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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden

at Rehoboth Chapel Swindon

on Thursday evening 18 October 1962

1 CORINTHIANS 15 v 22/23

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall
all be made alive. But every man in his own order:
Christ the firstfruits; and afterward they
that are Christ's at His coming"

We are reminded, of course, at this season of the year of the harvest, and it becomes us, as creatures of God, to acknowledge our undeserved mercies; that He has granted such a remarkable harvest in spite of our exaggerated wickedness and defiance of Him. In proportion as our sins abound, so it would seem the Lord in mercy bestows temporal blessings upon us, but woe be to this nation if we are left to disregard Him to Whom we owe every crumb of bread, every drop of water. The more He heaps blessings upon us, the more heavily His curse will come upon us when our iniquity is filled up. We are in a sad plight as a nation, and we know not what the Lord may suffer daring, reckless men to commit us unto without any mandate from the people. Personally, I have no doubt that the Papacy is behind this clamour for union and submission to the Treaty of Rome, though they claim it to be only economic; but it will be political, and it will be religious, in due time. The man of sin does not mind how long he waits, if only he can overthrow the Protestantism of this land. But that is only, as it were, by the way; yet the matter is important; it lies upon some of our minds very frequently. Not that it will affect some of us very much longer, but it will affect the young people of this land who are brought up in an evil day, with evil examples about them, and they now hardly know even national history because it is so perverted by the modern historical books in the schools. Everything that goes against the church of Rome is whittled away and, as you know, it was discovered a few years ago by Dr Coulton of Cambridge, how the Roman Catholic Church was seeking to force the publishers, and also school authorities, to accept their revisions of the history of the land because it told so dreadfully against the church of Rome. But I hope the Lord will save us from being improperly taken up with

Protestantism, because we shall not reach heaven because we are not Roman Catholics - there are plenty of militant Protestants who have not the life of God in their souls - yet we do want, as well as we can, to assert our belief in the doctrine of the gospel and of divine grace, and to maintain still what the Church of England nominally maintains, that the doctrines of the Church of Rome are blasphemous, and fables and deceits.

This is, as you know, a service of thanksgiving for the harvest, but I wanted, if the Lord will help me for a few moments, to draw your attention to this other harvest. "The harvest" said the Lord Jesus, "is the end of the world". He depicted it in those parables (Matthew 13). He spoke to the people generally by parables, but to His disciples He gave some elucidation of those parables, because they understood something of the kingdom of heaven. What a mercy if the Lord should teach us as He teaches His people. He taught them how that, in the professing church of God, there should be tares mixed up with the wheat, and those tares were to be left until the harvest, not rooted up. They said, shall we root them up? No, said the Lord, lest you should root up the wheat with the tares. How solemn it is to be in a professed church, and to look outwardly like a real blade of corn, and yet only be a tare. We cannot think that the Lord Jesus would speak this parable if it had no application to fact; that, at the end, there will be some who have passed current as being true wheat, but are tares; that is, at the harvest. And in this context we read of a harvest, really. The Apostle says "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming."

The firstfruits of the harvest. You know, under the Levitical dispensation there was to be brought the sheaf, which the priest was to wave among the people before the Lord, to show that the harvest was to follow. It was a kind of preliminary thank-offering. And then at the end of the harvest there was another feast of thanksgiving, both feasts being accompanied by a burnt sacrifice, and these things were in Israel as types. Now Christ is the firstfruits of the harvest of His people who shall be gathered into the heavenly garner, into

heaven. But first of all, in this text, we must notice a solemn thing: "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die"; that is a solemn thing. We are born into this world, and it is certain we must go out of it. We are born into this world naked and with nothing belonging to us, and we can take nothing out of this world. Paul, writing to Timothy, shows, by that simple fact, the foolishness of the anxiety of people in their covetousness to lay up things here below, to aggrandize themselves in this life, and he enjoins upon us godliness with contentment, which is great gain. It would be well if we were brought to notice that more than we do.

