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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden at Rehoboth Chapel  
Swindon, on Thursday evening 1 October, 1959

Hosea 14 v 5

"I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow  
as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon"

The solemn condition in which Israel was, as described in the previous chapter, is very humbling and shaming and hopeless, apart from the power of divine grace. The Lord said that when Ephraim spake trembling he was exalted, "but when he offended in Baal, he died". The abuse of the Lord's mercies, independence, idolatry and pride, were some of the evils which the Lord charged against His people in this 13 chapter, and the consequence was a drought, a drying up. "Though he be fruitful among his brethren an east wind shall come, the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels." O, what a description of the soul in drought, drought induced by sin, which provokes the Lord to withhold the necessary fructifying influences that are indispensable for fruitfulness.

This solemn case I believe many of the Lord's people have been brought to realise and acknowledge. You see, we are so apt to charge on God's sovereignty all the things which come to us of an adverse kind, and to pity ourselves because we have lost our comforts, until the Lord makes us ashamed. And what a mercy it is that He should make us ashamed! It is a great mercy, I feel, though He will not put us finally to shame - that would be a dreadful judgment! - but to make us ashamed of ourselves because of our leanness, the dryness, the fruitlessness, the withered condition into which we have brought ourselves, not, into which the Lord has brought us. God forbid we should blame the Lord for the consequences of our sin! That is the highroad to further judgments and God's displeasure; and that is natural to us. From the very time of Adam's fall till now, human nature is ever ready to blame God, or to make some sort of excuse; but the Lord will

have no excuses. No; there are none really; yet man likes to be deceived. It takes a great deal to make a person honest with himself and before God. We may try to kindle some sort of sparks and to maintain some kind of religious peace and quietness and a show of religious life, when perhaps inwardly our consciences say we are in a thriftless condition, our bones stick out that were not seen, and we try to cover up that leanness. Grey hairs are here and there upon us, indicative of decay, and we try to conceal that decay. Everything, all kinds of superficialities, we are ready to employ to deceive ourselves, to think that things are better with us than they are. But the Lord knows how to bring His people down, and to make them not only willing, but thankful, to be allowed to come to Him with confession and prayer.

I think this direction of the Lord in the early part of the 14 chapter of Hosea is very wonderful, set as it is between the charge of this self-destruction on the one hand, and on the other hand, the blessed promises of reviving: "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God". This prophecy shows two chief things, if you read it carefully; it shows the Lord's wonderful, changeless love and faithfulness to His unworthy people, and it shows the disposition to backslide, and the unfaithfulness of His people. These two things stand out in this prophecy. But the mercy of it is that the Lord's faithfulness will ensure that His people shall be brought back to Him with repentance, and shall obtain recovering, restoring grace: "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips." You see, when we are in that thriftless, withered, decayed state, our lips cannot pay the praise to Him that our hearts may desire; for the Lord's people are made honest; they may perhaps, not improperly, unite publicly in singing the words of a hymn, even although they cannot feel what they sing, but they are before the Lord trembling with a desire to be enabled to do so; but in their hearts, when they are convicted of their self-destroyed and fruitless condition, they cannot praise the Lord. But they want

to. "So will we render the calves of our lips." This is the Lord's purpose in restoring His people, and it is their desire. O, some of you may say - I wish I could praise the Lord, I wish I could feel liberty and love to Him, so as to praise Him as I ought, and thank Him with a free spirit; but sin and guilt and shame hang heavy upon my spirit. But the Lord has wonderfully tempered things in His word, and He does wonderfully temper things in His people's experiences. He makes them ashamed, but He does not put them to shame. He makes them ashamed in order that they may be brought down to a willingness and thankfulness to be permitted to come with a view to healing, cleansing, reviving and restoring. O, these restoration promises - do they shine in your heart? If you are a child of God and are in a condition to need them, it will be your mercy to look at them and seek the fulfilment of them in your experience. They are not only to be looked at, but to be wrought out, to be obtained in the fulfilment of them.

