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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS
Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Blunsdon Hill on 1 May 1957

Acts 13 verses 38 and 39

Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren
that through this Man is preached unto you
the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that
believe are justified from all things, from which ye
could not be justified by the law of Moses

I think if we had a spiritual apprehension of the mystery in Gadsby's hymn just now sung (536) we should be more taken up with the Lord Jesus than even with the benefits that derive from His work. I met, many years ago, with an observation of Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan, and it has stuck to me and recurred into my mind occasionally. He said "The Lord is loved not only for what He gives, but for what He is, and for what He has suffered." Really, when you feel your heart taken up with a once-suffering Saviour, though His benefits are great, His Person is greater. That will be the blessedness and felicity of eternity, not only to enjoy the benefits of His death, but to enjoy Him. Man's last end is to know God, and to be like Him and enjoy Him for ever. O what an end for puny man, worthless worms of the earth! But it involved all those unspeakably awful sufferings which He underwent as a surety and substitute. He bore "all incarnate God could bear, with strength enough and none to spare"; and this in His free love, in His gracious determination, in His condescending faithfulness to His obligations undertaken in the covenant of grace. For this purpose alone the Son of Man was manifested. He came from above for that only work, to accomplish redemption, to purchase His Church, to honour the law, and to justify God in forgiving sin. We read in one of the chapters in the Romans "that God might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus"; and that justice of God in justifying believers lies in the satisfaction He rendered to the law in His obedience and suffering death.

This is to be preached, not by angels, but by sinful men ordained and anointed for the work. A very solemn and heavy and blessed responsibility this! When the preaching is in the Holy Ghost there will be some meeting in the experience of the people from time to time, of the covenant purposes of God and poor sinners. There will be something done, something done that will last eternally. It has pleased the Lord that this should be the method of grace. Not exclusively; the Lord can bless His people and teach them and pardon them and take them to heaven irrespective of the ministry. But I believe this, that where He has provided the ministry He will not bless the neglect of it. It is His own provision. "It pleased God through the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." We live in a sad day of declension, superficiality, and much that makes us sad; but the same Holy Spirit lives, the same gospel is full of rich grace. What we need is the power of the Spirit to make the word of His grace, through the lips of unworthy men, effectual in the souls of the hearers, to "mix faith". In the Hebrews we read of some who were not profited by what they heard, because they did not mix faith with it. There is a good deal of fatalism today, which is a perversion of the doctrine of election; but if we really believe in the doctrine of election and predestination, we shall be seeking after the knowledge of Christ and the fruit of those decrees in our experience, and the method of grace will be considered by us. I know we may make too much of a minister, and the Lord may in displeasure shut up that man's ministry to us. On the other hand, we may think too little of it. I think it is Rutherford who says "Happy is the man that can win to look up to God above the man in the pulpit". A good word that! For if you receive the word of man only, it will not be saving; but if you receive the truth of God through a man, there will be a saving efficacy in that.

See what is said here: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." That is the purpose of preaching, for the obedience

of faith. "All that believe". O this faith, how important it is! The faith of God's elect, that special faith which is the work of the Holy Spirit, the gift of God. There is a difference between that faith and natural credence and acquiescence in the verbal presentation of the truth, which may be only logical; and if I may, I would try for a moment to outline the difference - the difference in the principle of it and in the effect of it.

Natural credence so far is right, as Hart says; but there may be natural credence without grace, without repentance, without any apprehension really of Christ's Person and work, and certainly without any love and without humility. But real faith has attaching to it humility, repentance, love and union. It unites the person to the Object. That is living faith. You may not feel the union to be secure and all-satisfying, but it will unite in adherence, in desire, in trust. If you hear with the hearing ear of faith when Christ and His substitutionary death and obedience are set before you, you will say, "There is all my trust". Not a little thing to say! Trust for eternity! And there will be love attaching to it. Your heart will move towards Him. You will have a hope in the mercy of God, and feel enabled to ply the throne of grace for the enjoyment of those benefits that derive from Christ and Him crucified. "By Him all that believe are justified".

Faith has no merit in it. It is not the cause of justification, nor the ground of justification; but it is the means by which condemned sinners receive justification into their experience. Justification is a legal term. It is the work of God. Only God can pass an act of justification on one who deserves to be condemned. Very solemn it is, and yet very blessed, that God who must condemn sin, can condemn it, does condemn it, has condemned it, in the Person of the Surety, and can and does and must therefore justify the sinner for whom the Surety stood and suffered. I sometimes try - but I fail very much - to consider the character of God in salvation, and to see the beauty of the integrity of the divine character in all the free gifts of grace. The free gift of God's grace in the

justification, the forgiveness, the sanctification, and the glorification of sinners, is all consonant with the perfections of Jehovah. None of them are infringed, because all flows from the free grace of God through the merit and work of Christ. That is the channel. Mercy flows that way. Why my friends, we have no right to live as sinners. We have forfeited our right to live. Condemnation is our right. Yet we read of the justification of life, the free gift of God's grace unto the justification of life, in a sinful worm who deserves to be condemned.

