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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 24 April 1949

ISAIAH 55 verses 1 and 2

Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,
and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy
wine and milk without money and without price

Perhaps some of you, in the intensity of your desire for a knowledge of Christ and of His love, have said inwardly, that you would give the whole world for the enjoyment of that love, if you possessed it. But it cannot be bought. "If a man would give the whole substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned." Very solemn; very true! It is so naturally. Even natural love, true love, cannot be bought. It is spontaneous. But especially divine love, and yet God does love some people. He loves them because He will, loves them with an everlasting love, set His love upon them before they had a being: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love", says He by Jeremiah; "therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee". But it cannot be bought, it cannot be merited. It can be known. What you were praying for in the hymn can be realised. A mercy for those who could use the language of the hymn from their hearts, who "faint and die" in their souls "to prove the love of Christ to them" (249)

And this is thirst, desire, intense desire, for the love of God, that satisfying love, that holy, constraining, beneficent, sacrificing, that giving love. "Ho, everyone that thirsteth", so thirsteth for it that nothing here can take its place. O nothing can take the place of God, the God of love, and the love of God, in a thirsty sinner's heart. There is a place made for it there that only He and His love can fill. Nothing but water can satisfy thirst. Gold cannot do it. If you had a sack full of gold and were dying of thirst, that would be of no use. And so it is with the soul. If you are dying of thirst for His love to be made known to you, or His mercy, nothing can take its place

but satisfaction from communications of that love and of that mercy. And the Lord does not give this thirst to mock the subjects of it. If He has given you a thirst for Himself that nothing can satisfy but Himself, you may have a great deal of trouble, a great deal of opposition, a great deal of temptation to seek satisfaction elsewhere; but you will be disappointed of satisfaction elsewhere, and you will be wonderfully surprised when you get satisfaction in and through Christ.

There are two ways the Lord employs in delivering His people from idols. One way is sometimes to smash the idol, to spoil the idol, to make that which you are making an idol one of your chief troubles. But there is another way, and that is by making Himself chief by coming into the heart and engaging the affections, and then Ephraim says: "What have I to do any more with idols". Idolatry, covetousness, "spending money for that which is not bread, labouring for that which satisfieth not", how foolish and sinful it is! And yet even the Lord's people, according to this text, and according to their shameful and painful experience and confession, are to be disposed to it. But, blessed be His Name, He will not permit His people to find nourishment and satisfaction in any worldly object. Whatever we lawfully have and lawfully enjoy requires to be put in its right place, and nothing can do that but the Lord coming into our heart and reigning there. Then everything is subservient, and Christ is chief, and there is satisfaction in God. Sometimes when the Lord comes into the heart, when the poor sinner does get a little of that love you were singing about, shed abroad in the heart, then the sinner can say he is satisfied. It does not take very much of infinitude to fill our little earthen vessels. The rich treasure of the gospel in our earthen vessels, conveyed by the power of the Spirit, is enriching to overflowing. When it comes in and you are satisfied with God, there is a drinking. There is a removing of the pinching want, a taking away of the dreadful suspicion and uncertainty, and the filling of the aching void that the world can never fill, when Christ is partaken of by faith.

And the Lord says here: "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat". I said this morning, buying expresses an exchange. Whenever we come to these waters, whenever we come to the Lord Jesus and do business with Him, as it were, there will be an exchange. We shall not remain the same. We take something to Him. Yes, we take to Him our sins. You must come as sinners if you come to these waters. You must come without any merit feelingly, if you come to Christ. You have no penny to give to Him wherewith to merit His favour and esteem, and buy His blessing. But what you take will be your sin felt in your conscience, your guilt burdening your heart, the innumerable iniquities of your life, your immeasurable shortcomings, having come short of the glory of God, your deficiencies, your unrighteousness, your filthy rags. O you must come with sins if you come to the Lord Jesus to buy, and there you will lay yourself down before Him and plead with Him to take away your guilt, your rags, to love you freely and seal your peace, to experience in your conscience His atonement. Berridge puts it very quaintly

Now the sale I understand,
Know what Jesus market is;
Much He asketh at my hand,
All my woe to buy His bliss

You have to lay before Him your sins, your woe, your undone condition, your helplessness, your ignorance, your alienation, your guilty weakness. And then He will give you His love, He will grant you His pardon, He will seal home His peace in your conscience, and there will be a reception, a partaking of Christ as the Bread of heaven. "Labour not", says Christ to those who followed Him curiously, not because they wanted salvation but because they ate of the loaves and fishes, "labour not for the bread that perisheth, but for that Bread which endureth unto everlasting life which the Son of Man shall give unto you; for Him hath God the Father sealed."