Then Israel is to renounce trust in himself, the work of his own hands, and doubtless the greatest idol we can have is ourselves. We lean upon ourselves and pride ourselves in what we may do, or think we can do, or what we are; but the Lord makes His people feel themselves to be what they really are: poor, needy, helpless creatures; as they are described in the 72 Psalm, the poor and the needy and him that hath no helper but God. It is wonderful to find God a helper of a self-destroyed sinner.

Then come the promises. "In Thee the fatherless findeth mercy". We have to come right back to that time and again

Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask;  
This is the total sum.

I believe that, if you really fear God, you will find in your experience from time to time you have to come right back to what may be called a rudiment in gospel experience - mercy. "In Thee the fatherless findeth mercy".

Then He says, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely". Though the Lord makes His unworthy people ashamed, and smites them, yet He loves them still, and smites them because He loves them, in order to bring them back to His footstool with confession and prayer, that He may do them good. The type of Jesus Christ in Joseph comes to my mind, how Joseph's bowels yearned over his brethren to do them good, in spite of their unkindness. I believe you may get an inkling of it sometimes; the Lord looks upon His people, and while He hates their sin, (and idolatry is the chief sin which He hates ) yet He feels for their distress, and He may minister to you sometimes a little encouragement, to strengthen you in confession, by such promises as are before us in this context.

"I will heal their backsliding". O think of it!  
Backsliding: heart backsliding, shyness, estrangement from the Lord, a barrier between you and the Lord that you cannot remove. A helplessness in our shame is very painful, but it must be felt and acknowledged; and then to find the Lord willing! "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him" How can that possibly be? Well, the secret of this is that He is never angry with the persons of His people, but with their sins. He shows His displeasure against their sins, but they interpret it as if He were angry with them. He can never have vindictive wrath against His own people. But how is His anger turned away from them? for their sins are real and they deserve His eternal wrath. Why, it is through Christ; only through Him is the vindictive wrath of divine justice turned away from any son of Adam; and the love of God freely flows to unworthy sinners through Him who, in love and pity, died to redeem them from their sins. It is because of this that the Lord brings His people to book for their sins, so that they may come individually into the experience of the blessings of salvation, of forgiveness.

I want to speak a few things about this fifth verse. "I will be as the dew unto Israel" It is a similitude used in several places in the word of God to express what the Lord Jesus is

and makes Himself to His unworthy people in order to their fertilisation, their fruitfulness, and their restoration. O, you may feel just like a dry thing. An east wind has come. "The wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry". You know how the east wind literally dries things up; what an unkind wind it is! It seems to do very little good, but much harm. And it is so with the soul when the Lord sends this wind, in rebuke, in showing His people what they have done and how they have backslidden, making them to feel their shame, their unfruitfulness, and their helplessness. Nothing can make you fruitful that you can do if you have made yourself barren and provoked the Lord to send this drought, this east wind. It must come from Him, and it will come from Him when you are brought to confess and, it may be, to mourn deeply with shame, and wonder if you will ever again feel any spiritual moisture, ever feel any unction in your soul in the truth of God. "I will be as the dew unto Israel"

Well the dew; you country people probably know more about this than I do; but the dew is very useful upon the herbage, and often, in some places particularly, can almost take the place of showers of rain. At any rate, it is very softening, moistening. It is silent; it comes down in the night; and this is what Christ is to His people when they are feeling this drought. We read in one place that this dew is distilled. That seems a nice word to me. Have you not found sometimes, in the darksome experience of your soul and a feeling sense of arid dryness and fruitlessness, a little softening, a little moisture upon your spirit? It may be through a whisper, a secret whisper - you can hardly describe it - but an influence from the Word of God. The Lord, speaking by Moses, said, "My speech shall distil as the dew". That distilling is a mysterious conveyance of moisture. You know what a distillery is, how the vapour from a liquid is conveyed silently, and it distils; and you may find a sacred atmosphere distilling upon your spirit from some gracious words in Scripture that are like the Lord's voice. It may be a promise; it may be a doctrine; but it conveys to you something of the Lord Jesus. "I will be as the dew unto Israel". You may be lying on

