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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday
morning 29.4.73

Hymns 369, 450 and 451, 727

Reading: Psalm 89 (1-37)

Text : Job 23.3,4

"Oh that I knew where I might find him that I might come even to his seat. I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments."

I greatly appreciate the thought of our brother to have the hymn you have sung on my behalf, and I earnestly pray that we may be favoured with some answers to them this Sabbath day, so that it might prove to be a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

I have been thinking, friends, of the amazing mercy it will be to possess a religion that will take us to heaven. There is plenty of religion, and plenty of people that appear to be satisfied with their religion, but who may ultimately be weighed in the balances and be found wanting. There is a truth in what a bishop once said, "The soul of religion is communion with God", and I wonder where this may find some of us, how we need a religion with contact with God in it. I wonder how many may have come this morning with this language in their heart, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him". It would be a wonderful congregation, it would be a congregation of living souls, longing for communion with God, not necessarily in the enjoyment of it, for that may not be very often, but longing for it and feeling like this, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him"; as though one might say, 'I have been seeking him for a long time and yet it seems to little purpose', Oh that I knew where I might find Him'. I wonder if there are any here feeling something like that.

In this chapter we have a phase of Job's experience. He was evidently right in the midst of his trial, and enveloped in darkness concerning his own case, he speaks of going forward, and backward, on the left hand, and on the right hand, but He hideth Himself. This is not an unknown experience to the Lord's living family. Many have been in such a case, some may be there now; and I wonder how we

have come this morning. Has it been with the language of Job here, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him"? Job was not in despair, for later in the chapter he refers to the confidence that he felt concerning the Lord's ways with him and says, "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold". So he did, he came forth as gold. We read that after the Lord appeared for him he said "I uttered that I understood not... Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes". The Lord never leaves a matter half done. In what I have read are two particular points. One is an earnest enquiry, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him", and the other is a gracious resolve that if I should be so favoured, "I would order my cause before him and fill my mouth with arguments".

There is an experimental point then, friends, in this enquiry, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him". He does not say, 'Oh that I knew when I might find Him', although that has its point; but where I might find Him. One might say, Is He not everywhere? He certainly is, He says so, "Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord". He does, He is omnipresent, in 139th. Psalm the Psalmist says, "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me". This is a solemn and glorious point of doctrine. You may say, Is He not in the church? - He certainly is, and this is more particular than His general omnipresence, for it cannot be said that He dwells in the earth in a gracious way, though He does dwell in the hearts of His people; but this is a personal matter, and this was Job's matter. In the earlier chapters we read of those discussions with Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar; they had many things to say to him, and they brought a number of things against him, but it brought Job to this, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him". As to these friends, they were miserable comforters all of them, not one of them understood Job's case, but Job understood his own case, and his own desire which was this, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him", as though he said, If I knew where I might find Him I would "come even to His seat". There are many of the Lord's people feeling like this, where the life of God is in the soul there is a burning

desire for some token from the Lord, to hear His voice, to receive some evidence, to have some gracious encouragement, to have some manifestation of the Lord's mercy to their never dying souls. Many of you, it may be, feel as I did coming here this morning, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him". I believe I can tell you where you may find Him, and where it may be some of you have found Him. He has appointed a meeting place. Under the Old Testament the Lord gave instructions to the children of Israel to build an ark and to cover the ark with a covering of gold, two cherubims were to be placed above it. The Lord said that the cover to the ark was to be the mercy seat, and He said "There will I meet with thee and there will I commune with thee". The mercy seat friends, as you know, was a very beautiful type of the Lord Jesus Christ. The mercy seat covered the law, the tables of testimony, Aaron's rod that budded and other things; the mercy seat covered it all, and the Lord said "Here will I meet with thee and there I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat". How sacred this is, this is the place where in a Gospel sense a coming, needy sinner will find the Lord - at the mercy seat. The mercy seat was a beautiful type of Christ, it was sprinkled with blood, typifying His great and precious atonement and the satisfaction that He gave to justice, removing all barriers that come between. "Oh that I knew where I might find Him", and this bears upon prayer, for often it has been in experience that the Lord's dear people have felt enabled to plead the blood that does for sin atone. Here then is a meeting place where two parties meet together on the ground of mercy, and the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is another place where the Lord meets with His people and that is in the assemblies of His saints. He has appointed the ordinances of the ministry, and the assembling together of the Lord's people for public worship, and many have proved this to be a meeting place where the Lord came to them and blessed them. "There will I meet with thee." In a Gospel sense we have this in the New Testament where the Lord said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them"; not that this is always distinctly felt, but sometimes there is a sacred feeling of the Lord's presence in the assembly of the saints as I have read in Psalm 89,

"God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints". How sweet it is when it proves to be a meeting place, where the Lord condescends graciously to come and own the appointed means.