"By Him all that believe are justified". This faith is the gift of God. We can never manufacture it. Many a child of God has felt he would give all that he possesses for a grain of living faith; but the universe would not buy it. God's grace can never be merited, never be deserved, and never be purchased. It is given. It comes mysteriously. The Holy Spirit works it in the heart. The gospel is to be preached for this purpose. It is difficult for one to say how it comes; but Paul writing to the Romans tells us. He says: "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." And he says: "How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?" and so on.

The method of grace is really wonderful. Perhaps some of you can go back to some of your hearings, when the Lord Jesus has been made so real, so dear, so suitable, so sufficient to you, that your whole soul has gone out to Him in desire, in love, in trust, and in a gracious determination to seek after Him until you may possess Him for your own portion, your own Redeemer. Now that is faith; and it is sweet to feel it, profitable to know it. It has a double efficacy in the soul who exercises it; it gives a hope in the Lord's mercy, and it purifies the heart. You cannot feel your heart going out in humble trust and love to the Lord Jesus, and at the same time roll sin under your tongue as a sweet morsel. And in that sense, experimentally as well as doctrinally, I believe it is right to say that justification and sanctification are inseparable graces. They are distinguishable.

Justification is a perfect state. There cannot be a partial justification; for when God justifies a person, He justifies the whole person. He does not justify his sins. As it says here, "By Him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." The law of Moses can justify no sinner; but the gospel can. God, for Christ's sake, can. Jesus Christ can, because He received the condemnation; and as we read in the prophet Isaiah: "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied; by His knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities." He who justifies is He who bore all their sins, and it is a free gift of grace. God for Christ's sake forgives and justifies the ungodly who believe in Jesus Christ.

This justification includes the imputation to the sinner of the obedience of Christ. Justification is something more than the removal of condemnation which we all deserve, and under which we may long live as a sentence against our sins. But when the Lord forgives sins, He will also justify the sinner and impute to that sinner a righteousness which was wrought out for him by Him who received the condemnation. In that 5 chapter of Romans it is said, that by one Man's obedience many were made righteous; and if God pronounces us righteous we shall be righteous. And that means we have covering us, imputed to us, reckoned to our account, that obedience which Christ rendered to the law and by which He made it honourable. Natural righteousness in the innocence of creation was attached to our first parents. They were righteous. But that righteousness was lost, and all the human race was made unrighteous by the sin of Adam. It passed upon the whole human race. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" is the question. None! How can a man be just then before God? In this only way, by the righteousness of Christ put upon him by God. O what an act! Imputation; a double imputation that God alone could effect. For God only can impute sin, and He did impute it, and imputing it to His dear Son, did not spare Him. O if we did but look into this matter by the Spirit, and had that "scene of matchless grace" before us, how it would

soften and humble us before the Lord! Then how wonderful to feel to be covered with Christ's righteousness! Not His intrinsic righteousness as a Holy God, not His righteousness as Mediator, but the righteousness He wrought out as a Man in standing in His people's place. O what a mercy it is to have an inkling of it! The hymnwriter speaks of it, and I wish we might feel it; it would do us good, it would give us a felt sense, a humbling sense of being fit for God:

And lest the shadow of a spot
Should on my soul be found
He took the robe the Saviour wrought
And cast it all around

It is scriptural language, because those who get admittance into heaven and get a welcome there, and find heaven to be a holy happy place of worship, tireless worship, they are there as having been brought out of great tribulation and having washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb; and they wear those white robes. It is the righteousness of Christ, justification.

And it is a state. Let me say a word or two on this, because it comes very near to experimental religion. The state of justification is unalterable. If Christ died for us, if He rose again for our justification, if God for Christ's sake imputes His obedience to us because our sin was imputed to Him and condemned in Him, we stand in that standing that is firmer than innocence.

Adam, when the tempter foiled him,
His bright robes were quickly gone;
But this righteousness of Jesus,
Once applied, 'tis always on;
Tis their title
To the mansion love ordained.