"Ho, everyone that thirsteth", here are waters to satisfy,

here is pardoning love to comfort, here is a cleansing fountain to purify the conscience, mercy to satisfy miserable sinners; here is life for those who feel sin to be a terrible death in their nature. Ho, everyone that thirsteth, whatever his name is, whatever he is, however unworthy, however bankrupt, however unlike the people of God - Ho everyone that thirsteth. O my friends, if you have this thirst that nothing but Christ can satisfy, the day will come when you will say: "I am content, I am satisfied". I can say at times, and remember particular times when I have felt so satisfied with Christ, with God in Christ as my God, Christ as my Redeemer, and almighty Friend, and Righteousness, and Life, and All, that I have said to Him: "Lord, Thou art enough". He is enough; but many of us have to say that for the most part we scarcely receive enough to secure our portion in the land. It is but little we know, and less that we enjoy, for the most part; but there is satisfaction. O there is satisfaction in receiving Christ into the heart! And He gives, He permits Himself to be received. Yes, when He calls people to these waters, He does not send them empty away. No, it would be a libel upon His divine character as a faithful God, if we were to suggest that He disappointed the thirst that He Himself gave. One of our hymnwriters says:

'Tis a thirst Thyself didst give
Bid me therefore drink and live

"Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Wine expresses the love of God, wine that exhilarates, that refreshes, wine that revives the drooping spirit. That mighty love that Paul desired the Ephesians might know, its length, depth, and height and breadth, that they might "know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." In the Epistle of John it is said: We have known and believed the love that God hath to us;" and he goes on to show how that love was manifested in the sending of His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. And it is not insignificant that John should say, "We have known and believed". It seems to me to

express this: We have known a little by tasting it, and have believed much more than we have tasted, the illimitable measurement of that love, the ocean fulness of it that is in Christ. But a drop of it is wonderful. O that love of Christ, and of the Father, and of the Spirit, that threefold love of God! God is love. The love of the Father; He celebrates it in the Scripture; His love in electing. Electing love is wonderful. In Malachi the Lord speaks to His Israel and says: "I have loved you, saith the Lord." "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" says an unkind Israel. (Malachi 1 v 2) And He goes on to show that that peculiar love of God to Israel is electing love, foreknowing love, predestinating love, the love that dictated that gift of a people chosen in Christ before the world was. This is the source of salvation, the electing love of God.

And then the love of Christ, His love in dying. Ah, we may read of it in the Scripture, and it may make our mouth water, and we may say, with hearts full of desire, that we die to prove the love of Christ to us. But you won't die. You may die as it were in your spirit of love-sickness. The church of old said to the companions: "If ye see Him whom my soul loveth, tell Him that I am sick of love" that is, sick for the enjoyment of its Object. Are you sick of love, sick in your heart because you lack the presence of the Lord Jesus and the comfort of His love? Well, you won't die without it. He has given you the thirst, and that thirst He will satisfy. And wonderful it is to drink a little of that wine, that "new wine of the kingdom". O it goes down very sweetly! It is very comforting and reviving to a poor sinner, the love of Christ. In the Revelation we read that in heaven they celebrate that love. Who, sinners? Yes, sinners, no longer sinners, but holy saints in heaven will eternally celebrate that love: "Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood; unto Him be glory." If you get a drop of this in your heart, this redeeming love, you will never be able to express the sweetness of it, the refreshing it is, the strength that it puts into your spirit. Strong drink is to be given to him that is ready to perish, and perishing people, feelingly perishing in their guilt and sin, coming to these waters, buying,

eating and drinking this heavenly meat, Christ crucified, they don't perish. They are revived, the Spirit bringing home to their hearts a sense of redeeming love.