your bed, literally, at night, and your heart exercised, your spirit troubled with shame and a sense of fruitlessness, and yet feel a longing for a little moisture; and then the Lord may drop a word upon your heart that will really moisten your spirit, and, may be, moisten your eyes and draw you up to Him with a little motion of faith and prayer; and your hope is enlivened, and you feel a little sweetness in your spirit. Why, that is not to be discouraged! You cannot call it a great blessing, but it has an influence upon you, and you feel it. It sanctifies you, it humbles and meekens your spirit, it removes the bitterness from your mind, and it saves you from that dreadful remorse, that sorrow of the world, which worketh death. Now you begin to mourn with a different kind of mourning

Now not without hope I mourn  
There is an Advocate above,  
A Friend before the throne of love

the Lord Jesus. Have not you found His Name sometimes is like dew in your spirit? His word, His Name is great. His Name is like ointment poured forth; His voice is most sweet. If He should whisper in your heart like this "Ye have sorrow, but the world rejoices; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice," that will revive you, it will touch you with a sense of the Lord's compassion, and enliven your hope.

Then it may be a doctrine concerning the Lord Jesus and what He has done and suffered. O, what sweet moistening you may find sometimes when the Lord speaks in your heart concerning His redeeming work! O, there is nothing like it! It mollifies the conscience, and, as Gadsby says, the unction of redemption suppleth the conscience; and that will bring fruitfulness.

"I will be as the dew unto Israel" The blessed promises of God; they may not come with a great power; not with a noise certainly. Quietly they may steal upon your mind, and simmer in your mind, and percolate, as it were, into your heart; and you find your heart warmed, your spirit meekened; and there will be a

sweetness and an anticipation, and you can look up to the Lord in your humble prayer and look for more blessing. O, it is a great thing in my view these days to be enabled to look up and to wait for the showers; for if the dew comes and is useful, there are also promised "showers of blessing". He says, "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth". That seems something greater. The dew is not to be disregarded, but the showers are more effectual, and Christ is both.

O the sweetness of this moistening, this watering! "Let the skies pour down righteousness", says the Lord in Isaiah; "let the earth open". Our only hope is here, my friends. But if you are really in a dry and barren condition, helpless and full of shame, and fearful lest that condition shall continue, and the Lord brings you to confess, and gives you a little dew upon your spirit, well, the Lord help you to hold that! It is not a little thing. In these last days of mine, I esteem it a great favour to feel a little moistening in my heart, a little softening and humbling, and a little going out to the Lord Jesus in trust, and sometimes, underneath all, a little rejoicing in hope, hope of better days, hope of being restored to that sweet intimacy and communion with Him that we have had in earlier times. These things seem very common place to some, but to me they are very wonderful; and that the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, should condescend to come down upon us like that in His word, and make His word an influence in our hearts, why, what a favour it is! He might bend His word against us, and never grant us any touch at all of sweetness; He might for ever, until the end of our days, leave us in darkness and hardness, dryness and unfruitfulness; but no, He says "I will be as the dew unto Israel."

"He shall grow as the lily;" blossom, the margin says. Well, the Lord's presence will make you blossom. We read in Isaiah "The wilderness ..... shall blossom as the rose". If your heart is a wilderness, and the Lord comes down upon it with this dew of heaven, with the sweet promises of the gospel, conveying to you some sweetness of His Name and love and

compassion and faithfulness, and His immutability, there will be a blossoming in your heart, a response in your heart. It will be effortless; no effort of yours can produce blossom; but the dew and the sun can, and will. Did you ever feel it? - a real going out to the Lord, a real feeling of love to Him, adoration of Him, trust in Him, and a thankful heart to find Him the same as ever He was. We believe in His immutability; it is a doctrine we desire to hold firmly; but to know that doctrine experimentally is to have fresh experience of communications from Him of grace, truth, love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness; and He brings all that when He comes; and then there will be this blossom. "He shall grow as the lily".

