38/B

Sermon preached by "Ebenezer" Clapham by Mr.J.Delves, on Sunday evening, 7th. August, 1938

"Blessed is the man that heareth Me, watching daily at My gates, waiting at the posts of My doors. For who so findeth Me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. " Prov.8.34,35

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This chapter speaks in a particular way of the eternity, power, excellency, fame and nature of wisdom, by which we understand under this appellation, the Lord Jesus Christ who is Wisdom itself. In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and He is said by the Apostle to be made unto His people wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. He is here represented under this name and title, as a herald bearing good tidings of the gospel, "Crying at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors, standing in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths." Here wisdom is said to cry and understanding to put forth her voice, so that the tidings thus published are not to be kept secret, or in a corner, neither are they to be confidential matter, but to be so proclaimed that all may hear. The people to whom these good tidings are addressed are spoken of as being simple and fools; and surely it is only such as are fools in their own eyes, simple-hearted, sensible of their sinnership and need, who have ears to hear the 'voice of Wisdom' and who receive the instruction given. Gracious encouragement too is given to every teachable character, every true seeker, for the Lord here affirms, "I love them that love Me;and those that seek Me early shall find Me."

This chapter holds forth much encouragement for those who long to hear and know the good tidings of the gospel for themselves, and to receive these blessings which will issue in their eternal happiness and peace; and this glorious Person - the blessed Son of God, is declared here to be before all worlds. "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was." When there were no depths I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water, Before the mountains were settled, before the

hills was I brought forth"; and so on. Who, after reading such words as these could dare to dispute the eternity of the Person of the Redeemer? It is so clearly and emphatically defined, not only here, but in many other portions of Holy Scripture, that He was in the beginning. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God;" yea, He was engaged in the mighty work of creation, for the worlds were made by Him; by the Word of His power the earth came into form when it was without form and void, when darkness was upon the face of the deep. But that is not the most remarkable point here to be considered. Even in eternity, before He prepared the heavens and set a compass upon the face of the deep, when He established the clouds above, when He strengthened the fountains of the deep, even then we read that He rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth and His delights were with the sons of men. There is something very sweet there, is there not? A spiritual mind may contemplate the thoughts of the Redeemer before the lower earth was formed. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end." Is it not wonderful to consider such a doctrine, and to hope and believe, (as some of us would desire to), that we were embraced in that favoured number upon whom He set His love from everlasting? My delights, even then, He said, were with the sons of men; and His people, His children, are invited to receive instruction and to walk in His ways. "Now,therefore, hearken unto Me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep My ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not." "Blessed is the man that heareth Me.

We might notice that in these two verses four distinct points are adduced. First, "Hearing", then "Watching", thirdly "Waiting", and lastly "Finding"; and according to Scripture, each one of these is declared to have a blessing attached to it, as in the words of our text.

"<u>Blessed</u> is the man that heareth Me", that is who hears the voice of Wisdom crying at the gates, at the entry of the city. A blessing is pronounced upon every one who is watching. "<u>Blessed</u> is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments." Nor are the 'waiters'

left outside of this, for we read that the Lord waiteth that He may be gracious. "The Lord is a God of judgment. Blessed are all they that wait for Him." And this is the encouraging point of it all for those whose heart is so engaged; they will surely receive the issue, the reward, in the Lord's time, for "They that seek shall find", therefore, "Whoso findeth Me findeth life"; and such are blest beyond degree, more than they can anticipate or realise. This is finding Christ, the Pearl of great price, and the richest of all blessings, for if we possess Him, (and to find Him thus is to possess Him) we are rich to all the intents of bliss. Blessed, then, is the man that heareth Me. But in what way may the Lord's people be said to hear the voice of Wisdom? It is Christ speaking here. I believe Christ speaks to His people now through His revealed Word, for He has given the sacred Scriptures as a clear revelation of His mind and will, and He says, "My sheep hear My voice". "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me." We are not, (when we consider hearing the voice of Wisdom, who is Christ) to anticipate an audible voice. I would not be prepared to dispute one who heard a voice audibly, but usually the Lord speaks through and by His Word, His revealed Word, the holy Scriptures; and how so? By His blessed Spirit, in conveying, impressing, applying this or that portion to the heart with sovereign power. It may be a voice to afflict, to reprove, or it may be a voice to direct, comfort and encourage. The Lord knows how to deal with, and how to speak to each of His people. Some may say, How am I to know if I hear the voice of Jesus? My answer is that if you hear the voice of Christ in your heart, that voice will direct you to Him from whom it comes! There is such a thing as receiving solemnly and really, though mysteriously, an indelible impression upon the heart by an unseen hand. The Lord may take a portion of Scripture and write it upon the heart. This is His voice to such a person. "Blessed is the man that heareth Me." There is an 'outward' and an 'inward' hearing. The Lord says in Revelation "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches". The voice of the

Spirit is the voice of Christ. The Lord conveys these solemn mysteries by His Spirit, and it will be our mercy to hear His Word.

