

Sermon preached at "Ebenezer" chapel, Clapham by Mr. J.H. Gosden
on Wednesday evening, 20th. January, 1937

Text: Hebrews 4.16

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

The Holy Spirit by the Apostle in this context brings before us the life and pilgrimage of the children of Israel as a type of the life and pilgrimage of the people of God, and he draws a comparison between the rest that the people of Israel obtained, when by Joshua they conquered Canaan and dwelt there, and the rest that is laid up for the spiritual Israel, and provided by God. The rest of Israel in Canaan was to a certain extent a type of heaven. No type can be complete, but it was God's provision, it was the rest He had designed for that nation, and it is God's rest of which the apostle speaks in this context that is provided for the people of God. It is eminently "My rest". Jehovah declared with an oath that the adults that came out of Egypt and had seen His mighty works should fall in the wilderness because they murmured and rebelled against both Moses and God who gave him to be their leader. So no adults then living, save Caleb and Joshua, actually entered into the land of Canaan. And the apostle sets that forth as a warning to the holy brethren, as he calls them in the third chapter, the people of God, lest any of them should seem to come short of God's rest. He does not say, lest any of them should come short, for no child of God will actually come short of heaven; that is a cardinal doctrine; but alas, how many seem to come short of it. Many we have known, some of whose eternal safety we have a good hope, but who seem to have come short, have declined, seem unprofitable, unfruitful and most unsavoury. This warning the Holy Ghost gives to the people of God. A dead Calvinist - he might call himself a Calvinist, that is a person who holds judgmentally the doctrines of divine grace - might say, of what use are warnings if divine grace cannot be frustrated. If the divine purpose can be unchanged on the objects of grace, of what use are warnings? Such an observation will prove that those who make it are holding the doctrines of grace, not graciously, and it will betray a very great ignorance of God's methods in salvation. The Holy Spirit uses warnings and threatenings as much and as well as He uses encouragement and promises for the benefit of the people of God. The whole of the Word of God is for the people of God, though no child of God will claim a spiritual and intimate acquaintance with every part of the Word of God; yet it is written for our learning.

It is a wonderful mercy then, if we are really pilgrims, if we have been turned round by divine grace, changed in heart, converted to God, and are seeking our way to Zion with our faces thitherward. But if it be so we shall have

difficulties. God does not intend His people shall live and shall obtain victories and shall gain the great goal, heaven, independent of Himself. No, rather, every step they take, every hour they live in pilgrimage, they are dependent, and it is their mercy when they are enabled to depend. He warns them against falling after the same example of unbelief. Then He speaks of the solemn truth of divine omniscience, how that the great God with whom we have to do, sees us through and through, that our whole lives, our aims, our purposes, our methods, our desires, our thoughts, and the intentions of our hearts, are naked and open before His eyes. This, when it is perceived, will have an effect upon you, according to your present experience. If guilt is on your conscience, if the remembrance of former iniquities is with you, and there is no sense of the atonement, divine omniscience will be an awful thing to you. It is a mercy to know it, even in that awful sense, to be exposed sensibly before the eye of God, and to perceive yourself as He perceives you (that is in a measure); very solemn though it is, it is very wholesome. It will make you fear and tremble before Him; but to have an apprehension of this omniscience of God when under a sense of an interest in the atonement, is a wonderful encouragement, a wonderful comfort. You will find that David and Job and many of the saints in the Scriptures derived encouragement from the fact that God knew their innermost secrets. Job says, "He knoweth the way that I take: and when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold". David had the same experience. He gladly, as it were, exposed himself to divine omniscience. Why, my friends, divine omniscience, exerted graciously toward us, is the only thing that will save us from self-deception. "Search me, O God," says David, "and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." God teaches His people that their hearts are not trustworthy. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." And even although where grace is there is sincerity, yet the Lord's omniscience, is a perfect knowledge of the secrets of the heart, and happy that man on whose side is that knowledge exerted for his eternal salvation.

But the Apostle draws attention to the manner in which pilgrims are to get through, how they are to persevere, and not fall after this same example of unbelief, and this not by their own efforts and strength and wisdom, but by prayer, that is by dependence. You will find, and do find, those of you who fear God, that the best way to get through difficulties, the best way to live, is to live a life of dependence and prayer. And yet there are so many difficulties to prayer that we need a power to bring us to that dependence and prayer. The two great difficulties that some of us find are these. First, the holiness and greatness of God, His incomprehensible Being, for when you pray you pray to a Being that you cannot comprehend. The ever-living God cannot be comprehended by a creature, and sometimes His character will be a kind of forbidding to you because of His holiness and justice.