And my friends, we must have it. A title for heaven is as essential as a fitness for heaven. But though the standing is

unalterable, the enjoyment and experience of it is very intermittent. I remember the first time I felt in my own soul the sacred substance of that word just now read "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." O it is a sweet experience! "By Him all that believe are justified". When faith is active, and when the witness of the Spirit is had in the heart, and a sense of peace with and through Jesus Christ is enjoyed, then there is liberty, then there is peace. It is a peace like that which Paul speaks of to the Philippians, and promises to those who are enabled by the Spirit to follow his direction, which is this: "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." When you are under the power of the Spirit, your requests will include chiefly spiritual blessings, of which there is nothing greater than the remission of sins and the justification of the person.

And you see, this Man, this Lord Jesus, whom Paul preached here, is a living Christ. He lives in heaven to bestow the blessings of the covenant, the blessings that result from His precious death. He is there in heaven to give them out, and to hear the requests and prayers and the confessions, and to make intercession for those people for whom He suffered. It is very sacred, very solemn, to be brought near to God through Jesus Christ, "this Man", to feel Him near to you. A few weeks ago my mind was taken up rather sweetly and solemnly with that word in the 17 chapter of John the 5 verse. It did make the Lord Jesus precious to me. The Lord, in that prayer to His divine Father for His people, prayed for many things for them, but He said this: "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was". My faith seemed to trace the Lord Jesus in His sacred humanity and His sufferings and death and resurrection, and then when He rose from the dead and gave that message through Mary to the disciples, and He said: "Tell My disciples, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God". He said:

"Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended". He was not then glorified, as now He is, in His holy humanity, the Person of the Son of God incarnate in heaven, glorified with the glory which He had with His Father before the world was. That is the Man Christ Jesus, a real Man, but glorified in His humanity.

Another thing connected with this is, that His people are to be glorified. They are to be conformed to Him. Less than that will not satisfy; but it is beyond all we can conceive. If you walk about sometimes feeling the ugliness of your sin and the constant defeats that you get, the defilement that you feel, and the conflict you have with indwelling sin and temptation, it may make you long sometimes to get to heaven. But then the consideration of a meetness and a title will come in, and both the title and the meetness are from and in and with the Lord Jesus. So it is written in the Corinthians - a blessed word: O I have seen in that such amplitude, such sufficiency! - it is said: "Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." "By Him" .. this Man, "all that believe are justified from all things". And if justified, then there is no more condemnation; and if justified, then glory must follow. Nothing can keep out of heaven a justified sinner who is united to Christ, his glorious Head.

Well, this text is a very solemn one, and it will be well for us if we look closely into our own cases, as to how we stand in respect of it.

I did notice this afternoon the two sorts of people listening to the disciples' preaching. Some of them cavilled, contradicted, were filled with envy; and some of them believed. O what a mercy if the Lord has given us faith, if He has made us believers! It takes the power of Him who made the world to make a believer; and I believe in a certain sense (you will understand what I mean) it is a greater work for God to take a sinner in hand and deal with him so, and make him a repentant sinner and a believer and a saint, and take him to heaven, than to create the universe. Insignificant, we are indeed, and we may

well say "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" Yet if we are rightly instructed, we shall want the Lord to be mindful of us and to visit us, and to bless us with the blessings wherewith He blesses His own chosen people. As the Psalmist prayed: "Remember me with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people; O visit me with Thy salvation."

It is a personal business; and if you take these two things in the balance and see that we are either justified or condemned, and that that state will be fixed presently for eternity, the issues are very great. O to make a mistake is very solemn! But I tell you one thing in the gospel that is known by those who are taught of the Spirit, and that is this - they are so convinced by the Spirit of their guilt that they dare not think of appearing before God without Christ, and they dare not think of leaning to their own righteousness or justifying themselves. There was a young man who came to the Lord Jesus and asked Him how to attain to eternal life - an interesting question, rightly made. But the Lord said to him "How readest thou in the law?" Well, the young man said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbour as thyself". The Lord said, "This do, and thou shalt live." But the young man, it is written, "willing to justify himself said, Who is my neighbour?" He could not rise above even a little courtesy to his neighbour for a touchstone with respect to eternal life. He thought, I suppose, he kept the rest of the law. O but where there is conviction of sin by the Spirit, the Lord will lay a person low. He will dread trusting in his own righteousness. He will understand and feel and acknowledge, without any exaggeration, that his own righteousness is but filthy rags. A painfully solemn thing to feel, but it is true. I have felt it sometimes, and have deprecated before the Lord in secret, appearing before Him in the very best service, the very best duty I have ever performed. Why, it is worthless, like polluted rags! But the righteousness of Christ is the thing. It is there you will look, there you will seek to be sheltered, to be accepted of God in Christ.

