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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on Sunday morning 17 May 1925

JOEL 2 V 23

"Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice  
in the LORD your God: for He hath given you the  
former rain moderately, and He will cause to come down  
for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain  
in the first month"

Gladness is a rejoicing heart on account of some known reason, and you may say, as reading this word and considering it, you have no heart to be glad. If you should read this chapter up to the 20th verse and see how spiritually it describes your own case, the dealings of God with you; then you might be ready to say that it would be presumptuous in you to think of being glad, allowing any gladness in your life. The desolations, the terrible judgements of God, the calling to fasting, and weeping, and mourning, that go before this word in the chapter, go before, in the experience of the children of God. Gladness does not arise out of nature - such gladness as is here exhorted unto - and it must be said also, that every person who needs this exhortation would have a good deal on the contrary side before he comes to realise what a wonderful thing it is to be exhorted by God to be glad. It is a little thing in many people's minds to be glad. Religion is a gladsome thing; self-deception is a gladsome thing; forgetfulness of the painful, separating truth of God, is a gladsome thing in many religious people. But when that separating, painful truth has taken hold of a person; when he has been desolated by God's great army of convictions; when he has been brought thoroughly down and turned inside out; when his heart has been somewhat revealed to him; when God's holiness has been shown in some degree to him, His majesty, then it will not be an easy thing for him to consider the word: "Be glad".

There are many reasons why we should mourn. There are many reasons in some hearts here, why we should mourn. One great reason is that we have so sinned, and are such sinners, against God, that we

deserve His anger, and His wrath, and if we were to live to God, this would be a matter of mourning for us. And if we had now the Spirit of God, we should be rending our hearts before Him in secret on this account. This would cripple, it would kill all the fleshly gladness of religion and a mercy of mercies it is when God does kill that fleshly gladness, that lightsomeness of heart, that saying, one to another, "peace, peace, where there is no peace." He who forgets this awful truth, that he is a sinner, or who, remembering it, finds within himself powers to palliate his heart on that account, that person will never come to that real spiritual gladness on true accounts unless God breaks up that falseness in his religion.

Another great reason why we should mourn and have often to mourn, is because of our enemy - Satan, the god of this world. Why should we mourn on account of him? Because of this, that, in our hearts there is a terrible living principle, a nature that loves him, his temptations; loves his rule, loves the things that he brings in order, if it be possible, to deceive the very elect. The devil does great things in the world. He has most of the world under his willing rule, and where he has not the rule, there he has a great power, an influence, a tormenting power, a tempting power, a driving power, a mocking power. He will nibble at every bit of comfort that you have, if it is a right comfort. He will seek to separate you from the only ground of comfort if he can by some error of doctrine. He will turn you from Christ to Moses if he can or he will turn you from mourning to fleshly gladness if he can only obtain such power over you as shall cause self-love to prevail. And this is a matter of mourning when it is felt and seen in the light of God. O the enemy is not a dead enemy. He has a power in the church, and in the hearts of the saints. What a mercy if he has not the dominion over us. What a mercy it is if he is our enemy. And this dreadful, this two-fold cause of mourning and of despair in ourselves is added to by an experience that is known by some of the absence of God. O there are multitudes with whom God is not; who have no feeling experience of His absence; who have no power, no capacity, to know whether He is with them or not. But when, having these two other reasons for mourning, a person who has known what the presence and the love and the voice and the power and the comfort and the light of God's presence are, has an experience of the cessation of all those comforts and the absence of the Lord from him,

then he is in darkness, and he is mourning. He is feelingly bereft of all that can be a reason for him to be glad. There may be some here in such a condition this morning. They cannot see a bright spot, cannot lift their hearts up even to look upon the mercies of God, and to be thankful for them, such is their depression and oppression. And they may feel, O how is it possible that I could be in such a state as this and be a child of God? How is it possible for one to be so bereft of religion, of feeling, of faith, prevailing faith, of power to resist the enemy; how is it possible for one so ignorant as now I feel, to have lost all my judgemental knowledge, even so as to use of the truth, to be really taught of God, a child of God? Well, a person in such a case will want God. He will want something that is different from, and higher than, just natural notion and religion. He will want power, he will want demonstration, He will want the Holy Spirit. He will want living light, He will want a touch from heaven in such a case, to enable him to hold fast and to bring him to a conformity to the text. "Be glad then ye children of Zion and rejoice in the Lord your God."