Prayer is a matter of faith. The other difficulty is this, your sin, your sinfulness and your guilt, inward corruptions and opposition to prayer and a sense of guilt also.

But prayer is not impossible, in spite of these two difficulties. Prayer is the life of God in the soul, in its sense of need, coming to God to supply that need; of every covenant blessing, of all the rich provisions of God in His holy will has made for His people, He will be enquired of by them to bestow them. From the day of the new birth, when life divine is conveyed to a dead sinner, that sinner will be a dependent creature, and it will be his mercy and privilege to pray his way through pilgrimage to heaven. But there is a blessed object set before us in the context, which when manifested to faith, by the Spirit's law and life, will overcome those difficulties and make prayer not only possible, but actual. You cannot help praying against all discouragements to pray, in spite of the deep unworthiness and unfitness you may feel when approaching to God, when the Holy Spirit reveals the Person of Emmanuel, Jesus the Son of God on the throne of grace, that He is the King to Whom poor sinners are to come in prayer. "Seeing we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." And this High Priest who is enthroned a great Priest on the mercy seat, is not one who has never had acquaintance with trouble. He is that blessed One who was made in all things like unto His brethren, sin excepted, in order that He might experience temptation and trouble, and ignominy and death and hell, that He might deliver His people and sympathise with them in their afflictions and trials and temptations. "We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched." Though He be God and is God, incomprehensible, yet He is truly Man, our condescending God. He became man in order that He might experience that which would give Him power to sympathise, to feel with and for His people in all their trials, even though their trials come to them through their sins. He who was without sin (they are full of sin) does not connive at sin when He seeks His people. It would be no encouragement when we pray to the Lord Jesus if He were one to name a compromise, to reduce God's standard, and tell you that you need not be too particular, that small sins may be excused; that would not be an encouragement to one in whose heart was the fear of God. No, He is not such an one; He so loves holiness and hates wickedness that He died for the sins of His people, that they might be made holy, and He gives to them such a desire for holiness that heaven would not be heaven to them unless it were a holy place; salvation would not be salvation to them if it were not salvation from sin and hell. You want to be holy, you hope to be holy one day, Christ is holy, and He sits on the mercy seat not to excuse sinners' sins, but as the Mediator between God and them in the merits of His atoning death, whereby He made reconciliation and expiated sin. He occupied that throne of grace that sinners might come to God by Him, find access to Him and find peace with Him on honourable grounds; might obtain mercy from Him, pardon

and peace and grace to help in every time of need. Now this really does spell continual necessity and continual dependence. I do sometimes wish I had not such an inveterate principle of independence, it is a wicked principle, and it is against one's own best interests. Man would be independent; the honour that the Lord puts upon His people is to be allowed to depend. He teaches them they have nothing of their own, neither wisdom nor strength nor goodness nor merit, and so they are compelled, and sometimes not only compelled, but enabled, to depend upon the Lord. Nor is this dependence a blind act, this dependence is in prayer. The Lord sanctifies the reason of His people, He sanctifies their understanding, and their affections, their will, and these faculties of the soul are exerted in this way of prayer. The Lord teaches people what they are, and what they need, what the Lord possesses, how they may find mercy honourably, for God's mercy is honourable and just, how they may obtain pardon for sin, how they, who are polluted through and through, may be cleansed from all unrighteousness, and this is an encouragement. If what we feel to need, we did not believe was in God to give, how could we pray? Let us therefore come boldly, because there are difficulties, and because those difficulties are by us insurmountable, because there are giant enemies such as the Anakims were to Israel, we are not to faint. "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." They rebelled against God; the heart of the people was discouraged. The land was good, they admitted that, but the difficulties were insuperable, and they would go back to Egypt. It would be better to be in Egypt than to die in this wilderness. The rebellion and foolishness of our hearts! Sometimes we get as far as that. The difficulties are so many, the temptations are so great, our inward opposition and sinfulness are so mighty, and one of the chief difficulties, the source of all the others, is our unbelief. But there is a power that can overcome all this, and that power is the attraction of Christ and the work of the Spirit in the heart. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace."