This blossom is seen; it is seen by fruits. The Lord sees it; He produces it; but O, how good it is when you feel a little blossoming! It will take away your shyness in respect to the people of God. I have sometimes felt really ashamed to meet the people of God, because of my threadbare state of soul, because of my sensible distance from the Lord, and my unacquaintance with Him, all produced by my own folly and idolatry, and forgetfulness of Him. God is not to be blamed for this; but He is to be thanked when you get a little dew, and feel that moisture. Then, when you see a child of God, this blossom is seen: the gracious, tender fear of God; humility. For, when the Lord is made afresh precious to you, and you get some communications of His free grace and love and redemption, that will lay you low. The more He blesses you, the humbler you will lie; and humility is a very sweet grace. This brings about a sweet harmony with the people of God; there will be no jostling when this humility clothes you, when you are full of gratitude and hopefulness because the Lord has returned to you in some measure and revived you in your soul.

"He shall grow, blossom, as the lily". The fruits of righteousness shall be manifested; godly fear, reverence, sobriety, love to the Lord's people and to His ways, spirituality of mind. O, the deathliness of carnality! You may hate it; I hate it!; but there it is. "To be carnally minded is death; but

to be spiritually minded is life and peace." And you will be spiritually minded if the Lord comes down upon you with some gracious words, if He reminds you of what He has said, and gives you again to feel He is the same, His mind and will and love toward you unchanged. Indeed sometimes His later blessings seem greater than the former, because our sins are so great as being against light and knowledge; but His grace comes over all, the atonement covers everything, His love cannot be quenched. It comes down, and a poor sinner can hardly bear with himself because of the Lord's goodness; and he overflows a little and speaks to his friends about the Lord's kindness to him in spite of all his unkindness.

But I tell you one thing it will do: it will make you very tender in your walk; it will make you fear sinking again into a backsliding and forgetful and idolatrous state; it will make you diffident of yourself; it will make you prayerful daily to be kept, to be kept and watered. The Lord said He would water His vineyard; every moment He would keep it, and water it night and day; and some of these wonderful promises will be in your hearts as pleas to the Lord to keep you from being dried up again. O, you will be more afraid of that than any trouble; when you once have been a little restored you will want complete restoration; and that, I think, is indicated in this verse which says "He shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots", or, "strike forth his roots as Lebanon."

It is not all outside growth. There is a good deal of growth inwardly. Root growth is as important as the outward growth; the two must go together, and they do. Does not that mean secret intercourse with the Lord? Is there anything comparable to those secret interviews you have with the Lord Jesus when in your room, upon your bed, or wherever you are, there is a little real fellowship with Christ. You confess to Him and tell Him how you want Him, and desire to love and serve Him; and He makes known His love to you and promises to be with you, and your roots of faith strike down into His Person, into His doctrine and there is an establishment in the truth. In the 29 Isaiah, the last verse,

after having spoken of the sad condition into which the people had brought themselves, the Lord says, "They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine." Now I think that is one way whereby the roots are struck down in experience, in the word of God. O, I do wish I could rightly commend this to you. I have to confess to my shame and often with trembling, my own unacquaintance with the holy, precious Word of God; but that is where the roots strike, in the truth of God. Sometimes you are reading, it may be in the Epistles, and doctrine is there propounded very sacredly, and your faith takes hold, as it were, of the doctrine, and the doctrine takes hold of you, and there is a union with the doctrine, and you feel a strength coming into your soul; just like the root of a plant striking downward, throwing sap upward, and making the plant strong. The similitude is scriptural, and I believe it is true to experience. "He shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon."