Perhaps I might mention another place that can be looked upon as a meeting place, and that is the Holy Scriptures. I wonder if that has ever been a meeting place to you, that is to say whether there has been an occasion when you have been prayerfully reading the Scriptures, and the Lord has spoken to you in them and blessed you by their testimony. When the Lord was upon earth He exhorted the people to search the Scriptures. He said, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me". I believe I have found Him in the Scriptures. My mind went this morning to the case of the eunuch who was returning from Jerusalem in his chariot and Philip was directed to go to him and join himself to this chariot, which he did, the eunuch was reading in the prophecy of Isaiah; and Philip said to him, "Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me". He was reading the 53rd, Isaiah, then "Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus", here was a meeting place. It was not simply Philip preaching unto him Jesus, but the Lord was there to bless His Word to him, he opened his eyes, and he bore witness to the true Messiah in that blessed chapter of Isaiah; and so convincing was it that when they came to a certain place the eunuch said, see here is water, "What doth hinder me to be baptised? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him". This seems to be such a personal plea. These afflictions had brought Job to a point, the arguments of these men and the charges they laid against him, that it must have been for some particular sin or this would never have happened, moved Job to say, "Miserable comforters are ye all", "Oh that I knew where I might find Him". So perhaps it has been with some of you when you have been passing through difficult and conflicting providences, people have misunderstood you and have placed their construction upon things. What has it done? Why, it

has brought you to the place where Job was, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat". Job was in great darkness apparently, in great trouble, and was greatly misunderstood; but what was his resolve? He says, "I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments". He does not say I will keep quiet and wait to see if anything may be said to me, no, he says "I would order my cause before Him". This ordering of our cause before the Lord does not necessarily mean a cut and dried prayer, it is a pouring out of the heart before Him. This may have been sometimes in just a very few words, as in the case of the poor Syrophenician woman when she came to the Lord and for a time met with much discouragement, yet eventually she came worshipping Him, saying, "Lord help me". This was a good way of ordering her cause before Him, and I do not know, but that some of you have prayed just like this sometimes - "Lord help me" and it has not been a vain repetition. This is ordering your cause before Him, it is bringing a matter, whatever it may be that weighs upon your spirit, is a burden upon your heart, or a darkness upon your path that may seem to envelop you, yet you order your cause before Him, as Job did, saying, "I would order my cause before him". Job found that it was to no purpose to order it before his three friends, for he had to come away from them all, to order it before the Lord; and so often it has been with a poor fainting soul. David felt something like it when he said, "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living". It preserved his spirit, held him up. "Oh that I knew where I might find Him". Perhaps we may come back then to this enquiry as it may respect some here in all your matters, your providences, your soul's exercises and your ultimate destiny, - "Oh that I knew where". What a mercy it is then that there is a place where a poor sinner may find the Lord, a waiting, troubled, burdened one as some here may be, distracted in your spirit, or walking in darkness and feeling to have no light, tempted by the enemy and assaulted by a crafty foe. "Oh that I knew where I might find Him". It is as a hymn writer says:

"O that I knew the secret place
Where I might find my God!
I'd spread my wants before his face,
And pour my woes abroad."

It is a wonderful mercy to have a religion that has some contact with God in it. But perhaps you say, 'I have tried to pray many times and I do not get any further'. That may be, and you may say 'What do you mean by contact with God?' Why, it is when the two parties come together - a poor, burdened, troubled, distracted sinner and a promise-performing God; they come together at the mercy seat, and are admirably suited to each other. None of your troubles or burdens or sins are too great or too high for Him, neither is He a God that hides Himself all the time. Has there ever been in your case a word come in which you have felt some sweetness? Has there ever been something in the nature of a promise that has softened your heart and enabled you to plead with Him? This is the contact, the two parties have something to say.

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat. I would order my cause before Him", that is you would take your matters, trials, anxieties, hard things or dark things, you would take them to Him Who knew all about them before. Yet here is this meeting place, He meets with you at the throne of grace. It is the throne of grace where the Lord meets with His poor waiting children and regards their pleas. "I would fill my mouth with arguments". This was Job's resolve, you see. This is not in the sense that we may often understand the term, when two parties argue or quarrel, but this filling the mouth with arguments is opening the mouth wide and pleading with Him - arguing with Him so to speak - pressing upon Him His own Word and promise that He would regard the case of poor people. Abraham filled his mouth with arguments when he pleaded with the angel concerning Sodom which was about to be destroyed; he filled his mouth with an argument, that is he pleaded hard, and as it were used the character of God to confirm his pleading; he argued with Him in the sense intended here, he said, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?", as much as to say can it be right to destroy the righteous with the wicked? He pleaded with the Lord, pressed his case. I wonder whether you have ever argued with Him, brought a word before

Him, His own Word, His own promise, and pressed it upon Him, filled your mouth with an argument. One of the sweetest cases we have of this is in the case of the woman of Canaan, the Lord said to her, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs", - that is what you are; but she filled her mouth with an argument, she did not dispute what the Lord said, she said, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table". What a beautiful argument it was, and it was an effective argument. The Lord, so to speak, could not refrain any longer, and so He broke forth, "O woman great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt". She filled her mouth with arguments, - Yes, there is the table Lord, there is the bread for qualified ones to partake of, of the Jewish nation, and as you say; it is not meet to cast that to the dogs; but Lord, one or two crumbs may fall over the table, then the dogs pick them up. That seemed to touch the spot. What a beautiful argument it was, without any disputing of what the Lord had said; she opened her mouth and filled it with an argument. There have been many instances like this. Take the case of Jacob when he was returning to his native land and heard of Esau coming to meet him with 400 men. He went to the Lord in prayer and he reminded the Lord of what he had said to him, he filled his mouth with it, "Thou saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee" and here is Esau coming to meet me to slaughter me. "Thou saidst I will surely do thee good", and so He did. "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat. I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments." Amen.

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