There is a reason why a person who is in such a case, yet a child of God, should rejoice and be glad, and that reason, that foundation of gladness and rejoicing is not - certainly he knows it is not now more than perhaps ever he did before - is not in himself, but it is in God. It is the testimony of God, brought into a sinner's case, that makes God's power known. All mere descriptions of God's power fall short of this, but when a person is in such a case, and then the testimony of God is brought to that person in that case, he feels the power of God, of His testimony. God makes Himself real to such a person who, though not an unbeliever at such a time, could not feelingly, prevailingly believe in God. And this is the great difference between faith that is merely in the judgement, that never is tried, never shaken, and faith that is in the power of God and that needs God to support it, to nourish it, and to call it into exercise. And it is worthy our notice and examination of our own cases as to whether we are brought into this place and get some demonstration of God to us. Why, my friends, if you get such a bitter case as this, and then get a testimony from God in your heart, you will prize that experience and it will be more nourishing to your souls than months and months of dry doctrinal learning. It will bring some vitality

into your heart. It will make you believe in God. It will give your faith such nourishment and growth, it will give you power at times to be glad that you are weak, glad that you are emptied out, glad that God disturbs all your false rest; glad, though it is painful, that He shows you how bad your heart is sometimes, and that He shows you that you are not half lost without Him, but wholly lost without Him. Then a person is fitted to rejoice in the Lord his God. There are reasons in God why the people of God should rejoice and when the demonstration, the testimony of God comes to them in their worst cases, then they see that there is reason why they should be glad. "Rejoice in the Lord your God".

Well, first of all, "rejoice in the Lord your God" because He is your God. O, but some of you may say, How can I rejoice in that as I do not feel He is my God? Well, if you are not under the powerful witnessing of the Spirit to this, then it will be your mercy to be preserved from lightly and presumptuously calling Him your God. But if the Lord has dealt with you so as to spoil every other god to you, as to take away every other refuge from you, and as to make Himself the one thing needful to you, the time will come when you will know, what now is the truth, that He is your God, and He has done this for you. Those who have had in their souls the persuasion that the Lord is their God, have, when He speaks to them, a reason in this, that He is their God, to rejoice. What greater thing can be said to a person than "I am thy God". It is better than settlement upon a person of every comfort. It is better than all the world can give him. It is better than all religion. It is better than all the esteem of men. Nothing can be compared with the testimony of God to this, that He is your God. And the gladness that fills the heart of a man, even though he should be in trouble, is very great inwardly when he realises this, even when he hopes that it is so. When he can look up to the Lord and with his feeble faith say to Him - "O Lord, Thou art my God". Then he is glad and he knows that the Lord knows that that does not go out of dissembled lips. He knows that the sinner feels he has no God but the Lord. Be glad that He is yours, that He has made Himself yours, you to whom this great mercy has come. O, to you who say, I am in trouble now, I am in darkness now, the enemy is powerful in me now; I feel that he has such a hold of me, holds me down and oppresses me so, how can I be glad; well, be glad in this, that the Lord your God has promised to

do great things as over against all the enemy does, has done, or can do. Did you ever, in your soul's experience, by the Spirit put the devil against God? Did you ever find the devil trying your overthrow and then God's testimony coming into your heart, the power of God, to deliver from Satan? O, how glad I have been sometimes in this, under the feeling power of Satan's temptations and the power of my own worldly, sinful heart and nature, to believe that the Lord is greater than both of those powers together. Be glad that He has promised to do great things; that He can do greater things than those the devil can do. The power of God is very wonderful. O, who can understand the power of God? But then it is written concerning the Lord Jesus, in whom the power of God is for the good of His people; it is said this of Him, that the weakness of God is stronger than men. Well my friends, the power of God in Christ in the weakness of Christ, that is as He was crucified through weakness, this is gladness to a child of God. How is it possible for Satan to do more than He permits? How is it possible for your own hearts to do more than the Lord allows them to do? And sometimes faith in you and a love to holiness in you will lay hold of this power of God and say, Lord subdue my iniquities for Christ's sake. Lord, let not sin have dominion over me, but may I be conformed to the death of Christ. This is how a sinner finds within him, gladness. It is not a light thing. It is a solemn and sober gladness, when the testimony of Christ is brought into his case, into his heart.