"Boldly". Not that unholy, irreverent boldness that is manifest in some in public prayer, not a rushing upon the thick bosses of God's buckler, no not that, but the boldness of one who, admitting, confessing feelingly his own deep sinfulness and unworthiness, and taking a view of the difficulties in the way to heaven, comes to the Lord in spite of that, on this ground that Jesus Christ is set forth by God to be the propitiation for sin. The throne of grace was established by God Himself; the God of all grace established it, set His King upon that holy throne, after that He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty of heaven, and there He is, and He is there by God's authority, to be the propitiation for our sins. In the Israelitish economy there was a mercy seat set up where God said He would meet with the people and commune with them. That mercy seat is a propitiatory; God said He would dwell there, not visit it but dwell there. Does not that make you ashamed of your prayerlessness, of your unacquaintedness with the throne of grace? If the King of grace waits to be gracious

on the throne of grace, is it not sinful and foolish that we should so often restrain prayer by our unbelief and independence? "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace". How are we to come? You may ask yourself the question, how can I come? Well, you must come just as you are, and that will be a part of the boldness. If you could come to the throne of grace after having contributed something towards your own salvation, and towards the vindication of God's law, if you could come with some merit, then you might say it would not be so difficult; but I would say this, you will never come at all, it would be impossible for you really to come to the throne of grace while you entertain any thought of personal merit; for grace and merit are opposites. Merit cannot come where grace comes, and grace cannot come where merit comes, and this is essentially a throne of grace. And it implies this, that the God of grace, Jesus Christ, occupies that throne as a King of grace, to bestow freely upon unworthy sinners without any merit, and much demerit, all the blessings of the covenant; for the covenant is a covenant of grace. Jesus Christ is the mediator of that covenant and He is exalted on the throne of grace as a Mediator that those blessings may be given freely to them who are interested in that covenant. But you will not come, many of you, to the throne of grace as being fully persuaded of your interest in that covenant. You come for that, for that blessing, for the assurance of your interest and that will be to obtain mercy.

Mercy is our chief need; we shall need mercy until we get to heaven. "Mercy is built up for ever", above the heavens. It is from everlasting to everlasting, but the thing is, we must obtain it, we must know it, we must get it for ourselves, else we cannot be satisfied, if we are rightly taught. Mercy is not a matter of theory, but a matter of experience. You experience the need of it, you find yourself in the position spiritually of the poor, guilty publican who had nothing to say, nothing to offer, no extenuations to bring, no excuse to make, no works to plead, but he did pray for mercy. He revered God, he came boldly therefore; his approach to God does not look externally as bold as that of the Pharisee. The Pharisee was carnally bold, but he never came to the throne of grace, he rushed upon the thick bosses of God's buckler, but he never asked, nor obtained any blessing, much less mercy. He told God how good he was, how he compared favourably with others, especially with this publican. And I am inclined to say this, that if you and I find in our hearts a consolation by reason of a comparison, we are not at that time coming to the throne of grace. If we come to the throne of grace at all, we shall come singly by the operation of God as the searching of a candle showing us our own case, our own sins, our own deep demerit, our own extreme need of mercy through blood. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace." You look at the prodigal, how boldly he came. He had played the prodigal, had gone from his father's house, had spent his substance with riotous living, and he begun to be in want; he was in rags, was hungry, and he was full of shame in the remembrance of his

^{SIN}prodigality. His previous blessings and mercies enhanced his sin in being a prodigal, but he was given faith and the boldness of faith was seen in this, that he determined to confess his sin and to ask, confessing his unworthiness, to be made as one of the hired servants. In other words he acknowledged that the lowest place in the father's house was more than he deserved. He brought his confession, and you know the reception he got. The fatted calf was killed, the ring put on his finger, and the best robe was put upon him and merry-making made. That represents grace. "Let us therefore come boldly", and my friends it is a very sacred and secret experience to obtain mercy. Much that goes on between God and the soul is secret. One may say, the most of our religion, if we have a right religion, is a secret business between God and our souls; not but that there is a proper external profession and worship, but God save us from an entirely formal profession. Personal, secret dealings with God are what we need, and mercy is personally, secretly obtained at the throne of grace. Some of you have known what it is to have come venturing hard to the Lord and, the spirit helping your infirmities, you acknowledged you deserve hell, confessed your sins, prayed for mercy, and mercy has come and in your little measure you can say that you understand what Newton meant:

"Once a sinner near despair,
Sought Thy mercy seat by prayer,
Mercy heard and set him free,
Lord, that mercy came to me."