But here it says, "As in Adam all die". Death came to us as creatures owing to the sin of Adam which was imputed to the whole human race, because the whole human race was in Adam. "As in Adam all die". No exception to that. The truth of the federal headship of Adam is plainly taught in the Scripture, and it is plainly manifest in the depravity of every son of Adam born into this world. There is not a single individual born into this world who is not born in trespasses and sins. Even an infant, and one dying an infant, is a sinner. If it has not had time to commit actual sin, it is born in Adam's sin, and therefore it needs as much the atonement of Christ to make it fit for heaven and give it a title to heaven as a grown man, being a sinner, needs. People talk about the innocency of a babe, and we love to think about the comparative innocence of a babe - it is a grievous thing to see that innocence gradually invaded by evil communications in the growth of the child - but no human innocence will take any son of Adam to heaven, because we are not innocent in our nature. But all of us here have grown up, or are growing up - some have grown old - and alas, we prove the fact that we are sinners because we were born in sin. O, the dreadful truth of sin! It came into the world by man, through Satan's devilish subtlety, whereby our first parents were deceived and overthrown, and they obeyed Satan and believed him rather than God. And this death was first of all spiritual death. Adam did not die physically immediately he fell, but he died spiritually. The image of God in which he was created was marred; he lost it. He was depraved immediately in every faculty, and though this depravity spread and increased with the various generations, still he was in the sight of God a sinner, and his eyes were opened and

he knew good and evil, and he sought to hide himself from God. O how dreadful! Sin marred the whole human race. It depraved man, so that soon the great God and Creator, Lawgiver and Judge, looking upon mankind, said that his thoughts and the imaginations of his heart were evil, only evil, continually, and it repented Him that He had made man upon the earth. (Genesis 6 v 5/6). Striking, solemn words of God about man! And if God had consigned the whole human race in that condition to eternal death and perdition, He would have been just. And all who live and die as sinners in their sins, and in the Adam fall, without any recovery wrought in their souls, will find themselves with the tares, if they are professors. All the wicked, all that do wickedly, shall be gathered and cast into unquenchable fire, said the Lord Jesus. That is the end; but it has no end. When a wicked, a godless man dies, he comes to the end of all his pleasures, all his enjoyments, and then begins his eternal perdition, endless woe, with no end to it. The fashionable teaching of today is that the end of the wicked is annihilation, and so the devil has stirred men up, thousands of them, to have as much gaiety and indulgence of their lusts here as they can, because the worst that can come is that, when they die, that is the end. Was there ever a more dreadful premium put on sin than that? and yet many in pulpits declare that to be the truth, and that deception is being promulgated with considerable activity in many directions. But the Word of God is different and all will know that God judges righteous judgment, and His Word will stand; not only His Word of promise, but His Word of denunciation. You will never get by it, my friends.

"Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead". This resurrection of the dead spoken of here is that special resurrection of those who have union to Christ. There will be a general resurrection on that great day when the Lord Jesus, with His almighty voice, will speak, and call forth from all the graves, and from all the ashes scattered, and from the seas, those who were buried or scattered there, and every individual member of the human race will partake of that general resurrection. But here we read of a special resurrection, I believe, the resurrection of the just unto eternal life. "By man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Now, though we are all in Adam by nature, we are not all in Christ by grace;

