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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

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

Hymns 811, 322, 735

Reading: Ephesians 4

Text Ephesians 3.20-21

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen".

These verses record a prayer by the apostle for these Ephesian believers, and the church at Ephesus. It is a relevant prayer for all the churches of Christ, and particularly for the one true church of Christ that incorporates the elect of God under that covenant ordered in all things and sure. These verses seem to reveal the nature of true worship in that the glory of God in Christ is in His church which ascribes unto Him the glory and honour for all that He has done and will do for His Church - "Able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think".

This is a very fitting conclusion to the preceding verses, wherein the apostle, treats particularly of the love of Christ, and desires that these Ephesians may be "Rooted and grounded" in it, and be enabled in some measure, at least, "To comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of this love. As I went into this a little this afternoon, I do not propose to re-iterate what I have before stated, save to say, that in these particular aspects the apostle would have these Ephesians to know the preciousness, value, greatness, freeness and abiding nature of this love! What a mercy this is for anyone, the greatest mercy, I suppose, viewed like this, to have an interest in the love of Christ, because the love of Christ is that love that He has manifested in the redemption of His people. He has revealed, demonstrated that love in their redemption in His condescension, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glorification in heaven! I have considered this, and realise that I have treated, very principally, upon the doctrinal aspect of this, but before passing,

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particularly to the words I have read as a text, I would like to make a few more observations upon this love from an experimental point of view, that is to say, what this love does in the heart of a poor sinner, and its effects.

One evidence of Christ's love in the heart, is to desire His company. We desire the company of those we love, naturally speaking, and we like the company of those we love, spiritually speaking. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that when the disciples were let free, they went to their own company, and the Lord's dear people like their own company. There would be no evidence of grace in us, if we preferred the company of the world. We like the company of those with whom we can feel to be one in heart, and that cannot be felt with all and sundry in a profession of religion. To feel a union is sweet, but there is no company to be valued like to the company of Christ! I know that the apostle desired that Christ might dwell in their hearts, by faith, so He does, but I am referring here, more particularly, to that union with Him when His presence in the heart is more particularly felt. This is beautifully illustrated in the Song, where the church says "Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of Thy companions?" She wanted to be, not only in the company of the flock, but in the company, more particularly, of Christ, and this is an evidence of love. Was not that prayer answered, where later, the church says "He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love". This is an evidence of love in the heart to Christ, when there is a desire, a longing for His company, when there is a hunger and thirst for Him, when the soul reaches forth after Him, as it is expressed in the Psalms:- "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" This bears evidence of love, and I believe that love is enjoyed in a comfortable sense of the Lord's presence, and of an interest in His dying love and blood, when we feel we can say, it may not be very often, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me".

This love is further evidenced in obedience to His word, laws, and commandments, and this is when there is an enlargement in the heart. The Psalmist in the 119th. Psalm says, "I will run in the way of Thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart". That word "WHEN" defines time, when it is a joy to run in His ways, as some of us know, and have felt something ourselves in the past of His love. It is a joy, and there is no right way, really, of following Christ unless we follow Him in love. It is His love that draws. It is like a band that unites. Hosea says, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them".

Sometimes the love of Christ is known in the heart of a believer in worship. This can be in private, and in public. It can be in the dead of night. It can be in the house of God when the affections of the heart are drawn toward Him in love. The heart is drawn to Christ in love, when, under a view of Him; and the manifestation of His love to us, it re-acts, and goes back to Him! "We love Him because He first loved us".

There are other things beside this, we cannot separate the love of Christ to us, or our love to Him, as one love, when the heart flows out in love to Christ. It is His love to us that occasions it. It is the same love, although for us, we may feel to live at a dying rate, and are often in a languishing condition. Well, what do you know about this? I cannot read your hearts. You have perhaps heard what I have said about this, but is that an experience in your soul? Has He brought you down to that place which is a preparation for the manifestation of His love? He brings sinners down into the dust of self-abasement, to loathe themselves and to feel their wretchedness, and moves them to fly to the Rock for want of a shelter. We must have the heart prepared for this love. Love is the essence of real religion. There is no question about this. After my old Pastor had preached his first sermon, an old man came to him

and shook hands with him very warmly, and said to him, "The religion of Jesus Christ is a religion of love", and our Pastor used to say, "I did not half believe then, and I do not half believe it now." By which, I suppose, he meant there was such a fulness in it that he could not fully grasp, nor understnad. So it is, for the apostle desired them to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that they might be filled with all the fulness of God, that is, as I have said, and as I feel, to be filled with His love, because love is an essential and intrinsic attribute of deity.

