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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 28 May 1933

Hebrews 4 verses 14, 15 and 16

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"

So that to hold fast our profession is to fly to the throne of God's grace continually in all our distresses, emptyings, temptations, and guilt, and changes, and oppositions. Prayer is the Christian's native breath, the Christian's vital breath, the Christian's native air, his passport at the gates of death; he enters heaven by prayer. And it is a great thing, a miracle of God's powerful grace, for any who are praying people, who live a life of faith and prayer on the Son of God. But it is evident, by this context, that to hold fast our profession, is assailed. It is not easy; it is opposed, as you were singing

Ifs, buts and hows are hurled
To sink us with the gloom
Of all that's dismal in this world
And in the world to come

It is not for one to say that to hold fast our profession is easy. Neither is it for one to say that it is impossible, for there is an object, there is an anchor ground, and there is a source of strength in Jesus Christ, which is infallible, and everyone who is brought to put his trust in Him shall prove an overcomer over all opposition and temptation and trouble and death. I spoke only on one particular point of obtaining mercy this morning, but a very great point, a very

choice mercy, to obtain pardoning mercy, so that the man receiving it looks for his wonted burden and cannot find it. Wonders why, it may be, he is at liberty; searches for his sins, as it is in the Prophet, and there are none. Not that he is not a sinner, but he is now a forgiven sinner, a happy, pardoned child with heaven in his conscience, with peace in his soul, with deep, flowing repentance in his heart, and with humble thanksgiving and praises on his lips. Mercy is wonderfully efficacious and sweet. The taste of the manna was like honey, we read, and the taste of God's mercy in Christ is inexpressibly sweet. It must be tasted to be understood, and when it is felt it dissolves the heart. I should be willing to defy any person to maintain hardness of heart under a sense of blood-bought mercy and I know of nothing else, no other power, that can produce such sweet contrition as a sense of being freely forgiven all your sins, for Christ's sake. Now this is obtainable, and it is obtainable by such as may be writing bitter things against themselves, and may be tempted to say that it is too high for them to aim at. But remember to whom you come in prayer, and remember what throne He occupies and by whose authority He occupies that throne; that He is the Prince of life, the King of peace, the Son of God, and that the same blessed One who sits on that glorious throne died on Calvary's cross, and bore sin in His own body on the tree. Some of you may have got as far as this in your faith and in your prayers -

My soul looks back to see
The burdens Thou didst bear
When hanging on the accursed tree
And hopes her guilt was there

Well, if some of you have got as far as that, and no further, is there no sweetness in that hope, and no influence upon your conscience to soften you in that hope? It is a good thing to hope in the mercy of God in this particular. The Lord taketh pleasure in such as thus hope in His mercy. But let me speak, if I may. humbly speak a word of caution. There are those who declare that it is not necessary to pray and urge and wait for the knowledge of pardon, and some, alas, people who preach do not hesitate to tell their hearers that it is unnecessary to have the enjoyment of divine forgiveness. I fully and freely admit that it is a very high and rich and rare blessing and not easily

attained, and there are many powers against the attainment of it. But, remember this, if you and I are going to heaven, we shall go there as pardoned sinners. And if we pretend that we hope that we shall get to heaven, is it more than a pretence, if we are willing to be ignorant whether we are pardoned or not? I would not say one word that would distress a rightly exercised, tender conscientious child of God, but rather encourage such to seek and pray for this choice mercy, for everything short of it will leave you without full satisfaction. While any guilt remains on the conscience, while you are without the receipt, as Berridge speaks, of the payment of your debts by the Lord Jesus, you cannot really fully rest contented if you have the life of God in your souls. Because there are many blessings short of this, it is not for me to say that you shall not seek to attain this greater blessing. And, for your encouragement, I would say this, that the very least mercy, the very least crumb of mercy, the very least kindly look of God upon your spirit, carries with it really, a pledge of forgiveness, for the Lord will never look kindly upon a poor sinner and never permit that sinner to draw near to His throne, and to find some measure of access there, whom He will finally banish unpardoned. One says, that he was holpen with a little help, received a little merciful strengthening, and it is not to be despised. I would not despise it for myself, nor would I suggest that you should pass by such mercy. But boldness, which is enjoined here, is sometimes wonderfully created in the heart by this, namely, the fitting of the Word of God, of His promise, of His gospel, with your felt need. It is wonderfully strengthening and emboldening to a praying man who confesses frequently "We know not what we should pray for as we ought". And though you know you have needs, yet you may feel, dare I ask for this? Is not this, my need, a proof that I am out of the secret? Could a child of God be as destitute as I? And then you find a Scripture; it meets your eye and through your eye reaches your understanding, fits in with the trouble of your conscience, and moves you to pray for the fulfilment of it and you only ask what God has promised.