only some. Christ is the Head of the election of grace, the Head of the true church of God. He it is to Whom the Father gave a people before the world was. He it is Who, before creation, declared that His delights were with the sons of men, rejoicing in the habitable parts of God's earth. O, what a marvel that is, that God should be contracted to a Man, that the Lord of life and glory, the Son of God incarnate, should die and rise again, and be the firstfruits of His people in heaven! This was grace; grace which sent Him, provided Him, set Him up in the Covenant to be the Head of the Church, His Body. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." But who are in Christ? How are they in Christ? And how shall they know that they are in Christ? Well, first of all they are made alive by quickening grace, and that is a kind of resurrection. When quickening grace reaches the soul of a sinner, a son of Adam, he begins to live; conscious of his sin, for the dead know nothing; they are not conscious of anything, but the living know that they must die and they know, when quickened into life, that they are not ready to die. They know that they have sinned against God and that, therefore, if they die as they are, they must sink into hell. That is what the Lord does with people when He quickens them into life. He gives them to know what they are, what they deserve, and how, if they are left to themselves, they can only go on sinning and ruining themselves eternally. This work of the Holy Spirit in communicating life to their dead souls brings them into a solemn sense of peril and anxiety, and it makes them realise their helplessness; makes them realise that they are accountable to God, and that they must meet that God and give an account of themselves. It is a great day that comes to a dead sinner when he is made alive in that sense. He feels his death then; he never felt it before. He feels his exposure then; he never knew that God's eye was upon him before. He begins to tremble at his doom and to feel desperately in need of a covering, of a hiding place, of a way of escape from the wrath to come. O, what an alarm is sounded in the conscience of a quickened sinner! It disturbs his life, it overthrows his prejudices, it makes him quite alone, it causes him to seek after a place of refuge, it overturns every project of his life, it changes the whole scene, and it brings him near to the dust of death. O, the pains of hell get hold upon such a person and, so far from thinking himself to be a saint, a child of God, he feels himself to be a very devil, and feels, moreover, that the more he tries to

keep the law and satisfy his conscience and please God, the deeper he is involved in thick mire where there is no standing, and he sinks. Solemn to sink like that! And he fears he will sink into perdition. It is very difficult when one sinks in thick mire. Those of you who were in the first world war may know a little about that - the dreadful shell-holes with their mud. If a man got into that it was almost impossible to get out of it. And so it is spiritually. When a poor sinner sinks in deep mire and there is no standing, O, how solemn! But there is life in his soul; life to feel, life to fear, and life that makes him flee. He knows not where to flee, but he must flee, and consternation sometimes makes him flee here and there in his dread, if he may but find refuge. And then he comes to this point where he has to fall down. He has no more strength to flee, no more strength to stand, and he falls down; falls down in solemn surrender. Have you been brought there? Felt you could do no more? You have tried your best and you cannot redress your case, cannot cleanse your conscience, cannot make yourself fit for God; but you stumble and stumble all the more, and you know not where to go. And then what? This: I believe the Lord brings these people, when they fall down, to fall upon the Lord with a solemn surrender to Him, lost or saved, acknowledging they deserve to be condemned, owning the sentence just. It is a point of real spiritual experience to which, I believe, the Lord brings all His people, sooner or later; they become guilty before a Holy God; they are dumb, they are condemned, and own the sentence just. One of the most solemn moments of a sinner's life is that, as some of us know. You have known, some of you, I quite expect, a time when you could say to the Lord,

If my soul were sent to hell
Thy righteous law approves it well

But the Lord will never send such a soul to hell who is brought to acquiesce in the justice of God's sentence, and who at the same time is brought to seek, if he may find it, mercy at the hands of a just Lawgiver. And how can mercy be dispensed by a just Lawgiver when the sinner deserves to be condemned and owns it? Well, it is through Christ, and it is in this way people are brought into union with Christ. None but lost sinners ever really have union to Christ. None but those who are cut off in their feelings from all hope in the mercy

of God in themselves, will ever appreciate the channel that God has caused mercy to flow in. None but those who know that they cannot keep the law nor atone for one of their past sins will appreciate the doctrine of the gospel wherein the Lord has provided a blessed Ransom, a Refuge for sinners, in the Person of His dear Son. This becomes increasingly important and precious to a convicted sinner, not only at that juncture, but throughout his life. When the Lord, by His Spirit, gives such a sinner to see by the eye of faith something of the mystery of godliness in the constitution of the Person of Immanuel, the purpose of God in that to put away sin, make atonement for it so as to redeem the sinner, that creates in that sinner's heart a real hope in the mercy of God. O, what a grace, hope is! I mean, a hope for eternity. In this chapter - this solemn chapter, blessed chapter, discriminating chapter - the Apostle says: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable". He is dealing, not with this life only, but with eternity, and it is with a view to eternity that, in this life, people are brought to treat with God for mercy. Temporal things are important, but they are subordinated to eternal things in the life and experience of the child of God. He will begin to regard God's mercy - indeed he is the only one who does adequately regard it - because he feels that a crumb of bread, a drop of water, a breath without pain, are all undeserved. People ordinarily talking about the harvest, and perhaps making a great show about a harvest festival, many of them know nothing about their ill-deservings, though they are glad to have plenty to do with in this world; and one would not say anything against natural gratitude; but when you consider what we are as sinners, every temporal mercy will be enhanced as being undeserved, and yet will be subordinated to the importance of eternity, and you will say of the best temporal mercy

