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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at Hope Chapel, Shaw's Corner,  
Redhill on Friday afternoon, 3rd. June, 1966

Hymns: 911, 176, 95

Reading:- Ephesians 1 and 2 Text: Ephesians 3.19

"And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge  
that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God".

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"To know the love of Christ" In this and other epistles,  
the apostle Paul frequently refers to the amazing ministry of "The  
love of Christ", and, indeed, we might safely say that it shines  
throughout the whole of revealed Scripture. It relates to the  
salvation of the church of God, and it is to be seen in a very  
striking manner in these three chapters to the Ephesians, particularly  
because what ever we read in connection with the choice of the  
church and her redemption through blood, and the Holy Spirit's  
application of the Truth to a poor sinner's heart, we cannot fail  
to see the love of Christ which is like a banner covering every  
action and every sin embraced and incorporated within that blessed  
covenant, as recorded in the Canticles, "He brought me to the  
banqueting house, and His banner over me was love". I do not doubt  
but that ministers of God have attempted to speak of this love;  
they declare it, and may have often felt their own hearts warmed  
within them as they have attempted to elucidate it, but with all  
our efforts, and the efforts of all ministers, everything comes  
short, short in that sense, that there is an infinity that stretches  
beyond the compass, or the grasp, or apprehension of a finite mind;  
even so, sometimes, to those who have felt something of it, no theme  
can be sweeter; more humbling; more heart-breaking; more confirming  
and strengthening, than the love of Christ. The apostle, here,  
desires that the Ephesians might know this love.

In the chapter are two chief features. In the first part,  
we have the apostle's reference to what God had done for him as a  
minister; how he became a minister, and for what reason he was  
called to be a minister. In the second part, from verse 14, is  
prayer for these believing Ephesians. We may conclude that he was

writing to them as such for he could hardly write some of the things that he did, if he did not feel they were believers. In this, and in relation to himself, he refers to how he came to know these things, and to be a minister of the Gospel. He says in verse 3 that by revelation God made known unto him the mystery. There appears here to be something, which in a particular way, God made known to the apostle, and He made it known for a particular purpose! The mystery appears to consist in the fact "That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel." There is something to think about here, for this is not only a mystery, but it is a mercy, and a great mercy, that Gentiles should be fellow-heirs with believing Jews, and not only Gentiles, but people of all nations, as we may understand, "And partakers of His promise, in Christ by the Gospel". The apostle says on this account, he was made a minister, "according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power". I have been thinking about this, with some heart-searching, as to my own case, whether I could really feel in my heart that God ever made me a minister by the effectual working of His power in my soul. I believe friends, we may conclude by this, that it is essential for a minister of the Gospel to receive a revelation in order that he may preach, not what is stored up in his brain, but what is revealed in his soul of the precious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know in 2 Corinthians 12 the Apostle Paul speaks of being caught up to the third heaven, and of hearing things not lawful to be uttered, and that he did not know whether he was in the body or out of the body, also that such a revelation was attended with the "balancing of the clouds" which consisted in a "thorn in the flesh". Although he had such an amazing revelation he would gladly have dispensed with the "thorn in the flesh" and he prayed hard that it might be removed from him. How that answers to us all. We might rejoice in the revelation, and yet often resent the "thorn", but it is sweet to contemplate the issue, for although

the Lord did not remove the thorn from him, He said "My grace is sufficient for thee". And so it was. We hear nothing more about the "thorn in the flesh" except that he speaks of glorying in tribulation also. Nothing can do what God does for a sinner, or a minister, and nothing can substitute that divine revelation of the Gospel to the soul. A minister may be a doctor of divinity, or something else, but he will be a dry breast to living souls if he has had no revelation of the precious Gospel. What a mercy then, ever to have had a view of Christ, a sight of a suffering and all-sufficient Saviour. If we have, that will make an indelible impression upon our hearts and in our ministry too; it will affect our ministry, and it will also affect the people to whom we minister.

The apostle makes no boast of himself, for he says, "Unto me who am less than the least of all saints". My old Pastor used to say, I am not going to quarrel with the apostle about this, he knew just how he felt. I know how I feel, and does not every minister of the Gospel feel the same, that he is less than the least of all saints, even if he has been blessed with this revelation.