And this is without money. It is wonderfully free. Every blessing comes down from God through Jesus Christ to the Lord's people sovereignly and freely; but not undesired, not unsought. It is admitted that the first blessing is unsought. Regeneration, new life, quickening grace, that blessing is unsought. It comes by the Spirit's saving power: "The wind bloweth where it listeth. Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit." But there are effects, and one effect of being born again is to have a living insatiable thirst for God.

"Come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk." Wine and milk are both, together with living water, expressive of the nourishing, vivifying, strengthening, satisfying, sanctifying communications of the truth and grace of God in Jesus Christ. And this milk, what is it? Well, we read in Peter of the "sincere milk of the word". "Desire", says Peter, "the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby", that you may partake of that heavenly nourishment, the Word of God, the promise of the gospel, the doctrine of Christ, the sweet declarations of the truth as the truth is in Jesus. It is one thing to read the Bible, and a good thing. It would be better with many professors, and probably with most of us here, if we spent more time in inspecting the Scriptures. But that is not the same thing as drinking this milk. To partake of the Word of God is a wonderful thing, to find the Word of God in your heart, conveyed and received, conveyed by the Spirit, received by faith, assimilated, meditated upon, walked in. Why, it becomes a part of the person. Peter speaks of "those great and precious promises, whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature." A very mysterious expression. It does not mean that we are made divine. We are not made gods. But there is a partaking of the divine nature by partaking of the precious promises of the gospel as made over to us by the Spirit of Christ; and they are nourishing, they are sanctifying. "Now

are ye clean", said the Lord Christ to His disciples, "through the word which I have spoken unto you." And there is a cleansing, as well as the satisfying effect in the Word of God as received by faith. O what value there is in a promise put into the hand of faith! It is a pledge from God. It conveys to a sinner strength. It strengthens him in faith to rely upon the faithfulness of God to fulfil that promise; and in that sense, as I view it, he is a partaker of the divine nature, and he has as it were a hold on God. Covenant promises are surer than heaven and earth. In the 54 chapter of this prophecy the prophet says: "The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from thee, nor the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee". So that one who is a subject of the covenant promises, one covenant promise, is firmer in his faith and his standing than heaven and earth. The mountains shall depart, the hills be removed, but the kindness of God shall not depart, nor the covenant of His peace be removed, "saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee".

And if you get a promise, why, my friends, that promise will never wear out. It is a living word. You may forget it many times and forget the Lord who gave it to you. Very solemn! Very guilty is that forgetfulness! It does not show the prevalence of grace and the fear of God, alas for us! We are often guilty of forgetting the Lord's words, and if the Lord cast us off for our forgetfulness, it would be a woeful prospect for us. But He is faithful, though we believe not, though unbelief sometimes prevails; and though we do sinfully forget Him, He cannot deny Himself.

"Come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." There is nothing you can give for it, nothing you can promise. No future good can you promise as an inducement for the Lord to bestow upon you His love and His mercy. It must be free.

Bring no money, price or aught,
No good deeds, nor pleasing frames;
Mercy never can be bought;
Grace is free, and all's the Lamb's.

And the Lord says here: "Hearken diligently unto Me". Hearken diligently to the gospel. Hearken not to that pharisaic spirit that would make God a debtor to that legality of yours, that would wait for something to take to the Lord. Hearken diligently to the sound of free grace, "sovereign grace o'er sin abounding." "Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good". And what is good? Christ is good, the Paschal Lamb. His Word is good, His Word of promise. His doctrine is good nourishment to the soul, feeding faith. "Faith is by knowledge fed" - knowledge, not naked, but conveyed by the Spirit, living knowledge, the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. How can we attain to this? By prayer, by faith. Said Peter, warning the believers of days of apostacy lest they should be led astray: "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." If we have true faith, if the Lord has given us that precious gift of faith in the bleeding Lamb, how is that faith to be maintained? By exercise. Peter again said: "Add to your faith virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godliness and brotherly kindness, and charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." By which he meant that we can never bear these fruits to our faith, only by exercise upon Him who is faith's right Object. So that the way to fruitfulness is the way of prayerful believing acquaintance with the Lord Jesus; for communications between God and the sinner are made by prayer at the throne of grace.