Thanks to Thy Name for meaner things,
But these are not my God

It is the favour of God, the blessing of God, the mercy of God, the salvation of God, the love of God, the righteousness of God, the presence of God, that I want, and without this I am eternally lost and poor. Is it not so?

"As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" These shall be made alive, experimentally, in the knowledge of Christ as their Redeemer. O, that is living! That is living in the soul! When a poor sinner is brought out of the prison-house, when he has the sentence of condemnation removed from his heart, and the sentence of forgiveness pronounced in his conscience, then he lives. And what a life it is! - a life of faith on the Son of God. "The just shall live by his faith". He lives before he enjoys this liberty; he lives even when he is under the law and in bondage, and he lives when in the prison-house; he has a hope in the mercy of God, that the Lord will one day liberate him, because he sees how a sinner can be liberated, justly liberated, by a Holy God, in the pronouncing of divine forgiveness, the jubilee trumpet. But when he hears that trumpet in his heart, when the secret whisper of the Spirit brings home to his conscience a sense of redeeming love, then he truly lives, then there is the comfort of love in his heart, then he is delivered from slavish dread. Then, instead of forboding evil, he "expects more good to know". But what a day it is! How it brings into the soul that enjoyment that nothing else can! Well, one said

Lord, it is not life to live
If Thy presence Thou deny

But is it not life to live with His presence? Did you never rejoice to see the curse removed? And what does it produce? It produces what is so extremely rare in the professing church today - a broken and contrite heart for sin. We live in a day of drift, a day of dullness, of fog; things are blurred. But when the Holy Spirit gives to a sinner a sense of redeeming love, then he mourns more than ever he mourned before on account of his sin. O, what a great deal of orthodoxy correctly stated there is in this present day, in which there seems to be no element of real repentance, and I believe that will be a crucial point in the present drift. Plenty of people drift with orthodoxy - superficially correct, cold orthodoxy - and think they are right, but without real repentance we have no union to Christ, no union with a broken-hearted Saviour. Very solemn this is, and I say it, not out of a profession of knowing much of what repentance is, but I do know enough of it to know how blessed it is, and how important. There is nothing can produce it like a sense of

blood-bought pardon. Men go about and command other men to repent. Well, you may as well ask a corpse to rise out of the grave. We know we ought to repent, but only God can produce evangelical repentance, and that is the fulfilment of that wonderful promise: "I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him." O, sweet, solemn, poignant mourning is that! You can never forgive yourself, and never cease to love the Lord for His so great love in doing that for your redemption. Why, in heaven, my friends, those who reach there through divine grace will sing that song: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us in His Own blood". In that sense, sin will not be forgotten in heaven. There will be no sin there, and no real trouble for sin, but a remembrance of Him Who is seen without a veil between, that Man Who suffered, bled and died to take sin away.

"As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive". This life is eternal life; it begins here; it never ends; death will not touch it. We must all die physically, except those who will be alive at the Lord's coming. We know not when that will be; He only knows; a mercy if we are made watchful concerning it! If we are blessed in our souls with a knowledge of the Lord Jesus as our dear Redeemer and our Forerunner and King and High Priest in heaven, then we shall welcome that day. It will be the best day we ever lived.