The cedars of Lebanon, as you know, of course, are very sturdy, very noble; they reach a great height, and the roots are very strong. The cedars of Lebanon are notable for their stability. You may say, Ah, I am not stable; I feel very wavering. And I know what this is, alas, I do! Carnal reasonings against the sacred mystery of the gospel and those doctrines that are so profound, will make you unstable often, until, and unless, by the blessed Spirit your faith strikes down into the word of God. Not carnal reason! O, young people, if I may affectionately address you, the Lord save you from religious reason! It will lead you astray. I have seen it recently among young people; more or less evangelical in doctrine; but they argue things out and try to bring them within the compass of their puny reason, and the danger is that everything that is not within the compass of the carnal mind is doubted, rejected; and, as a dying man, speaking to you dying people, I would warn you about that. Doctrine is all-important. If we are wrong in the doctrine of Christ, we cannot be right in our experience; but how sweet it is, how satisfying to the soul, to feel that you do believe what you cannot understand, and rejoice in what you do

believe.

Take the doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship; "the Son of the Father in truth and love." O, how I have loved that doctrine sometimes! I do not expect to understand it, but that does not offend me now. At one time I tried to understand it, and I found temptation was so strong, that, for a time, I was put to it very seriously whether to hold or discard that cardinal doctrine of our holy faith. Very solemn! But the Lord mercifully helped my infirmities, and strengthened my faith in His Person, and gave me to see by faith what I could not understand, and to love the doctrine of His eternal Deity, His eternal Sonship, and His mysterious and blessed and real incarnation. Christ is precious; and when you feel Him to be precious there will be some stability in your heart. You will not then be dry and fruitless; you will not say it is a dry doctrine, abstruse, and needless to be thought upon. No, you will love the doctrine, and Him in whom you are brought to believe and trust. Then out of that doctrine comes the sacred efficacy of His work of salvation, His obedience to the law, and His sin-atonement sacrifice on the cross, for who but God the Son incarnate could bear the weight of the guilt of the sins of innumerable sinners in His own Person? Only Christ could bear that, and He did bear it; but the point is to feel in your heart the assurance that He bore your sins. That will make you grow, that will make you sing, that will make you repent, that will make you love the Lord with mind and heart, His people and His ways. What a transformation it is in the soul when a little of this reviving is felt! Then the world and all its vanities are under foot; then there is only one thing, you want to know the Lord, and to serve Him as you ought.

"He shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." And this is to be for the glory of God; not only for the good of Israel. I do feel, my dear friends, if you look at this point soberly, it is a greater thing to be made instrumental to the manifestation of God's glory than it is even to have the comfort of salvation. "Vessels afore prepared unto glory". Think of it, sinner! It will make you feel a little thing, an

insignificant worm; but O, the honour that is put upon a poor, sinful man, to be made a vessel, to be made a branch (to use another scriptural similitude) in the living Vine, to bear fruit to the glory of Christ, and of the Father; for the Father's glory is wrapped up in this - "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples." And that is another fruit, discipleship, obedience, following the Lord in His ways and ordinances; not to contribute to salvation, but out of love, for what He has done to save your souls.

I wish the Lord would recover us; I need what I am trying to speak of, and perhaps some of you feel to need it. Do not be afraid to confess; deem it, if the Lord enables you, a privilege to be permitted to come and confess your sins and your unworthiness, and to plead the promises. The Lord will fulfil them, not because you confess, but because He has made the promise; and His method is to bring His people to confess as a pathway to fulfilling the promise.

I must leave the subject; it is attractive to me. May the Lord give us the wisdom and the prudence to understand and to know these things, and to declare from our very hearts that the Lord is good; that He is good in rebuking us, kind in reproofing and convicting us, and supremely kind in granting us a little restoring mercy. These changes come over us in this life, because we have an old man which is corrupt. That is our trouble; our greatest trouble, if we are the Lord's people, will be that we have an old man. But the day is coming when that will be left behind. O, what a prospect! Sometimes it is before me in a little measure of liveliness, but often I feel entangled with so many unprofitable things. So I need this free mercy and this free grace and this silent, effectual bedewing from heaven, the coming of that dew from the Lord Jesus. Dear friends, Christ has all that we need. May we receive out of His fulness, and be granted more fruitfulness, more love, more constancy, more zeal for His glory, and more separation unto Himself!

AMEN.