Here the apostle refers to a gracious confidence and boldness; he says "In Whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him", and proceeds to pray for these people. It is a wonderful prayer; only a few words, but it seems to have in it a body of divinity, and a fulness of experience. He would have them to know real things. There is nothing superficial here; this prayer is not an aimless ramble; he prays for what is really necessary to take a sinner to heaven, and after all, that is all we need. Probably, one day a lot of religion will vanish into thin air, but if Christ is revealed in our hearts, that will not vanish, although sometimes, things we felt we had in days gone by seem so very obscure.

The apostle prays for their strengthening, and for the indwelling of Christ in them that they might be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, and that they might be rooted and grounded in love. What is it that can root and ground a sinner in the love

of Christ? I am disposed to say that it is the discovery of that love to us in our hearts that roots and grounds us. Nothing external, actually, can do this; it is the work of the Spirit of God in the heart in living communications, in the communication of divine, heavenly blessings. Every sight of Christ draws the affections toward Him. This is a sure effect and it is this that roots and grounds us. The apostle makes use of expressions like this. He speaks of being "rooted and built up in Him" of being grounded and settled in the faith, and not being moved away from the hope of the Gospel. Now we cannot be rooted and grounded in love without that love being shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. If this love is not shed abroad there, we have no experience of it in this aspect, although we know that all the movements of the heart of a poor sinner for Christ, evidences His love to him, though that does not satisfy; but when the time of love comes, (and doubtless some of you know what I mean) this time of liberty, when the love of Christ is shed abroad in the heart, then we are rooted and grounded. We know then what it is, and it brings satisfaction.

In the text the apostle speaks of being "filled with all the fulness of God". This is an amazing statement. We do not understand him to indicate that we can be deified, or possess those divine perfections that necessarily belong to God that are incommunicable. Divine love is not an incommunicable attribute of deity; if it were we should have no hope whatever, no prospect but black despair, but divine love is a communicable attribute, flowing into the heart of a poor sinner and filling him with love to Christ, and this is what it is to be filled with all the fulness of God. To be filled with His love is to be satisfied, so as to come to that place, referring again to the Canticles, where it is said, "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love". There can be a spot in the life of a believer when he is satisfied; he is satisfied in his own soul under a view by faith of a personal Saviour, when he sees his interest in the great and blessed atonement, and feels his sins are washed away. There is

satisfaction here; this is when the love of Christ fills us. This is what it is to be filled, as far as we can be, with the fulness of God, and I am sure that it is as much as we can bear while we are here below.

"To know the love of Christ". The apostle mentions some particular aspects of the love of Christ, in the previous verse. He desires that these Ephesians might in some measure comprehend it, have some grasp of it, some view of it. We cannot fully comprehend the love of Christ, there are heights and depths beyond all our comprehension. When we speak of the love of Christ or of God, we are like a small child, as Newton said, going down to the sea-shore with a toy bucket and filling it, while the vast ocean lies unexplored. So it is, yet even that child may have as much as he can carry. Now this is rather beautifully illustrated in Ezekiel's vision. Ezekiel, as you know, saw many waters issuing out from under the threshold of the sanctuary, and he was instructed to pass through them, as he saw them streaming down the mountain-side, first they came to his ankles, then to his knees, then to his loins, and then they were a river to swim in, a river that could not be passed over: not just a river to swim in, you could be swimming in a river and be easily able to see the banks on both sides, and able to swim across; this was a river that could not be passed over, and never will be; not in time, nor in eternity. It is a shoreless sea, an ocean that never can be fully explored, nor its heights or depths fathomed. After all, it is a most amazing thing, that a poor guilty, hell-deserving sinner should ever know anything about it, and be the subject of it. That is the most amazing consideration to me, and some of you feel the same, I am disposed to believe. If a touch of that love fills your heart, it is Christ's love. There are not two or three different kinds of love, it is one love, and if that fills you, it is Christ's love. I used to hear my old Pastor say, "If you have but a crumb from a loaf, that crumb has all the ingredients of the whole loaf in it. So that if the love of Christ is felt, even as a drop, it is the same water as fills the mighty sea of divine love".

"To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge".  
Passeth knowledge, that is, in the fulness of it, although it may be known in a small degree, experimentally. This is illustrated in the previous verse by referring to the breadth, and length, and depth and height. One of our hymns expresses it like this:-

"O love of unexampled kind!  
That leaves all thought so far behind;  
Where length, and breadth, and depth, and height  
Are lost to my astonished sight."

