reason to hope that the seed has fallen into good ground. Has it borne any fruit? Is there thirty fold? Has it borne fruit in repentance? Is there sixty fold? Has it borne fruit in a gracious knowledge of a revealed Christ? Is there a hundred fold? Has it borne fruit in a sweet subjection to the holy will of God concerning you, enabling you to fall into His hand, to lie passive in His hand and know no will but His? enabling you to say, perhaps, in affliction and trial, "Thy will, not mine, be done." I think that is a hundred fold. But it bore fruit, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear". What a mercy to believe. Some believed the things that

were spoken. They all heard them, but undoubtedly there were the wayside and the thorny ground hearers there.

Some believed. What is it to believe, friends? Why, it is a divine ordination first: "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed." It is the work of God to do this. We are not excused thereby in our hardness, in rejecting the truth of God. It is a mercy if one falls down before God and says, 'Lord, open my eyes to receive and to hear Thy Word; bring mercy into my soul.' Man is so hardened in sin by nature that, unless the Spirit of Christ first touches the heart, it will not believe. To believe, then, savingly, is to believe in the heart, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." It is not a notion in a person's mind; it does not arise from reading the Scripture and saying that it is very evident it is true. No, it is a solemn conviction in the spirit, an alarm in the conscience, a receiving of the truth, falling under its authority, believing it, giving credit to it. Some believed; doubtless this is true in most congregations where the gospel is preached. This would be a wonderful congregation if everyone present were a saved soul, or if not so now, were destined so to be by divine grace; a wonderful congregation. The Lord knows the heart of all; I am not a judge in regard to this or in relation to anyone's state, except where we feel a union and the evidence is clear as to the possession of grace; but may it not be assumed that there are some here even this evening who heard the Word and believe not? Some believed the things spoken, others believe not. I appeal to your conscience therefore in the sight of God, in this solemn position and ask you to enquire solemnly how the matter stands between your soul and God.

Some believed not. O what a mercy to be brought to a knowledge of the truth, to believe the things concerning Christ, the gospel of the grace of God; to have a saving entry into our hearts of the precious things, of those things which accompany salvation. The Apostle Paul wrote very solemnly to the Hebrews, pointing out the awful danger of apostasy, but concerning them he could say, "Beloved,

we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." What are the things which accompany salvation, but a gracious experience of the things of God in the soul? There is some distinction to be made between salvation and the things which accompany salvation. Salvation itself is, as it were, the fountain, the blessed doctrine of the finished work of the glorious Redeemer, accomplished on the cross; salvation finished, perfect, complete. The things which accompany salvation are the things which flow from it; the blessed fruits and effects thereof in the experiences, hearts and lives of the children of God; real repentance, godly sorrow for sin, faith, trusting in the Name of Jesus for salvation, waiting upon Him in faith, believing in Him. Some of them believed; and this believing, we would conclude, is saving, believing unto salvation, unto life. How this tries some living souls. Why, they are often saying,

"O, could I but believe,
Then all would easy be."

It would seem to put so much straight if only we could believe; and sometimes we seem hardly to know what we do believe, or whether we believe anything at all. Sometimes things seem so covered up too, but at another time one may be so tried concerning these things and tempted of the devil about them, tempted to throw them all on one side, to believe even that there is no God. There will be a trial of faith, friends, if the work is God's work. Faith must surely be tried; but if this faith is by the Spirit of God it will stand the trial, it will survive the furnace, it will abide in the flame, it will live.

Some believed. Now these things are worth believing, are they not? And they are to be believed. They are true; there is no doubt about them. No doubt should be cast upon the revelation of God's truth. But a person may believe the truth so far; he may have a conviction in his conscience in relation to the truth, but the point that tries so many of the Lord's people is their personal

interest, whether they are embraced in those promised blessings, whether there is any hope for them of eternal life and heaven.

O, press on, poor soul, if this be thy case.

"Urge thy claim through all unfitness;
Sue it out, spurning doubt;
The Holy Ghost's thy witness."

They that seek shall find. One day, if indeed you are pressing forward, struggling to believe, saying often, 'Lord, make me believe, give me faith,' - the day will come when the Lord Jesus will reveal Himself by His Spirit in your heart and you will look upon Him whom you have pierced and mourn for Him and rejoice too; rejoice and be ashamed. The time will come when the Spirit of Christ will bear His witness within you that you are His child. 'O hasten the day Lord, come and speak that living word to my soul!' There is believing in a desire, you know; there is believing in a prayer, you know; believing in the humble approach of a sinner, even where one may lack the assurance of faith. O but when the Lord comes and speaks the healing, living Word, and you can say, as you will then, "My Lord and my God," then you can believe to the joy and rejoicing of your heart.

"Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not."

Amen