The Lord speaks, too, by and through His precious gospel. He is the principal of all preachers. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel unto the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted", and so on; every spiritual, living communication that we receive is the voice of Christ unto us. If the gospel is felt in its power and sweetness and knowledge, that is the voice of Wisdom therein to you. It will be very solemn to hear the outward sound of the gospel, and never know it! What we need is to hear the voice of the Son of God. The Lord says that "The hour shall come and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live"; so the Word of Christ is a living Word. It conveys life with it. It may bring its own life, so to speak, in the first instance, for when a poor sinner is brought out of the darkness of nature and sin into the light of gospel truth, that is Christ speaking to such a person. "The flesh profiteth nothing," but "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." In Psalm 12 we read "The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times". Every word we receive from the Lord passes, if I might so express it, through a furnace, for every word of mercy a sinner receives has been tried in the furnace of His sufferings, as in a furnace of earth purified seven times. The voice of Christ, too, is a powerful voice. It may be "a still, small voice", but it is a voice that penetrates, enters the heart effectually, and will accomplish that which the Lord intends. He says, "My Word shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

Now if we are favoured to receive any communication, any light upon our path, anything that softens the heart, melts the spirit, or anything that may be an awakening to us to show us where we are, that is the voice of Jesus! Some people speak of having words from the Lord, and can seem to get them almost at their own command, but

I believe that 'words' as we so term it, from the Lord, are not so frequent as many suppose. We shall be highly favoured if we receive one really living word from the Lord, but some of us may hope that we have heard His voice a few times in our lives, and that we do hear it; it leaves a mark, does it not? The Lord may put a word in the heart of a poor sinner in a time of trouble and distress, which may abide, more or less, as a beacon light all the rest of his days. Sometimes the Lord may give a child of His a word to use, that is, a word to use in prayer before Him, a word in the nature of a promise that he may often have to take in future days and say, "Lord, I believe Thou didst say this to me"; and the Lord loves thus to be put in remembrance by His people, because it is acceptable to Him to be enquired of, for He says, "Put Me in remembrance: Let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified." Friends, it is wonderful, is it not? to hear the voice of our best Beloved, to have this sweet communication of grace and life to our souls, all flowing, as it were, through Calvary, flowing into the hearts of poor, needy mortals. "Blessed is the man that heareth Me". Sometimes it is a word of invitation: "Come unto Me", He says, but you may read it a hundred times and not be able to come; yet if you receive it, you will find yourself coming, and the soul will say,

"Lo! glad I come, and Thou, blest Lamb,
Shalt take me to Thee as I am."

There is a drawing efficacy in the words of Jesus when He sweetly whispers them in the heart, and they have a peaceable effect too. "When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?" He can speak a word in a storm, a wind, an earthquake, that will bring a sweet stillness upon the spirit. Thus we read that when the Lord came into the ship He commanded the waves to be still and there was a great calm.

The second point is "Watching." "Watching daily at My gates." We spoke a little in another way of watching this morning - "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments"; but the watching here is more particularly defined as allocated to a certain place. "Watching daily at My gates." There is probably an allusion to an

ancient Eastern custom, to persons waiting and watching at the gates of the Royal Palace in the hope and expectation of obtaining the King's favour. That was a custom in olden times, and the gates, you know, are at the entry of the Palace, not inside! You have to pass through the gate to get into the interior of the building, and this is the place, we read, where Wisdom cries; so it is a good place to be watching. It is just the spot where you want to be, and those who are found watching there are pronounced "Blessed." But what may be understood by the watching at the gates? We read, "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob". In fervent desire to be engaged in the holy worship of God, the Psalmist says, "Our feet shall stand within Thy gates, O Jerusalem". By the 'gates' may we not understand the Lord's appointed means of grace? Notice tha He says that the gates belong to Him - they are not ours! "Watching daily at My gates"; therefore they are of His appointing, and blessing too. The outward means of grace also are of the Lord's appointing, and speaking in general, the observance of the Lord's appointed ways in the ordinances of His house, in the public ministry, and the services of the sanctuary, are the gates where His people watch. The Lord may have made this little sanctuary as the gate of Zion to some of His people: some of us may have come here, as it were, watching, waiting with eyes open, and our soul in our ears, so to speak, made attentive to hear what the Lord may speak to us. You may watch - if you are alive in your soul you will watch - the services all through from the beginning. I once heard a good man say that he liked never to be late for the services because it might be the Lord's purpose to convey something to him in the first line of the hymn. It is a good thing to be found watching, and the Lord will not disappoint His people. To be rightly watching is to be made alive, to seek earnestly, and thus His people may watch His hand all through the service. What will the hymns be? will the Lord speak to me through the chapter? Will the minister meet my case? I wonder whether the subject will be fitting my present need and condition? will he be led into my particular path? may he be made as a minister of Christ to me to give light upon my dark way? This is watching.

