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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at Zion, Prestwood on 22nd. November, 1956

Text: "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting Covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Isaiah 55.3

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What a wonderful mercy it is for some of us and for all poor needy lost and ruined sinners, who feel their condition before God, that there is a Gospel, a wonderful provision through the saving mercy of a Covenant God to meet the case and to supply the need of all who feel their poverty and are in themselves ready to perish.

One of the striking and remarkable features of the Gospel is its freeness. It is said earlier in this chapter, "Ho everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." It is indeed a striking revelation of the freeness of the glorious Gospel, yet it says that it is to be bought, this wine and milk is to be bought. But how can we buy that which is free? We cannot buy the blessings of divine grace by anything that we have to offer to God of corresponding value in the sense that we purchase property, or something of that nature, and yet at the same time, in order to a gracious receiving of the precious Gospel in our souls, there must be a sacrifice made. I understand by buying without money and without price, that we have no merit to offer to the Lord, for any of His saving blessings, all sovereignly and freely given; and yet in order to be in a suitable and prepared state to receive them we must "sacrifice ourselves". We must be crucified to self, that is we must part with our pride, independence, goodness, and many other things. We must be brought down to abject poverty as declared in the parable of the two debtors both of whom it is said had nothing to pay; and when they had nothing to pay he frankly forgave them both. A very striking illustration of the freeness of the Gospel! We must be brought down, although it is hard and painful work, because it is so

humiliating to flesh and blood; yet at the same time it is only as we are thus brought down before God to know and feel our own wretchedness that the Gospel is attractive to us, can be received, and its precious blessings valued and enjoyed. Oh what a wonderful mercy it is to receive something from the Lord as an earnest of salvation, and that will one day take us to heaven as being true possessors of this blessed Gospel.

Not only is the Gospel absolutely free; another feature of this Gospel is its fulness. Everything is there that we need to bear us through our chequered pilgrimage, and to fit us to dwell eternally with the Lord, to enter that city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. Everything that we need to prepare us for salvation is in the blessed Gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ is the gospel, for all blessings are in Him, and are conveyed to poor and needy sinners through the merit of His sin-atonement blood. So we are brought to feel and know to our comfort and joy that there is nothing lacking there. It is full and free. What a mercy to get a view of Christ, to see in Him everything we need to deliver us from the wrath to come, and to grant us an abundant entrance into His everlasting kingdom.

But there is another beautiful feature of the gospel beside its freeness and its fulness and that is its freshness. The blessings of the Gospel are like the green pastures spoken of in the 23rd. Psalm. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters." If we are taught by the Holy Spirit of God and are favoured with a faithful view of the Lord Jesus Christ and the freeness and fulness of the blessed Gospel in Him, it will always be fresh. It is like a living stream of pure water ever fresh to cool our thirst and satisfy our need. What an amazing mercy to feel it is for us. Another remarkable point, invitations are given to poor repenting backsliders to partake of these blessings by the Lord's mercy. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God for He will

abundantly pardon." God's mercy will be made more sweet as sin is made bitter, Oh what a mercy for you and me that where repentance is graciously given, and a poor backsliding prodigal returns unto the Lord, having come to himself, and realising, as it is in the parable of the prodigal, that in his father's house there is enough and to spare, <sup>he</sup> returns to find that the Lord will have mercy upon on him and will pardon.

In the verse that I have read are two points. There is a timely invitation and a confirming promise - "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Here is the invitation then; a merciful invitation addressed to a character. This is in line with that which the Lord Jesus says - "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It is to the character the promise speaks, "When the poor and needy seek water and there is none and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." What timely invitations are extended to poor sinners in their feelings ready to perish, to come and bring their case to the Lord. Here, in that sense, is an open invitation to those who have been trying to obtain satisfaction in some other way, spending their money on that which is not bread and labouring for that which satisfieth not. All this belongs to the working of nature in us and is the fruit of a legal tendency to build a foundation for ourselves, to have something of our own to stand upon, some worthiness, some goodness of our own, striving to keep the law, to obtain a better footing, to merit the favour of God. But all this legal striving will never be to any real purpose, save to show that with all the striving we sink further and further into the mire, and feel more helpless than ever. We can never obtain the favour of God by any goodness of our own. It is beautifully expressed

"Whilst we can call one mite our own,  
We have no full discharge."

"Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live;"-Come unto me, come away from the world, from sin, from self, from all this fruitless labour, spending money for that which is not bread and labouring for that which is not satisfying. Come to me, as a poor helpless sinner, come with your case, your burden, your guilt, your ruin, your helplessness. This coming may be a good part of the experience of a vessel of mercy. Peter speaks of this coming, he says, "To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious." In the 6th. of John, the Lord speaks about this coming. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." What a confirming Scripture! This coming is the fruit of election. It is the effect of that soul being given to Christ, and he comes in the strength of a gracious promise. I will in no wise cast him out, although indeed there may be at times a great trial of faith even in this coming, as it was in the case of the Syrophenician woman, and some here may be in that trial. Though she came to the Lord with her case in her distress, he answered her not a word. He did not commend her faith straightaway, and say, be it unto thee even as thou wilt. He answered her not a word. There had to be a painful silence, a further pressing of her case, a pleading with Him for a favour. "Truth Lord, she replied, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Perhaps you have come there so to speak, you feel unworthy of any favour from Christ. "Woman, He said, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt." "Incline your ear, and come unto me:" Oh what a wonderful glorious person he is to come to. He is true Almighty God; He is Mediator between God and man. The man of God's right hand in whom all blessings dwell. The fulness of Christ is there. In Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. The Father has committed all things unto Him. Here then is an empty sinner coming to a full Christ. What a mercy it is for some of us who feel our bankrupt condition. Here is a full Gospel. If anything depended upon something in us to make us worthy of it,

we should be lost and undone for ever, but oh what a timely invitation this is to a perishing labouring soul, "Incline your ear and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live". As though He would say, hear the word I have to speak.

There is a hearing with the natural ear and there is a hearing with the spiritual ear. The former may be in word only. It is, as it were, an outward hearing, but only in the judgment, and it may go no further than to bring us to some opinion of things or to have some sentiment about this, that or the other; but a spiritual ear is the Lord's gift. "He that hath an ear to hear let him hear." This seems to say, "Incline your ear", open your ear to hear my words, in no wise close your ears. We have no desire to hear the voice of the Lord unless convinced of our sin and guilty condition; then we wait to hear the voice of mercy in our souls, and nothing can satisfy us but a Divine testimony spoken by the Lord to us that He has made us the people of His choice. "Incline your ear, and come unto me." Oh it is a mercy to have an ear to hear the truth, that is a spiritual ear, a living desire in the heart to hear the Lord's voice through the appointed means of grace, or in reading the Scriptures, or in the silent watches of the night, when the heart is up to the Lord for some token of this mercy and favour. Sometimes you may hear as it were a quiet and yet effective whisper in your heart, a sentence, a word to give you a direction, revive your hope, confirm your faith, humbling you before the Lord, directing you in the way, showing you what you have to do. "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." You may hear a reproof, but oh what mercy there is in a reproof. "The ear that heareth the reproof of life shall abide among the wise." What lovingkindness there can be in a reproof. It can carry an evidence of sonship. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." Have you ever heard His voice, has there been a choice moment in your life when the Spirit of the Lord has brought unto your heart effectively a word so as that it has been

as clear to you as if it were audibly spoken?

"Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live;" What a confirming promise is this. This is a promise of life, of life felt and known experimentally in coming to the Lord, in hearing His voice, and in receiving of His Divine Person. There is life in the hearing sometimes, is there not, and have there not been occasions when we have felt our souls to be revived and made alive even when we have been hearing the Gospel preached? I believe I have known a few of these blessed occasions in my life, but it is only as we hear the Lord's voice through His servants that we feel this sweet, gracious, reviving experience of Divine Life. "Hear and your soul shall live." That is, hear these timely invitations, hear the Gospel. But you may say, I am too vile, too wretched, too black, too unworthy. But is it not for these that the Gospel is provided?

"The vilest sinner out of hell  
Who lives to feel his need,  
Is welcome to the throne of grace,  
The Saviour's blood to plead."

Can you believe that you have had a moment in your life when such a word has brought a ray of hope into your despairing feelings? You have said, Oh will the Lord have mercy upon such as I after all? "Hear and your soul shall live." There is life then in the coming although you may feel to have come with your death and feeling death to be in you, feeling to be enveloped in darkness, full of confusion, harassed by temptation, and out of the secret altogether. Yet strange to say, and I believe you will understand me, if life is in your soul you cannot let the Lord alone, you must keep going because necessity is upon you. There is a feeling like that of Esther "I will go in unto the King, and if I perish I perish". It was a venture with her life in her hand, but the King held forth the golden sceptre to Esther in honour of her venture. So I believe it will be with a poor trembling sinner; He will not turn thee away, venture on Him, venture wholly, let no other trust intrude.

"Christ has blessings to impart,  
Grace to save thee from thy fears,  
Oh the love that fills his heart,  
Sinner wipe away thy tears."