And this brings in the exercise of the soul in its various needs. For instance, how in our trials and difficulties in life we do need communications of grace, grace to support our minds, grace to enable us to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and not be offended because of the truth. And all this

sense of need that we have only exemplifies, and will bring out in our experience, the fulness of satisfaction and supply that is in Jesus Christ. The more our needs are felt, the more troubles we experience, the more our faith is tried, the more we shall be driven home upon the Lord to sustain us by His communications of grace; and this is one way whereby the Lord loosens His people from this poor world. "This is not your rest; it is polluted". And He knows the disposition there is in some of us to seek to rest short of heaven's glory. O, but "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." And there are real pleasures, holy joys, in true religion. These waters, this wine, this heavenly meat, this milk, express holy pleasures. There is a river of pleasures that issues from God, flows down into the wilderness by streams, reaches a poor sinner's heart, makes glad the city of God - the love of God, the mercy of God, the grace of God, the holy joy that is in divine forgiveness. You get a touch sometimes, do you not? O but it is very little that we know! And yet the little we know leads us up to Him from whence it comes, and causes us at times to reckon ourselves dead to this world, dead to sin, and alive to God and to the world to come.

In the Colossians the Apostle sets before those believers a blessed prospect, the condition into which the Lord would ultimately bring them. He had "made them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light", and He would presently make them "unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight"; that blessed prospect, the ocean fulness of blessing that is in Christ. Rutherford says

The streams on earth I've tasted
More deep I'll drink above

Have you tasted the streams? Ever got a drop of the love of Christ, of the mercy of God, of the peace of the atonement? Ever felt the holy joy of salvation in your heart? Ever realised the Lord to be your God, and Friend, and Saviour? Well, that is but the beginning; it is a real beginning in grace that will be

consummated in glory. "At Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore". Now cannot some of you say that there have been moments in your lives, notwithstanding all your sin, all your sin-bought miseries and troubles, and distresses, notwithstanding all the temptations and trials of life, when you would not change with an angel, moments when you have felt happy, that all was well; Christ in you the hope of glory, and satisfied with Him as the portion of your cup and of your inheritance? And then what? Well, presently there will be the enjoyment of the principal. If you have had the foretaste, if you have had a little from the waters of love, drawn a little of the living waters from the wells of salvation, then presently there will be the ocean fulness into which you will go. Yes, the earnest of the inheritance is by the Spirit, but the inheritance is laid up for the saints in heaven; the best is to come.

That blessed chapter (Revelation 22) we read leads up to that, a river of clear water that issues from God, and it will take everyone back to God, fit him to be with God for ever. O the prospect that the gospel sets before poor pilgrims who often fear that the world, and the flesh and the devil will overcome them! Ah, but God is greater than our hearts, greater than the world, greater than the devil, and He does in His great mercy prevent us from finding satisfaction outside Himself.

"Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" Blessed be God, He will not let His people find rest and satisfaction away from Himself. That is a negative; but a blessed negative that has a positive side connected with it. "He will satisfy the longing soul, He will satiate the weary soul, and fully satisfy the desire of every living thing." And when we get to heaven we shall have no wrong desires. What a wonderful thing it will be to be gratified in every desire, and to be holy in that gratification! O the many unlovely desires we may have, the turning aside through our forgetfulness of the Lord! But the day is coming when there will be no more sin, no more curse, no more night of desertion, no more inclination or ability to sin; but

inheritance, the ocean fulness of blessedness in God.

And see how this is secured, the channel through which this river flows, the redemption of Christ, the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, that sacrificing, suffering, dying love (yet undying love).

The love of Christ is rich and free;
Fixed on His own eternally;
Nor earth, nor hell, can it remove;
Long as He lives, His own He'll love.

Yes, He loves them through this wilderness, from the pit of corruption into heaven. And if you cannot be satisfied short of His love, you are favoured people, and you will have all in His love. There will be rest and satisfaction there.

AMEN.