So this watching may have respect to the services of the Lord's house which are the gates of Zion, where His people meet and seek to hear His voice, and watch and wait upon Him there. You will be watching for something for your soul, and watching too perhaps, for direction in your way; you will not simply be coming to hear a certain man, but you will be coming, watching to hear what the Lord may speak through His servant. That is the right way to hear; and the more clearly you hear the Lord's voice in the sermon, the more you will lose sight of the instrument, and look through the instrument to the Speaker from whence the voice comes. It is a mercy to be watching. We would be glad to have the chapel full of anxious hearers, watchers, desiring to hear the Lord's voice. All such are pronounced "blessed", and the Lord has few such in this dark day; and it is a dark day; it is a day of departure from the pure simple order of things. These plain, unadorned services of ours are not pleasing to modern folk; but what is worship without the substance? If the Lord favours us in His courts, we shall never quarrel with the plainness of the service, no, not if Jesus is in it. We shall worship Him in spirit and in truth. I would just re-affirm a previous statement, that this is the very place where the Lord speaks, therefore it is a good place to be found. "For she crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors". The watcher waits.

"He that waiteth at the posts of My doors". Undoubtedly this may mean the same thing substantially, but it is rather suggestive of a little more progress; to be waiting at the posts of My doors is a step further. Perhaps a little encouragement has been received at the gates;perhaps the King has sent an invitation to say, "Come a little nearer"; then one ventures to the posts of His doors. He speaks at the posts of His doors. To be waiting at the posts, is to be waiting in spirit at the throne of grace, the means of grace; it is, as it were, to be drawn a little nearer to His favour, with a little more communion, a little closer view than formerly. At the posts of His doors He may be seen and heard more clearly; you are brought there to wait! Many of the Lord's people wait at the posts of the doors. Queen Esther was found here. We read she went in unto the King; she went into the inner

court where the King would see her, not knowing what the issue would be; she went with her life in her hands, so to speak; she knew that if she stayed away, certain destruction would fall upon her people, therefore she ventured. Venturing faith was honoured in her case, and so it will be in yours! She waited there until the King held out the golden sceptre and invited her into his presence. If you are waiting at the posts of His doors, you will get an invitation to come indoors, to be indulged with His sweet presence. We read of good old Simeon that he was "waiting for the consolation of Israel", and his desire was fulfilled before he died, for he held the Babe in his arms; then he said, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word, for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation". The issue of waiting is sure, though it may be long if the Lord so disposes. The poor man waited thirty eight years at the pool for the moving of the waters; it must have been a long weary time for him, but it was not in vain. The Lord says concerning all who are waiting, "They shall not be ashamed." What a mercy to be waiting. Get as close as you can. If you can get to the gates and the Lord gives a little encouragement, venture to the posts of the doors, and He will bring you in, in His own time; He will give you the desire of your heart. "Whoso findeth Me, findeth Life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord." There is an enquiring one outside there, waiting, watching and wondering whether he ought, whether he dare venture any further; but he hears the voice of the Lord giving direction, and he ventures a little nearer, and getting to the posts of the doors has a view of the King in His beauty. Later the golden sceptre is held out, and that for which he has long been waiting is granted; he finds Him.

The Lord says that He is the Life, and if we find Him, we find that Life. We are not to understand that life is not received before we are favoured with the issue of our waiting. No! there is life outside the gate, there is life at the front door, but life perhaps in a warmer degree, a little further light, a little more teaching, a little more earnestness, a little more godly zeal. The case is pressed harder still; presently the answer is received, and such an

one is invited within; He is found at last, but there has been life all through. It may be a great question if life is in possession because of darkness upon the mind and spirit. Am I a child of God or not? will the King receive me? There is life all through, but not in the enjoyment of it. There is no satisfaction at the gate; there is no full satisfaction at the door; but when the invitation to enter is given by the King of Kings, there is satisfaction! This is divine favour sweetly manifested, and this is life to the soul in the enjoyment of it, in the sweetness of it. "And shall obtain favour of the Lord." So there is every encouragement for the seeker at the gate, there is every encouragement for the waiter at the posts of the doors, and the reward is beyond all anticipation, for it embraces all that Jesus is. Such shall obtain favour. It means they will receive His smile, the good things He has to give, and the free love of His heart going out toward them, for He will embrace them with His love, indulge them with His presence; this is liberty, and finally, there will be the unmerited favour of heaven. This is the issue, and it may not be far from some here; it cannot be far from some. The three things are linked together, the hearer, the watcher, the waiter; they will all be brought in then.

"They that seek shall find, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Therefore, the Lord help us to PRESS ON! Amen