And you will never be satisfied, if you are the Lord's, until you can, in your measure, say the same. it is very personal. What is mercy? Well, mercy has relation to wretchedness and misery; you will never need mercy feelingly, until you know your sore, until you realise your guilt, until you are fully persuaded you are utterly without help in self.

"Wretches who know what help they need,
Will bless the helping hand."

Mercy is the blessing of God, the deliverance of God, the salvation of God made known, the comforts of the gospel communicated, forgiveness bestowed upon wretched hell-deserving sinners; the least crumb of mercy is infinitely valuable to a wretched sinner. That is to say, the least glance of God's kindness. You know what I mean, you who pray. You do not get a big blessing every day of your life, but if you never get a glance of God's kindness, never get a little light, a little touch upon your spirit, a little sense of His goodness on your heart, what would you do? I say, a crumb of mercy is infinitely valuable. When you have been in, not only wretchedness, but in self-despair, and the Lord has given you a touch within, if it were but a slight touch, in your spirit of His goodness, and raised up a hope in His mercy, why, that was worth more than the whole world when it came. You did not deserve it, but it came sovereignly. God does not pay a debt when He gives mercy to a praying sinner; our prayers do not merit mercy, we have to know that. Some of you may wonder why He keeps you waiting so long before He comforts

you. Well, one reason may be that you have not yet learned adequately what mercy means. Some cavilled with the Lord Jesus because He received sinners and ate with them, and the Lord said this to them, "Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice." And you may depend upon it you will find, you do find, that until you have learned your need of mercy undeserved, it will be "Go and learn what that meaneth." That is to say, you must lose something else, you must come down lower. Mercy is not a mere term, it is a solemn reality, and a blessed one too. When there is nothing between you and deserved hell, but the mercy of God in Christ, and when it is made known to you by the Lord that that is between you and hell, that God has mercy on you for Christ's sake; when He has given you a place among His people, and He has for Christ's sake forgiven you all your trespasses, that is sweet mercy, it melts the heart, softens the conscience, liberates the spirit from the shackles of the law and gives a foretaste of God's rest. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God."

It is a wonderful thing ever to have had a touch of that rest, to feel the satisfaction of mercy as Moses prayed, "Satisfy us early with Thy mercy, that we may be glad and rejoice all our days." "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy." And when you obtain mercy, when God communicates mercy to your soul, that will not make you independent; the more you obtain this mercy, the more you will cleave to the King of grace, the more free you will be in your dependence upon Him, the more you will feel there is no need to contribute to your own salvation, but the more you will be inspired with a desire to live to the praise of the glory of His grace. It is mercy that frees the spirit and gives ingenuosness in serving God. You do not serve Him to make Him a debtor, but you serve Him because He has made you His debtor, especially when you perceive, and perceive increasingly, that all mercy flows through the death and sufferings of Christ. The King of grace, who gives blessings to wretched sinners freely, purchased the church with His own blood, and every mercy the people of God ever enjoy comes as a result of His sufferings. That is a very sacred word to me, quoted by Peter out of Isaiah 53, he says, "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him". The King of grace, blessed be His name, his sufferings are ended, but not the efficacy of them, not the result of them. This is to be one day fully realised by the whole church, "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied". He delights in mercy, He does not bestow it grudgingly. What wrong thoughts some of us have had of the Lord, born of our unbelief and ignorance and prejudice, and it may be from temptation through a sense of our own sin and unworthiness, as though the Lord grudges to give mercy. He does not! The Scriptures declare "He delighteth in mercy", and more, it says "He takes pleasure in those who hope in His mercy". What a great word, what a condescending word that is for Jehovah to say. Are you hoping in His mercy, praying for His mercy, coming sensibly, needy and wretched to the throne of grace that you may obtain it? What a welcome awaits you, and He

delights to show mercy to such. "And find grace to help in time of need."