What Thou hast promised, I implore

Take this point, which is a point I am not ignorant of, the subduing of sin. On Friday night we were noticing a little of the 38 Psalm in

which the Psalmist speaks of his enemies being lively, and therefore, strong, which I take to mean, very largely at least, spiritual, inward enemies; inward depravity and corruption. Now it is a terrible thing to live under the tyranny of inward corruptions. It gives a man no rest. It makes him dread that he will finish a reprobate. It makes him feel - "Can ever God dwell here?" It spoils his religious hours; it prevents him meditating. O, it is not a mere name to be a sinner; it is a terrible reality. And what can subdue sin? What can really hold down the boiling corruptions of our nature and create a comparative calm in the heart? Only one power, and that, God's power. There is a Scripture in Micah, the 7 chapter, which may have been to some of you, as to myself, an emboldening word, enabling us to pray for its fulfilment, because it exactly fits our needs. Says the prophet, by divine inspiration, "He", that is the Lord, "will turn again. He will have compassion upon us". He will subdue our iniquities and Thou wilt cast all our sins into the depth of the sea." My friends, lacking the experience of this, but feeling the need, the dire need of the fulfilment of this, have you ever been emboldened to pray that it may be verified in your experience? We can never need what God has not promised. We can never pray for any blessing He has not designed to give to His people, of a spiritual kind. The Covenant of Grace is infinitely full of blessing and the Mediator of the Covenant is this King of grace. He sits on the throne of grace to fulfil the gracious promises of Jehovah freely to those who come and ask. And so that word is known by all real praying people - "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you". There is no peradventure.

I can no denial take

says one

When I plead for Jesus' sake

And is it not mercy, obtained mercy, when you find upon your heart the exercises of God's gracious power subduing your corruptions, preventing you, as the Psalm says, preventing you by His mercy. Preventing you from falling foully; preventing your corruptions from utterly swamping you, and creating a comparative peace. The quietness of sin that results from any natural preoccupation may lead to a carelessness and a Pharisaism, and ultimately to a fall, but the

subjection of sin by the power of Christ carries with it a caution. It produces in the soul a sanctification. It makes holiness very sweet. It makes the conscience very tender. It is not a dead peace, but a lively one. And it is mercy, so that the man, for the time, can breath, as it were, a spiritual atmosphere. The things of God are his element, and he is in that element, and the word of God's grace he can attend to in a gracious, Spirit given, meditation. The devil is against all this, but the Lord is greater than the devil. When Joshua stood before Jehovah, clothed in filthy garments, and the adversary stood at his right hand to resist him, we find this is what took place. The angel of the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke thee, even the Lord which hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" And when a poor, praying sinner is withstood by the devil on account of his sin, guilt and depravity, and feels the shame thereof, then the Lord, when He comes and deals with the devil and rebukes him, He deals with the sinner and gives him what he gave to Joshua, a cleansing. He said to him, "I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee and I have given thee a change of raiment."

"That we may obtain mercy". Another thing about this obtaining mercy. It is for the Lord to give a poor, miserable sinner, the comfort of His love. Mercy is for miserable people. It is powerful mercy the Lord shows. It comes through the blood of Christ; it is given at the hands of the Lord Jesus by His Spirit. And no mercy is sweeter than this, for the Lord to comfort you with the comforts of His redeeming love. To obtain it so, as for the time, to be all taken up with it. The sweetness of redeeming love, the consolations of the love of Christ, are sweet mercies in the experience of the people of God. Very rarely perhaps, and it may be only for a very brief moment, have some of us felt this mercy, but it is wonderfully sweet. It is obtainable. The love of God in Christ is not always to be locked up and never to be known, and it is known at the throne of grace. A warming, comforting influence upon the heart through the love of Christ, and the result of this is love. It is not often, perhaps, some here can say they really love the Lord. They want to and their complaint is that their love is mostly cold and faint, and so it will be until the love of Christ in the heart kindles. Then that hymn takes place in the experience

I love the Lord with mind and heart
His people and His ways
Envy and lust and pride depart
And all His works I praise

and that is sweet liberty. And this is how fruitfulness is produced. Fruitfulness is God's mercy to people. It is the result of His goodness and His kindness in Jesus Christ.