The Scripture says that "God is love", which means something more than that He loves people, although that is true, but that He is the fulness of love, as an essential perfection of deity which constitutes Him to be what He is. This is a most absorbing thought, but it is also said "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love", so that love is the effect of knowledge. If there is no knowledge of God, there will not be any love to Him. Love flows out of knowledge. The knowledge of God is made known to us and our understanding is enlightened in divine things, when a knowledge of Christ is given us, and nothing can be compared with this. The apostle ardently desired this himself, and writing to these Ephesians said, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord." How does this answer to your own case? It must leave some of us very short, at least, it does me.

Well, the two points here are KNOWLEDGE and LOVE. Therefore that living knowledge must come from God, "For God is love". The longings in the heart of a poor trembling sinner evidence this knowledge; this venturing faith to the throne of grace, to the mercy seat, evidences a knowledge of Christ; and the arguments, all evidence knowledge and love. I am sure this is true, because in my own case I know that as the Lord Jesus was made known to me, so I loved Him; but before that I loved Him in my desires after Him, and these movements of the heart bear evidence of a union with Christ. This love is not universal to all and sundry, without exception.

How can universal redemption be according to the Word of God? Did the Lord Jesus bleed and die and pay the ransom price of the redemption of souls that are lost in hell, who lived and died in their sins? Did He make some attempt to save them and fail? God forbid! His covenant is a covenant ordered in all things and sure and will never fail. There was a set purpose. He did not come to save the world if the world would allow Him to do so, but He came to save the lost and that is the greatest mercy for us, because we are lost. No sinner will get to heaven but as a lost sinner in himself. We are all lost in the Adam fall, but the eye of divine love was set upon a number, the number of His choice, and He makes no mistake. There is nothing in this to militate against a poor trembling soul who is brought to feel a sense of his need of the Lord's mercy, and comes venturing before His footstool like the publican saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner". This is an evidence of love, of life, and of the Lord's choice of such an one. There is everything in Scripture to encourage a soul who ventures, as it were, Esther-like, with an "If I perish, I perish", but none yet have perished who have felt the love of Christ. If we are really His, the day will come when we shall know it, in a measure as we have never known it before. So it was with those who came up out of great tribulation with their robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. It was love that redeemed them, love moved them to follow Him, in that sense, and to suffer for His Name's sake. Our salvation arises from love in God to us, and there is sure to be a re-action. If we are vessels of mercy the time will come when there will be a change of heart. There must be a change of heart, this is the work of God in a sinner's conscience bringing him down, and revealing to him the truth. O what a mercy it will be to be right at last, to be found in that great day at His right hand, and to stand in our lot in the last days, as is said to Daniel. To know the love of Christ shed abroad is to be filled with all the fulness of God.

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly". This is an ascription of praise to God relative to His power. Exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think". With the power of God there is no limit. With us, there are very close limits, but the power of God is almighty power, essentially almighty power. The power here, may be particularly ascribed to the Father because in the last verse, it is said, "Unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus". Now glory flows into the Church by and through Jesus Christ. There are no merciful communications to sinners out of Christ!

"Out of Christ, almighty power, (789)
Can do nothing but devour".

This is what makes the Redeemer so precious in the hearts of His people, it is because through Him that mercy flows.

"Every grace and every favour, (180)
Comes to us through Jesus blood".

God is almighty. To Abram the LORD said, "I am the almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect". God always has power to perform what He has promised. In the epistle to the Romans Paul refers to the strength of Abraham's faith in that "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able to perform". He was able to perform what He had promised although unspeakable difficulties appeared to interpose. Faith sees no impossibilities, when it sees God! Faith looks above seeming impossibilities and focuses on omnipotence. God is able. Able abundantly, not only to fulfil His promise, but He is able to support and strengthen and settle His people. He is their strength in the time of trouble, affliction and distress. He keeps the mind in perfect peace that is stayed upon Him, according to the power working in them. Where the mind is stayed upon God by the power of His good spirit, there is peace, and God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all our circumstances and all opposition. This can come into the circumstances of our lives when God is pleased to work, for there is no providence too hard for Him. He is able