If any of you feel that your sins are so numerous, so peculiar, that you cannot forgive or forget them, and entertain serious questions as to whether really you can ever get the forgiveness of them from God, may the Lord help you to remember who this Man is the Son of God. O

Could we His Person learn to prize
We more should prize His grace

and we more should trust and plead His Name, merit, and blood before the Father. There is none other Name given under heaven among men but His Name, whereby we must be saved. And when, and if, this justification reaches our hearts and we feel the liberty of it, freedom from condemnation and peace with God, that will liberate us to serve the Lord, it will make us anxious to live to His glory, it will give us a desire to do what Paul says the saints of God do ... by the Spirit, they crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts. So far from free justification by divine grace through Christ's redemption leading a person to a careless life, it rather stimulates a longing desire for holiness; and a person thus dealt with would live holily and godly in this present world, though he will never be satisfied with the standard he reaches. The best of saints know something of the Apostle Paul's wretchedness: "O wretched man that I am!" Yet he was a blessed man. The Lord dealt with him graciously, afforded him much of the comfort of the gospel. He could say of the Lord Jesus, "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me", but he had this indwelling sin. It did not interfere with his state of justification, but it interfered with his enjoyment of it.

But that is to come to an end one day. O the prospect for the people of God is sometimes very bright ... holiness, perfect holiness of spirit, and perfect conformity to Christ. No more dark frowns from God. When you get some providential trial, you perhaps immediately begin to examine yourself as to how you have offended the Lord. I got a trial yesterday; it came suddenly and unexpectedly, and a very painful trial it was. And immediately I began to wonder what I was guilty of, what the Lord

was provoked about to allow such a thing to come. It is very solemn, but I believe very profitable to examine oneself, because it brings a person afresh into contact with God in Christ. It would be good if we could live in that word of the hymnwriter

Daily I'd repent of sin
Daily wash in Calvary's blood
Daily feel Thy peace within
Daily I'd commune with God

The nearer we get to the end the more important it is to have the conscience purged, and kept purged and tender, by the blood of Christ.

But these people who are justified, and shall be fully sanctified one day, are partly sanctified from time to time through the word of truth, as Christ said "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth". These people shall prove that there is no wrath against them in God, though He shows His displeasure, and that in His love, for wrong things. There is no penal wrath, and they shall prove that all things work together for good. What a wonder that is! Everything that occurs will be made to work for their good, their ultimate spiritual good. Job had a word when he was greatly tried, and when his friends thought he made so much of it. "Why not get peace with God?" they said. Well, poor man, he said: "O that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat!". It did not look much like a justified person. But said Job: "He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold. I know that my Redeemer liveth." Dark seasons, seasons of desertion, sin provoked darkness ... all those solemn things that we come into, the Lord will overrule for His people. Erskine is bold when he says - I would quote it rightly, and advisedly, and graciously, but I believe what he meant was true: he said

Sin for my good shall work and win
But 'tis not good for me to sin

"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man" this exalted, glorified, enthroned Man, the Friend of sinners, once a crucified Man..through this Man, in whose hands is all power in heaven and in earth "is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." Why art thou afraid to come? You may be afraid. I have been many times afraid .. afraid on my knees of approaching God, a holy God. How can we approach Him apart from Jesus Christ? But get a glimpse of Jesus, the Mediator, and Intercessor, and great High Priest on the throne of grace, then

Why art thou afraid to come
Why afraid to tell thy case
He will not pronounce thy doom
Smiles are seated on His face

The kindness of the Lord Jesus, His compassion toward His unworthy people, His ability to save to the uttermost, His unfailing faithfulness to His promises, and His undying love ... these are attractions to the people of God. Does that make that word important in the chapter just now read? I know that it is a very high standard of experience, yet I believe the Spirit can and does bring His people into it from time to time; where the Apostle says: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

That peace with God is independent of circumstances. O what a different outlook you have upon your circumstances of life, and prospects for eternity, when you feel peace with God through Jesus Christ! But he says: "We have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God". Then he says: "Not only so, but we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Now that is an experience for justified people. If you say, "I am deficient"; if you say, "I

faint almost at every trial that comes"; I can sympathise with you; but let us pray for the Holy Spirit to conform us to that word in our experience, to give us such a strengthening sense of interest in Christ's righteousness and atonement, that we shall glory in tribulation. Not in tribulation for its own sake, but because of what it leads to through sanctifying grace... they "came out of great tribulation." There is an end to tribulation, but not an end to the benefits of Christ, not an end to the enjoyment of Himself.

I know my poor preaching is exceedingly disorderly, and I do mourn over it before the Lord, but here it is. If the Lord should bring us inside this text and save us from being those who despise the gospel, and give us faith to mix with it and to entertain the Lord Jesus in our heart's best room, and to live to His glory, how good it will be!

AMEN.