Another mercy is this, for the Lord to deal mercifully with a wayward wanderer; for Him not to deal with us according to our backslidings; for Him to pity our distress when we are distressed by our own sin-bought poverty, when we find ourselves alarmed at being at a distance from Him and fruitless, as the prodigal. There was the poor man, a spend-thrift, spent all his substance with riotous living and he fain would have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, but no man gave to him. Then he came to himself. That was mercy; it was mercy my friends. We can turn away from God, we can entertain idols, we can forget the Lord. We are capable of destroying ourselves. But every turn, every time we come to ourselves, and every time we are brought to repentance and to the throne of grace with confession, is mercy, undeserved, free mercy. But restoration, restoring mercy was given to the prodigal. Perhaps some of you may feel, this evening, to need restoring mercy. Days are not now with you, as of old. You have grown weary, it may be, and have become fruitless, impoverished. Have, as it were, lost your confidence through negligence and prayerlessness. Sin has wrought much in you through its deceitfulness and you may find yourselves in a barren land. How are we to obtain that restoration which we need? Who is to bring us back? Who is to restore our souls? This great High Priest, this King of grace, who possesses exhaustless grace, restoring grace, which He can, and will, communicate to His people. And sometimes His restoring mercy seems almost greater than mercies bestowed earlier in experience, because we grow in our unworthiness. We grow, because we sin in sinfulness. We grow in a sense of our depravity, in learning what we are, and what we are capable of. Therefore mercy seems to be deeper and a greater necessity as time goes on. But O, this restoring mercy, it is obtainable. If it is

unobtainable, then backsliders must despair. But what has the Lord said? - and may this embolden some of you in your need of restoring mercy - "I will bring it health and cure" and will reveal the abundance of peace and truth. He says "I will heal their backslidings and I will love them freely, for Mine anger is turned away from him". But what is the way to that rich experience, that promised, restoring mercy? You have it in the context of the text. The Lord says to Israel - "O Israel, thou hast fallen by thine iniquity". A solemn charge under which the child of God falls. He does not reply against it. No, he says, "Truth Lord". But the Lord surprises him by saying "Take with you words and turn to the Lord and say unto Him, take away all iniquity and receive us graciously. So will we render to Thee the calves of our lips". Some of you, sometimes, may long to praise the Lord, but guilt, the guilt of backsliding, the guilt of wandering, the guilt of negligence, the guilt of entertaining idols, hangs heavy upon your spirit, and you say, O, if I could but freely sing the praises of the Lord, but I am crippled. I cannot sing His praises; I am not at liberty. Now that is the way of liberty, of restoration, the restoration of the soul to its health, the healing of backsliding, and the consequence is praise. We will render the calves of our lips, the very best of our high praises. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace" for these things, for God there smiles, God there invites, God there has said - I will cast out none who come.

Another mercy some of us may be feeling to need, and that is upholding mercy. The difficulties of the way increase. We find we are ensnared here and there; snares are laid for our feet. The devil seeks to throw us down. The intricacies of our spiritual life are many; errors abound on every hand. We live in a perilous time and need, and feel to need, upholding mercy. It is very painful to feel weak, to feel that you cannot stand, to fear that you will fall away, and faith in a sinner will never tell him that he will never fall away. Peter once thought he would never fall. He thought, whoever forsook the Lord, he would not; he loved Him too well. But Peter did not know himself. It is a mercy to know our own weakness, though 'tis painful, but it is wisdom, gracious wisdom in weakness, to go to the throne of grace for sustaining mercy. "When my foot slippeth", said the Psalmist, "Thy mercy O Lord held me up". Has the Lord promised