"Even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Well, friends, the time has nearly gone; I have hardly said anything about the text, but it is a wonderful thing to have the life of God in the soul, the fear of God in the conscience, the love of God in the affections. If we have the grace of God in our souls, that is imperishable, and that life will live even when we come to Jordan. The devil cannot destroy it, but the Lord will destroy the devil's works in that sinner, and he is inclined, and enabled at times by the Spirit, to put off the works of darkness. Ah, there will be a conflict where this life is! "In the world ye shall have tribulation" said the Lord Jesus, and that tribulation is not merely external trouble; it is inward separation, and that is very solemn. "All contained in that red list", said the hymnwriter "were not murdered martyrs". O, what crucifixion is

needful for those who live united to Christ! Paul knew it. He said "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me". And Paul said in another place: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain", and it is to a child of God. It is not life to live without Christ's presence. When He is with you, whatever troubles you have, they do not overwhelm you. You feel them, but Christ being with you sanctifies the trouble, turns it to good account. And whatever pleasures you have in this life, Christ's presence will temper those pleasures and turn them into a blessing. They will be sanctified pleasures. The Lord's people have pleasures in this life, but they are not those sinful pleasures that the old man craves after. They must be put off. But presently the people of God who are joined to the Lord Jesus shall come up again from the earth, and their souls and bodies will be reunited, and they will live; make up the complete harvest of which Christ is the Firstfruits. O, the doctrine of union, my friends, is writ large in the Scripture, and if you are a child of God it will be in your experience:

In union with the Lamb
From condemnation free
The saints from everlasting were
And shall for ever be

But the bliss of it is to feel it, to know it, to enjoy it; and I believe that in some small measure the Lord's people do know that union here below, some in a greater measure than others - a union of desire, a union of love, a union of enjoyment, a union made by the Spirit wherein the sinner is permitted to embrace the Lord Jesus as His Portion and as the Antidote of death. It will be wonderful to die in faith of Christ, in a sense of union with Him, and to be raised again.

"Every man in his own order: Christ the Firstfruits; afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming." This is when the Lord will come with all His saints, all those who are alive and

remain, and those who are raised up from the dead joining their redeemed spirits, their bodies raised incorruptible; and the Lord will appear with them all. He will bring them, and He will say to His divine Father, "Behold, I, and the children whom Thou hast given Me"; His redeemed ones. O, what a great thing if we are there, if we partake of that harvest, of which we read in the Revelation. Two harvests are spoken of there. One like unto the Son of Man thrust in His sickle and reaped the harvest of the earth, which was ripe, into His garner. And then the other reaping was into the winepress of the wrath of God. This is in the Scripture! It is before us. The harvest is coming. Have we union to Christ? Does He dwell in our hearts, the hope of glory? Have we room in our hearts for Him, that nothing else can fill? That is coming very low. I would not set you down upon your aching void, as if that will satisfy you, but if you can say, as before God - and what you say is verified in your conduct and life - that you must have Christ as All in All, and that, comparatively, there is nothing that is worth anything to you but the possession of Christ, then you will not die until you have Him in your heart. O, that is a point. Said the good Apostle, "That I may win Christ" - I cannot get beyond that - "and be found in Him". Win Him in my heart, be possessed of Him as my rich, enriching, precious Portion, and be found in Him at last, saved unto eternity.

Well, my friends, eternity is close to us. We are Strict Baptists by profession. How do we attend the services? How many steps have you made heavenward since we last met? How many have I made? We may complain that we have not got very far on the way, but how do we stand now? Can you say solemnly

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness

It is a great thing to say rightly. I do deprecate language without meaning. We may become like parrots, and say right things without any meaning - a terrible thing! It is to be feared many professors do so and the devil does not mind how much you say aright if there is no heart to it. But if you say from your heart, Lord Jesus, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I want to love Thee, and I cannot live without Thee, and cannot die without Thee - well, you never will. If

He has made Himself so precious to you, then one day you will feel you possess Him, and have a good hope of appearing with His redeemed people in eternal blessedness.

The Lord has dealt very solemnly with me of late and I have been brought down lower than since my early days fifty years ago, but this is my ground, Christ the Rock of Ages. My hope is built there, and sometimes it is a lively hope, though in this life there is much groaning in the tabernacle through the conflict with sin and Satan and many trials; but it is a good hope. May it be confirmed in our experience!

"Christ the firstfruits". He will not be in heaven and leave His people behind for whom He laid down His precious life, and for whom He now sits King and Intercessor on the throne of grace. May He make us acquainted with Himself there by faith in this life, and when we come down to life's end it will be well.

AMEN.