"Rejoice in the Lord your God" that He has overcome death and hell and that, having overcome them, He is in heaven to bring you off overcomers. Faith penetrates through the darkness to this great truth, by the truth shining through the darkness into the poor sinner's heart. There is a communication from heaven, from the light of heaven, from Christ, to a dark sinner, that directs that sinner's heart back to heaven in his darkness, and he says, I shall come through. Thou wilt show me the path of life out of this death, through these difficulties, through the darkness. Thou wilt bring me through; and faith simply and gladly hangs on God. There is something in the text, passed through, for which we should be glad in the Lord.

"He hath given you the former rain moderately", "A teacher of

righteousness" as the word is in the margin, and this is a reason for gladness. Why, my friends, any of you, all of you, who have received into your hearts that Divine Teacher of righteousness, the former rain, the Holy Spirit in His quickening influence, in His regenerating power, ought to be glad in Him on that account. But it is important for us to know this. It is important for us to realise whether or no we have had this former rain. How can we know it? "He hath given you the former rain moderately", "a Teacher of righteousness", "according to righteousness". If the Spirit has been communicated to us, we must know there has been something done. I do not say that all of you will know that you are regenerate, but you will know that there has been something done if the Spirit has been given to you, the former rain has come to you. When a teacher teaches a person, that person taught knows he has an instructor, however little he knows he has learned. And when the Holy Spirit is given to a dead person there is a consequent result, some effect produced. Just for a moment or two, let us look at this. "He hath given you the former rain moderately". Have we been under the unctuous, living, solemn teaching of the Spirit of God? Have we been brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light? Have we been turned from Satan to God? Has there been a power in our hearts at any time that has caused us to contemplate God's majesty? has caused us to realise in any measure our need of the living God? Has made us to cry out in our very souls for want, that want not perhaps very distinct as to the Object of it, but a terrible want, an awful shortness in our lives? Well, if the Lord has done this for us, we ought to be glad. If He has; O it is a great thing to be a regenerate person. It is an easy thing to be a religious person and not to be regenerated, very easy. Nothing is easier in these days. Why, religion brings no scorn in these days, brings no persecution. It is easy for a person with such a mind to grow up in religion. But O, the greatness of God coming to a dead person and giving him life by communicating to him His Spirit. This is necessary, absolutely necessary, for God's presence in heaven. We cannot be right, whatever we may think. Whatever we may think we know, we know nothing yet as we ought to know unless this has been done for us. What does it do? What effect has it? Well, it has the effect in the soul of a person to make him, sooner or later, realise that God is angry with his sins; that he himself cannot take these sins away and make himself acceptable to God. It makes a person

realise the holiness of God and therefore his distance from, and alienation from, that holy God. These feelings come into the soul; they are in the soul of the man, not a mere passing thought, a life. O natural conviction may go a long way in this matter. It is important for us, as the Lord may help us, to seek that our calling may be made sure to us. "Give diligence therefore brethren to make your calling and election sure". And the higher a person climbs in even true doctrine in religion, the higher he climbs in the Church, who has not had that start, the more terrible will be his fall in this life; very terrible it may be. If grace brings him to fall it will be a mercy. Who can express the terribleness of the fall of a man from the height of a profession into hell, who has never been regenerated. Now sometimes this work is very gentle; sometimes it is not like a heavy storm, it is not with terrors always; sometimes it is. But in any case there must be, and there is, a certain effect, and, in a few words, that effect is to create in the heart of that person a desire for God, a desire to be under the favour of God, a desire to have removed from him all that keeps him from God, a desire to be made acceptable to God, and to be made fit to be in the presence of God. Less than that effect in the heart is short, as I believe, of true regeneration. "He hath given you the former rain moderately" - "A Teacher of righteousness", and this is by the Scriptures often. O how some here in their earlier days found this Teacher of righteousness with them in the Scriptures. How God declared Himself to the soul in the Scriptures. His anger against sin, His love and favour to His people, His heaven that He has prepared for His dear children. And these things, the one cutting the sinner off, the other drawing him on to God, had an influence, a teaching; brought the sinner down and made him feel that he was lost in himself, and yet with such a desire to be a child of God, to be among the saints of God, to be prepared to stand before God. "When shall I come and appear before the living God". "Moderately". "According to righteousness". That is, according to His own will and uprightness and greatness and holiness. The Spirit Himself worketh according to His Own will in the hearts of His people. This is necessary to be observed and it would be, might be, for the comfort and encouragement of some of you to notice it - "According to righteousness" or "moderately". According as the wisdom of the blessed Spirit sees fit. No two cases of the work of the Spirit in a child of God are precisely the same as I believe. There