this? Has He promised it, even though some of us have to say our weakness is largely in consequence of our sin? Yes, He has. In a chapter in Isaiah, He says, respecting His vineyard, against which He debates - that is, He corrects and opposes wrong things in His people - yet He says this, "I, the Lord, do keep it. I will water it every moment. I will keep it night and day lest any hurt it". You will find, dear friends, as you are exercised, that the Scriptures are a great benefit in respect of prayer. And when you realise, as you will, that your very needs are spoken to in the promises of God's Word, that will embolden you, and it will give you strength in your prayers to watch and wait for answers to these petitions, for the fulfilment of those promises. How long do we need upholding? While we live. We are not safe if we are ignorant of this need. If any of you, who fear God, are left to walk for a time in independence you may, if God does not secretly prevent, find yourself in some fall. God hates an independent spirit. He hates a man who can stand without upholding mercy, but He delights in the man who hopes in the mercy of God. Faith will never make a man independent, but it will bring him to a gracious dependence upon the almighty arm of God and that dependence is expressed in prayer - "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe". "Lord, by Thy Word I have kept me from the path of the destroyer". "Hold up my goings in Thy paths that my footsteps slip not". With some such prayers you will approach the throne of grace with a humble boldness when you perceive that your needs and the Scriptures are equal. They coincide, and you say to your soul, though your needs are great, though you are in the depths of trouble, though your strength is hunger-bitten, though your enemies are strong, though you have no merit, yet you cannot ask but what God has promised, and you cannot fail when you ask what God promises while God is God and cannot lie. I spoke this morning of the character of God, and if you lay hold of the immutability of God in the gospel promises and of the character of God as a faithful God, that will wonderfully embolden you to take no denial and to wait and watch and pray and hope for the mercy of God unto eternal life.

"That we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need". Life is full of needs but there are particular times of need in the experience of men, of the people of God. For instance, a time of especial trouble or affliction or sorrow is a time of need. If we

go through affliction or trouble or sorrow and in it, and in consequence of it, do not visit the throne of grace, it is a very solemn mark for us. O, if you meet trouble with a tenacity of purpose to get through it as best you can - and I know what that spirit is without going outside myself; independence belongs to me; I hate dependence - it is a very solemn thing to be left to it. The Lord makes His people fear independence and they would rather have any trouble that makes them feel their dependence and go to Him than to be left alone. I do not say that lightly, nor feeling that one could bear much trouble, but we can bear no trouble, little or much, rightly, except we find grace to help us and that is felt. We either faint or despise God in trouble left to ourselves. The one is as bad as the other and it produces effects in us. It dishonours the Lord, it contradicts His word, it defies His wisdom, and goodness, but it takes a great deal in some of us to bring us, with godly child-like simplicity, to the throne of grace, for grace to help us in our troubles. But the Lord does bring some of us; we are brought there by necessity. We cannot do without the Lord, and when we get to the throne of grace, we say, we would not do without Him, for every trouble, every sorrow, every loss, all affliction, which is, by the Spirit, sanctified to us, and in which we have contact with the King of grace to find grace to help, is really a blessing. There are one or two afflictions through which some here have gone which they would not have missed; not because the affliction was joyous, not because they delight in being troubled, not that at all, that would be entirely unnatural, and it would be hypocrisy to profess, but because they had to do with the Lord and the Lord has had to do with them; ~~and~~ they got spiritual blessings out of natural troubles from the Lord. In the 5 chapter of this Epistle, it is written concerning the Lord Jesus Christ - "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered". Now there is a depth of sacred, unctuous truth in those few words which, in a little degree, I humbly believe I learned in my soul in a trouble. O, it implies a lot. "Though He were a Son" - notwithstanding He is what He is and was when upon earth in the days of His flesh - "yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." He was tempted with respect to His Sonship in His humiliation. He was scorned and derided and mocked, and He was crucified and by His experience He learned obedience. And is a poor sinner, yet a child of God, to learn obedience in any other way? And