So it is, and must be, but I wonder what we really know of the verse that follows:-

"For love of me, the Son of God  
Drained every drop of vital blood.  
Long time I after idols ran;  
But now my God's a martyred Man."

I do not know how far some of us can come into this experience, although we are not qualified to take it literally, in that sense, but the precious blood of Christ that flowed from His wounded side on the cross, the atonement that He made to redeem the church is by the same blood that was freely shed and which redeems every individual member of His mystical body.

The apostle speaks of the breadth of this love. I do not want to be fanciful in preaching, but perhaps by the breadth we may understand that His love embraces every vessel of mercy, of whatever nation, kindred, people or tongue upon the face of the earth - the whole elect of God. It incorporates every one referred to in the first chapter, verse 5, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself". This love, like a complete circle embraces every member of His mystical body without exception, whoever they may be who are not appointed to wrath, but to obtain salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. The breadth is like a kind of circumference that includes everyone that is within the pale of His predestinating decrees.

The apostle also refers to the length of Christ's love. May not this refer to the fact that it is everlasting? In fact, words as we use them, cannot clearly define what is intended. When we speak of length, we usually refer to a certain limit, though it may be considerable. The length of Christ's love cannot be

measured, it is beyond all calculation, it is everlasting. We cannot go back to a time when it began, and we cannot go forward to a time when it will cease, but we can go forward to a time when it will shine brighter before our view. It is an eternal love, a love that cannot be measured. This everlasting love was declared to Jeremiah, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee". We may consider the manifestations of that love in the work of redemption, and the love of God to His people in it. This is referred to in so many Scriptures, and we may contemplate in our minds an eternal future, when the wonderful works of creation will all just crumble to dust. The apostle says "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thine hands: They shall perish: but thou remainest" and refers to His love which can never cease.

This love is not known by those who have never been stung in their consciences by conviction of sin, nor brought to view what they are in the sight of a Holy God. Those who speak lightly of sin, betray the fact that it sits lightly upon them, and they know nothing, really, about being a sinner. Some of you know what conviction is, you have felt the love of Christ, and know what it is to have a "broken heart". It is a mercy to be dealt with, to be brought down to see ourselves, and then to a knowledge of Christ, and to have His love revealed in us. This will make us feel it, in its length and breadth, in the depths of suffering into which the Redeemer went in order to redeem His church. We do not fully understand the depths of divine love, the depths of the love of the Son of God, and what it really means, but we do know that the Lord Jesus Christ condescended to appear on this earth, as Philippians 2.6 & 7 "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". There is a depth here, we must go

to Gethsemane to see the depth of divine love in the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ there. These are described in Psalm 69 where in prophecy He says "Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul, I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me". These are depths indeed. Was there any love there? To that I would say, it was love that moved Him, it was love that sustained Him. His groanings in Gethsemane evidenced His love to His people. The sweating of blood, and drops of blood were drops of love. Hart says,

"And why, dear Saviour, tell me why,  
Thou thus wouldst suffer, bleed, and die;  
What mighty motive could thee move?  
The motive's plain; 'twas all for love."

Love shines like the lustre and beauty of heaven in a suffering Redeemer; there are other depths, beside this. We must go to the cross to contemplate what He suffered there, He endured the cross. He did not just die from the agonies of crucifixion, in this sense, but He endured the cross and all the sufferings involved until He could say "It is finished". These are the depths. Was there not also that depth when darkness covered the face of the earth for three hours? Was there not a depth in the cry of the Redeemer there? "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?". Here are depths of divine love. The love of Christ shines at Calvary, but what depths. In another aspect, the depth of Christ's love is seen as it reaches out to the worst of sinners, as the apostle felt himself to be, so shall we if we are given a sight of the cross. It will make us feel our sins and grieve over them in the sense that nothing else can. We feel our sins when we have a discovery of what our redemption cost Him.

Not only was there a depth of love, but there were heights. The height of His love to my mind refers to His exaltation, it is as we have it in the first chapter where we read that God "raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all". This illustrates the height of His love; His love fills heaven, His love is heaven. There He is, exalted above all angels. This is the height of His love. It was never said to an angel "Sit thou on my right hand". Christ has the place of highest honour at the Father's right hand.

"Though now He reigns exalted high,  
His love is still the same,  
Well He remembers Calvary  
Nor lets His saints forget".

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