are differences of administrations, but One Spirit. But the effect for substance and for Object and for end and issue is the same in each case. If the Lord helps you, you who have this Teacher of righteousness in your soul, may you be enabled not to dictate to Him; not to say, now I want the experience of my friend, but rather commit yourself to His teaching. It is arrogance for a pupil to tell his master what he should teach him. But then there are experiences; the Scriptures are full of blessed experiences promised, and that, in the hands of faith, becomes a rule whereby a poor sinner, longing to be blessed, prays to the Lord God. You will never, by the Spirit's teaching, you will never pray but in accordance with the holy Scriptures. Whatever you ask for, if you ask by the Spirit, you will find to be in the Scriptures of truth. And you may see there the promises, how the Lord has promised to forgive all convinced sinners, and then you may say, O that is what I want, and prayer is produced in your heart. You beg of the Lord to give you that blessing, but may you be enabled to submit to the teaching of the Spirit. What the Lord does for you will be done for ever, and will be your own experience when all the conformity to others and all their consequent bolstering of you up will be useless to you. It is good to compare notes with the people of God, but it is not good for a person to say, now that experience I must have. Rather may the Lord help you to look into the Scriptures and cause you to see and feel your need, and the desirability of the various blessings that are promised there, and enable you to wait on the Lord that "how and where and by what means" He will bless you. And then you will be glad at His work. You will say, this is not a copy of someone else's experience; this is what God did for me, and the least thing God does for you will be a jewel, a treasure, a righteousness, a possession that is unloseable. Why, if the Lord - and as you read the Scripture you will know He speaks to people - if the Lord should speak a word to your heart; should He so condescend, as it were, to open His law and say in your heart one word, how happy you would be. How glad and how truly rich you would be. "He hath given you the former rain moderately". That is in the past. Then he says - "And He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month". If He has done the first and you are now in trouble; if you can only look back and cannot feel anything of the sweetness or of the power or even of the solemnity of past dealings of God with your soul, and you feel in



a terrible state of darkness, walking in darkness and having no light, and feeling fearful lest the enemy has such a power over you as to hold you down, and fear your sins, and what the Lord may do with you; if you have had the former rain, says the Lord, "I will do great things" I will deliver you and I will give you what you want, that is I will cause to come down for you the latter rain in the first month. Have you ever feared that your religion would dry all up? Yea, have you feared it has dried up? Have you felt so dry in your spirit, so prayerless, and so loveless, and so hopeless and so dark and so motionless as to have a real, solemn fear that your religion has dried up. Past evidences gone. Well my friends, God has not gone, and if He has given you the former rain, though you do not now feel the refreshing influence, the love, the vitality of it, yet He knows He has given it to you and that united you to Him. When the Spirit is given to a person that unites that person to God. They that are Christ's are one Spirit, united together in one Spirit, and united to Christ in one Spirit. Then be glad in this faithfulness of God, that He will not forsake the work of His Own hands. He will give you the latter rain; He wont let your religion dry up. You who are troubled, that fear lest it should; you who say, "O that it were with me as in months past"; you who are mourning and weeping and rending your hearts in secret, not before your fellow men, in your hearts, and turning to the Lord your God, you will prove what He says in this chapter. "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness." Do we deserve this latter rain? Do we deserve the refreshing from the Spirit? No. We deserve it no more - yea, if it is possible we deserve it less - than we deserved the first coming of the Spirit to us, for then we had not sinned as we have since sinned. Perhaps some of you will understand what I mean when I say this, that sins which we have committed since we believed the Lord called us by His grace are heavier and more piercing and more bitter than sins before that took place. But then it does not undo the grace, the mercy and the faithfulness of the promise of God. What He has begun He will finish. "He will cause to come down for you"; He must cause it.