is he to overcome the devil in any other way than by being tempted by him and finding succour from the mighty Jesus who overcame him for His people? O, there is an emphasis in experience, on the 15 verse of this text - "But was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin". And my friends, if you get that at the throne of grace, in your afflictions and troubles, you will be thankful to have had the trouble because it has brought you, in some little measure, to feel the compassion and the love and the mercy of this great High Priest, this Friend of sinners. "In all their affliction He was afflicted". That is a truth written in Scripture and it is a blessed, an unalterable truth. But to know it, is for Him to come to you and let you feel the consolations of the gospel in the tribulation. Then you will give thanks for the trouble. You will really feel glad the trouble has come, because it has brought you spiritual profit. It will give you patience in tribulation, to have to do with the once suffering Redeemer in your sufferings. And when you are tempted with respect to being a child of God, because of the peculiarity of your troubles, and more, because of the scum of your nature that comes to the top in the fire of trouble, I say, then it will be a great thing for you to find the Lord Jesus, who Himself was tempted on the point of His Sonship, to succour you and to say - "My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him". You may catch, in your spirit, some token of being a child of God in your trouble, because the Lord comes to you in it. Trouble itself does not prove anything. It is what the Lord does for you in the trouble that will prove whether you be a bastard or a son.

"And find grace to help in time of need". We need grace to help us to say, in difficulties and disappointments and strange providences, that the will of the Lord is best. To be able to submit to the will of God, unreservedly, we must have grace from God. What can produce that unreserved submission but a knowledge of being in the Lord's hand and realising that this King of grace is regulating all for His glory and your good? Afflictions, crosses, losses, disappointments, strange wandering up and down in the wilderness, as it is written - "He led them about, He instructed them, He kept them as the apple of His eye" and all to prove them, to show them what was in their hearts. Do you submit to this? Do you, in your troubles and disappointments and mortifications, say, - Choose Thou the way, but

still lead on, nor leave me till I say, Father Thy will be done. It is not easy, but grace from Christ is findable, and only at the throne of grace, to help in this time of need.

There is a time of need which is coming to us all, a time of very solemn need, when we shall need a refuge, when every other helper will fail, when heart and flesh shall fail. It will be a time of need when we come down to the end of our mortal race. We shall need the Lord's presence, we shall need the support of the truth. We shall need His everlasting arms, we shall need His gracious help. And this I feel is a great mercy, when the people of God are enabled to keep their journey's end in view and to lay up many prayers against that day, to lay up a good foundation by prayer and supplication. But is there a Scripture to warrant this? I know that many say you will never have dying grace till a dying hour. It is true, but are you willing to leave all thoughts of dying till you come to that dying hour, or are you led, as the Psalmist was led, to pray "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom". "O that they were wise" says the Lord by Moses, to His people, "that they would consider their latter end." And when you come to a consideration of it, do you not come to this - Lord, forsake me not. Some of you are old and grey-headed, and there was an old and grey-headed saint who said to the Lord - coming to Him for grace to help him - "Now that I am old and grey-headed O Lord forsake me not". And what has the Lord said on this point? It is a very embracive word. He has said "I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee". Now if you can put Him in remembrance of that when you have your end in view, it will be a good thing. And remember this, dear friends - may the Lord cause us to believe it - there is not a prayer put up by a child of God at the throne of grace in the Name of the Lord Jesus that will fall to the ground, not one. You may not get an answer at once - you may have to wait long for some answers - but every prayer offered in the Name of the Lord Jesus, the character of God forbids that it shall fall to the ground. "Whatsoever ye ask in My Name I will do it". Some of you may be at times inclined to complain of the Lord and say, I prayed, and asked, and prayed, and asked, and the blessing does not come. Well, the Lord give you to believe that if you have prayed and if you have asked, the blessing is on the way. The Lord may have something more to teach you yet before He gives you the blessing you want. There may

be some reserve in your asking. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage,
and He shall strengthen your hearts. Wait I say on the Lord.

One brief word in conclusion. This Person, the Son of God, who is named the King of kings and Lord of lords, who is the Friend of sinners and occupies this mercy-seat to hear the confessions of sinners, to bless confessing sinners, will one day leave the throne of grace and take His seat on the great white throne of judgment. Then those who live and die ignorant of Him, despising His mercy and His grace will know Him in the dreadful sentence which He, the King, will pronounce. "Depart from Me ye workers of iniquity, I never knew you". May the Lord forgive what I have said amiss and add His blessing.

AMEN.