Well, there are special times of need when we must come, for there is none to help us. In some of our cases these special times of need recur continually because of temptation maybe, especially times of need when you need grace to enable you to stand, and to resist the devil lest you should fall into temptation. You cannot, I cannot, overcome the devil apart from faith in Christ; there is no way of resisting him effectually but by fleeing to the throne of grace and beseeching the Lord to deliver. That is a great promise, and you will find this, my friends, as comers to the throne of grace, you will find the Spirit inspires in your hearts a gracious boldness on the ground of the promise of God. I hardly know of a stronger encouragement to a poor, unworthy sinner, than when he finds his own needs and the promise of God harmonise in his experience. It is a wonderful encouragement and has not the Lord said that He will bruise Satan under your feet shortly? Has He not declared of Himself by the apostle that "He is able to succour them that are tempted". We need to come boldly by faith, boldly, because when the devil points at our filthy garments we cannot answer him, but the Lord can. He said concerning Joshua, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." That is the way to obtain succour and grace to help at such a time and to obtain grace also to subdue that in us which has a terrible affinity with the devil's temptations. What threatenings you may get from your own terrible, inbred corruptions. I said to my people last evening that the Bible would be incomplete to me without the seventh chapter of Micah. In that chapter is this wonderful promise, "He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us, He will subdue our iniquities and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." That comes into a very practical place in the experience of the people of God. There are some special times when the threatening of sin to dominate and overthrow you utterly is a very real thing, and nothing less than real succour by communicated grace that you may overcome the abounding of sin in your heart, will really deliver and help. What a mercy it is in this to feel the near presence of a mighty Redeemer coming and putting His hand of grace upon your corruptions and subduing them and raising up in your heart that grace and faith and hatred to sin which is from His grace so that you escape. How some of us tremble at the power, the capability there is in us to sin, nor can you rest and be satisfied by saying, That is the old man. The people of God are not only concerned about getting to heaven but about the state of their souls on their way thitherward. They cannot rest in sin; if you can, you have small evidence of being quickened into divine life. There is a difference between sin living in you and you living in sin. Sin will make you restless, and that restlessness will be a means in God's hand of bringing you to Him that you may obtain victories over sin. There is a promise for that, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Are not the promises of God's word very practical?

They are not to be stored away somewhere, hidden away, but they are to be used. God must fulfil them, if He has made them to you He will fulfil them, but He will bring you into a sense of the need of their fulfilment and then you must go to the throne of grace in that solemn need and put Him in remembrance. He condescends to allow you to put Him in remembrance of what He has promised and what you now feel you need Him to do. What a sacred harmony there is here and what profit there is in this labour. Let us labour therefore to enter into rest, and to enter into it here, not to wait until we get to heaven. Many people seem to be willing to muddle through life somehow, not particular as to whether they have communion with the Lord, or whether sin or grace reigns, provided they will be safe at last. But if you have the Spirit with you, you will want communion with the Lord, and you will be brought continually to feel the need of grace to help you right through life. The more grace you get, the more help you get, the more trust you will put in the Lord, and the more answers to prayer you get the more you will be in prayer. The Psalmist said when the Lord answered him, "I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplication, because He hath attended unto my cry, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live." Prayer sometimes, through our carnality, seems an irksome task; that shows how carnal we are and foolish. Sometimes it is a sacred privilege, very sweet then, when by experience you are taught the value of prayer, the spiritual profit of prayer, and you will always be praying. And the Lord communes with His people at the throne of grace; He has said He will. Has He never spoken to you? Never looked into your heart with a look of love? Never shone forth from between the cherubims? His name is 'He that dwelleth between the cherubims' on the mercy seat. That is a secret the people of God know. They do from time to time get access to the throne of grace, obtain mercy, find grace to help, and have thus a fresh attestation that the Lord dwells there as their Friend and Advocate with the Father. You cannot have a stronger solace than that, to have a place where you can go in every trouble, in every need, temporal, spiritual, loss, and sorrow, and even in death itself, for I believe the child of God enters heaven with prayer. Many a child of God has died in the act of praying. I believe every child of God enters with the spirit of prayer and will be looking for the Lord. There is a King on the throne of grace, there to bestow on worthless sinners the blessings of covenant grace. May He give us a heart to come, and enable us to be found at the throne of grace and to be intimate with Him who reigns on that throne. To have Christ for your Friend, to be able to find in Him a Friend continually, a Friend in time of need, is better than to possess the whole world. May that be our portion! Amen

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