Now how does He cause this to come down, this latter rain, to continue the growth? Well, I believe He does it by causing the sinner to pray. Why, perhaps you say, I am always praying. Are you? Can you

always pray? You may yet live to prove that prayer comes from heaven; live to prove that prayer is no formal, stated language; though you may still have formal and stated times for the exercise; but when the Lord the Spirit comes He does most assuredly come as the Spirit of grace and supplications. Whenever there is a reviving in a child of God or whenever there is a reviving, particular reviving in a church, I believe it usually comes by way of the Spirit of prayer. We cannot, we would not, say that the Lord works always one way, but I believe this is the way He ordains usually to work, the Spirit of prayer. He causes the soul to mourn; there is mourning in prayer. O there is real mourning before God when a soul prays in a dark and desolate condition. "Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar". Joel 2 v 17. "Gather the people"; "sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly". This was prior, in this chapter, to the promised restoration which should be brought to the land. Well it would be our mercy if, feeling our dryness, and darkness, feeling our distance from God, the Holy Spirit would give us grace to call on Him, that He would refresh us with some fresh showers of heavenly blessing. Some of you may just have had the former rain, just got the beginning, just had your soul moistened and quickened and revived, and you may little think perhaps now how much you will need the fresh showers, the latter rain, to come on you. You little think, perhaps, of the Spirit's work. You know what comforts you have; you know, when the Lord is with you, you know what it is to feel His peace, to hear His voice; you are full of comfort, full of a sense of pardon. O I wish all here were, but perhaps most of the children of God do value more the comforts that come by the Spirit to their hearts than they do the source of them at the first. Not that you will be utterly disregarding the source, for they must certainly draw the heart up to the source; when the Lord blesses you, then you will bless Him, but it is a principle in us, when we are not instructed, to look more to the comfort and feeling than to the source of that comfort, and of that feeling. But later on you may be brought to this, the infinitely inexhaustible resources that are in God and particularly the Divine Spirit who communicates out of those inexhaustible resources in God to the poor little capacities of His people. And this is very blessed - it comes to the soul; a suitability, it comes to the sinner - a humble confidence. And sometimes even in a dark place, though he is not comfortable there and

cannot be satisfied with the absence of the Lord, yet it gives him a humble confidence in the Lord. There is such an experience as trusting in the Lord in darkness. "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of His Servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon His God".(Isaiah 50 v 10) That will come by the instruction of the Spirit into the faithfulness and the fullness of God in Christ. "He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain and the latter rain in the first month". The latter rain used to come just before harvest I believe, and this may be very suitable to some of your cases. How you long to be refreshed before you go hence and be no more. You look at the past days of refreshment and you say those were your best days. Well, the Lord can make your last days your best days. He can come down by His blessed Spirit and fill you to overflowing with His goodness and His grace and His love. I desire He may do it for you and for us who are younger; that He will come down and refresh our souls.

There is another reason that we have to be glad and to rejoice in the Lord our God; I would not leave it out; it is not left out in our hearts. We have reason to be glad and rejoice in Him as we see the mighty grace of God manifested in poor sinners, prodigal sinners. I believe that there are some here who have been cured of the spirit of the elder brother, and O how sweet it is, how confirming it is, to see the invincible grace of the Holy Spirit reaching prodigals, bringing them back from their prodigality, teaching them speedily themselves and Christ and satisfying them with the best robe, and with the ring, and with the fatted calf. You do not grudge them it, do you friends? No.

May the Lord pardon what has been amiss. May He fill you who fear His Name with this humble, sober gladness and rejoicing in Him.

AMEN.