"Hear and your soul shall live." Have you walked in this way? There is divine life then in the coming. It is a coming of necessity a coming in humility, in repentance, under a sense of our unworthiness, like the publican who smote upon his breast saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Is it not good to have a religion like this? I believe it will take you to heaven. This coming will never be vain. "Hear and your soul shall live." There is life in the hearing when the Saviour's voice is heard. "My sheep, He says, hear my voice", and they prove that to be true. No-one else hears it but His sheep, that is in mercy. When you hear the voice of this good Shepherd in your heart, you will feel that life, it will cause you to live in your soul. It will awaken in you a gracious holy lively experience, making you feel like the Church in the Canticles. "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." What kind of living is this? It is the soul's living, not our natural life; it is the life of the soul, the effect of His life in us. "Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more, but ye see me, because I live ye shall live also." It is living in the view of faith, in some sweet manifestation of his suitability to your particular case. It is a life of faith putting your trust and dependence upon Him. It is a life that looks alone and solely unto Christ. "Hear and your soul shall live." Oh it is sweet living, it is drawing from His fulness, it is an empty sinner living upon a full Christ, living through the merit of His precious death, living as it were at Calvary.

"Hear and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you even the sure mercies of David." There are a number of Scriptures where the Lord speaks of making a covenant with His people. He speaks of it in the prophecy by Jeremiah. "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those

days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people". The Apostle Paul refers to this also and speaks of a covenant being made with the Lord's people, which is not according to the covenant made with our fathers which they brake. It is an everlasting Covenant that can never be broken. But how can this Covenant be made with us? In the next chapter in two particular places we read of taking hold of this covenant, and of doing the things that please God (Isaiah 56.4-6). What are we to understand by taking hold of this covenant? It is true we cannot apply it to ourselves, but this taking hold of the covenant is an act of faith. It is by a faith that is wrought in us by the Spirit of the Lord that we are enabled to plead acceptably, and in faith, for those particular blessings of which we feel our need. These are made over and applied to us as we press our case before the Lord, notwithstanding our unfitness and sense of unworthiness. It is a taking hold of the covenant as expressed in the two lines of a hymn where one says:-

"I can no denial take,  
When I plead for Jesus' sake."

This is taking hold of the covenant, this coming boldly to the Throne of Grace, filling our mouth with arguments, the argument of the Lord's promise to hear and answer our prayer, to supply our need, to fulfil our desire and bless our souls. This covenant must be made with us by the Lord Himself. It can be in an answer to many prayers, I believe it will be. But what is it for the Lord to make His covenant with a poor sinner, a coming sinner as described in this verse? I believe it is when the Lord brings His gospel in sweet feeling and efficacy into your souls; then He makes a covenant with you. If the Lord is pleased to bless you in your soul and shed His love abroad, in that blessing He makes His covenant with you. He makes His covenant with you by confirming His own promise in your soul, for He will never go back upon His Word. "For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God by us." Has He made this covenant with you? Oh say you, it is all too great,

I can understand that. You feel that is higher than you can rise I try sometimes to pour out and bemoan my case and there I seem to have to leave it. I get no satisfaction, I am conscious of my poverty and low state. Yes, but you may be just the very one for the Lord to make His covenant with. In fact you are just the case because, where that need is felt, where that poverty is manifest to such, this covenant is acceptable. A covenant is a mutual agreement by stipulation between two or more parties as among men, but a covenant in a spiritual sense can never be on this ground. All is fulfilled in Christ and made with us in Him.

"I will make an Everlasting Covenant with you even the sure mercies of David." I believe this refers to the Lord Jesus although it is true David himself knew something of this in his experience, for he says "Although my house be not so with God, yet hath He made with me an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure". What a blessed thing for a poor sinner to feel, it will take him to heaven. If this covenant is made with you heaven is in it, for His word shall never fail. "I will make an everlasting covenant with you even the sure mercies of David." What are the sure mercies of David? They are the mercies and blessings of the everlasting gospel. The blessings of this covenant are to be experienced and enjoyed in a living soul, to bear and support him through his chequered pilgrimage here, to be for his comfort and strength in the conflict and warfare in which he has engaged, to enable him to overcome at last and to be more than conqueror through Christ. It will eventually grant him an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of God. Everything is here in this blessed covenant, every promise, every blessing is ratified and sealed by the precious blood of Christ. Hence the blood of Christ is spoken of as the blood of the everlasting covenant, because by that precious blood these promises are applied and made over to us. Every grace and every favour comes to us through Jesus' blood, even the sure mercies of David. These are the mercies of grace, life, hope, peace, joy, happiness, and eventually heaven. And if we have part and lot

in this we shall get there by His mercy. We shall reach that eternal habitation, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. May we all seek that we may hear His blessed voice, the voice of the good Shepherd making this covenant with us so that we may know those everlasting blessings that will be enjoyed in eternity, in their fulness, richness and freeness. May the Lord make them over to us and give us a real religion that we may live by this life and draw from this fulness.

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