to do exceeding abundantly, this is true in the lives of His people, and is seen in certain striking ways. Further, God being able to do exceeding abundantly, to my mind indicates, very principally, His mighty work in the salvation of His people. In salvation, there is not only love, but there is power. It is salvation by the power of God in delivering His people from their helpless condition. When Daniel was cast into the den of lions, the king came to the den, after a sleepless night, and said "Is thy God, Whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Is thy God able? (He had said to Daniel, "Thy God will deliver thee"). Daniel said, "My God hath sent His angel and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me". Some things in the lives of the Lord's people have astonished them. In Psalm 126 we read "The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad". As we are favoured to view by faith the work of redemption, the divine decrees of God in predestination, and all that was involved in that covenant made with Christ, we view His almighty power, for He is almighty! In the first chapter of Revelation, we read "I am Alpha and Omega". "The ALMIGHTY". "I am the first and the last". Ministers must warn, must preach the new birth, but no creature can effect this vital change, it is by almighty power, the working of the Holy Spirit. He must quicken by an almighty power. Without the new birth, there is no prospect of heaven. "Ye must be born again". Here, in this new birth, we see God "Able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think". Beyond all that we can ask, beyond all that our minds can conceive. This is "According to the power that worketh in us; the power that is working in a living soul, this is by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Every quickened vessel of mercy experiences this in a greater or smaller measure or degree. The apostle makes the reality of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit very clear, in writing to the Romans, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His". "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the

the dead dwell in you, He shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by His Spirit that dwelleth in you. Now this indwelling, is a working power within a believer. This "power that worketh in us" is that power that operates in the heart of a quickened sinner, as no other power can.

Let us look at this word "According". That is to say, as suitable to the case. The apostle makes use of this word "According" quite a number of times. He makes use of it in the first chapter, verse 5: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, ACCORDING to the good pleasure of His will!" What is the need for such a word as that? "According to the good pleasure of His will", that is, in such a way as is in conformity with His will, is acceptable to His will. Also in the Philippians the apostle says "My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus". There is something very blessed in this word "According". It indicates not only a divine sufficiency, but an exhaustless supply according to the need of a sinner, and according to the power that works in a sinner. Now the power referred to here by the Spirit, is the power of faith. It is the power of faith in the heart of a sinner. It must be so, because the Scripture says that "Without faith it is impossible to please God". Therefore no prayer can be acceptable unless it is the prayer of faith, and how can the prayer of faith be acceptable? Only by the power of the Spirit of faith working with grace in the heart of a coming sinner that ventures with boldness to the throne of grace.

"According to the power that worketh in us". Not only the power of faith by His Spirit, but it is also the power of love, this power stretches beyond all our conception. God works in a saving way and faith works by love, in the hearts of those who are quickened into life by His power, and are the subjects of the power of His good Spirit in them.

"UNTO HIM". This ascription is similar to that in the 115th Psalm "Not unto us O Lord not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake". Not unto us. This

adoration is another effect of Christ's love in the heart. We are in our right place, that is, as in the dust before Him. Not unto us, no honour to us. A sinner has nothing in himself to boast of, being helpless in himself. "UNTO HIM BE GLORY". This incorporates the blessed Trinity. Unto Him, unto the Father in the choice that He has made of us, if we are His. Unto Him be glory for predestinating, distinguishing grace; and to the Lord Jesus Christ, Unto Him be glory for Redeeming grace; and unto the Holy Spirit be glory for quickening grace. "Glory in the church". In the church notice. There is no glory ascribed to God, in a gracious way, outside the church. What is the glory of the church? It is the glory of the presence of God in her. In the prophecy by Zechariah it is said, "I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her". This is the glory of the church. This has ever been the glory in the church throughout all ages, world without end, and will ever be. There is a future in this glory, that is when time shall be no more, and when the elect are all gathered in; when the bodies of the redeemed are raised from the dead, and made like unto the risen body of Christ, as recorded in the Philippians, and in the Revelation when all the redeemed are gathered there standing before the throne and before the Lamb, casting their crowns before the throne, saying, "Thou art worthy to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created". The glory of the church is to honour Him, and to place the crown on His head, and to place their own, so to speak at His feet, giving Him all the glory for their redemption and glorification. This is described in the 5th. of the Revelation, "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation". Well, the point is this, where does it find us? Will a future day find us there? Have you and I any evidence of an interest here? Have we any concern about what our destiny will be? Can we say -

"Bold shall I stand in that great day
For who aught to my charge shall lay" (103)

or is our language this?

"When Thou my righteous Judge, shall come
To take Thy ransom'd people home,
Shall I among them stand?
Shall such a worthless worm as I,
Who sometimes am afraid to die,
Be found at Thy right hand?"

An all important question is it not? What a mercy if there is an anxious concern about this, for the matter of our eternal destiny is the chief matter. "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom".

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