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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 26 March 1924

JOHN 17 v 13

"And now come I to Thee; and these things
I speak in the world, that they might have my joy
fulfilled in themselves"

In approaching any part of the word of the living God it becomes us to seek to do it with reverence, with humility, and with godly fear, but such a word as this - this whole chapter being the passage of Christ to His Father - seems to be so sacred, so holy, that it is with great difficulty one unholy sinner can look at, touch, or speak from such a word, and yet, if one should leave it alone, if one should allow always the objection of one's own sinfulness, dimness, one's own limitations and guilt and distance from God, and unworthiness, what holy word of Scripture could one ever dare to touch. This blessed chapter contains in it the substance, the foundation, the pattern and the effect of the blessed intercession of the Son of God for sinners, and it is remarkable I feel that in it the Lord Jesus Christ expresses nothing in detail or openly concerning His sufferings though He was on the eve of them, as in the first verse He declares - "Father the hour is come" - and I think, and feel disposed to say, that this is not without significance. It is characteristic of the blessed, holy Saviour of sinners that He did not make of his sufferings matter of mere human sympathy, and it may be that in this chapter wherein the Lord Jesus deals with His Father in prayer concerning the fact of His suffering life and death, that He would seek that that deception which is possible to men, His disciples might be prevented from. Mere human sympathy with a suffering man is not spiritual and will do the soul no good, and if permitted may deceive a person into thinking that he loves the Lord Jesus Christ with a spiritual love. Also this fact brings out this truth that the delight, the love, the thoughts, the affections of the Lord Jesus Christ made His attention in this, His prayer, fix upon His beloved people, and their interests, for in their interests He came, and in their interests He was now to die and return to His Father. The

sorrows of Christ, even His literal sufferings, the sorrows also of His soul are but little expressed actually in the description given of His death in the gospels. If you would see the sorrows of Christ's holy soul, you must find them, and will by the Holy Spirit, find them hidden in the Psalms and in the Prophecies. He did not express the sorrows of His soul audibly before sinner and reprobate and saint. No, His voice was not heard like that. The bitterest of His sorrows were expressed in secret prayer and in humble supplication to His Father and I feel inclined, just in passing, to make this observation upon this point, that as Christ is not only - as He is indeed - the Redeemer of the Church, but also her pattern, how gracious it would be of Him if He enabled us individually, as professing to believe in His Name, to walk after Him in this matter. Self-pity is one of the most hardening and deceiving and defiling sins that we can be guilty of. Our greatest trials, our severest soul exercises ought, according to Christ's own pattern, to be known only by the Lord. I do not mean by that, that one, a poor sinner, a weakling, one greatly tried, may never confide in a friend who knows the Lord, and may be able, as a means, to help him. I do not mean that one should not seek communion with the Lord's people even to mourn together over sin, but I believe there is a line of instruction in this matter which, may the Holy Spirit lead us into in our experience. But passing that, I would like, by the Lord's help, first of all to notice this declaration of Christ's: "And now come I to Thee". He had declared that He had finished the work which His Father gave Him to do. All His, what is called for convenience, His active obedience to the law was finished. He was born and He was made under the law; He came to obey and fulfil and not to destroy, as He says, and through His whole life we may see as reading His life with an enlightened mind, He fulfilled all righteousness. There is not one of the commandments written in the word of God which the Lord Jesus did not fully, completely, perfectly fulfil and of course there is not one thing forbidden in the holy law of God which the Lord Jesus Christ disobeyed God in. He is holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners, must necessarily be so, being God. And having fulfilled all that part of His obedience and having regard particularly - as in His whole holy life He had regard - for His dear people and their interests and their real good, and their defence and their instruction, now He declares it with an audible voice in His prayer to His Father. "Now come I to Thee",

repeats it, for He had previously said the same in a previous verse which was doubtless for the comfort and for the defence of the disciples, that when Christ should be apprehended, when He should be crucified, then they should remember as they did, and it is written of them, they remembered His words. He Himself knew that all things were now accomplished, it is said, on the cross, and He Himself in this prayer knew that the hour of His sufferings had come. "Father the hour is come". And now, having finished all the law, having obeyed it fully in every jot and tittle of it, now this remains: "I come to Thee". How can He come to the Father? He comes to the Father in the way in which it was ordained He should come. He was given to be a sacrifice; He was made to be sin for the church; He was not spared by His Father. As yet He had not been a sacrifice; as yet with respect of dying, He had been spared, but, says He, "Now come I to Thee". The cross was before Him; His cup of bitter agony and curse was before Him. He had already been grieved in spirit; He had already prayed to His Father: "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done." Now He was fully set in this direction to come by the way appointed for Him unto the Father and with this in full view, as we must believe He had it in full view, yet such was His love to His people, His care for them, His determination to do them good and perfect them, that in this chapter He gives audibly, for His people to hear and receive, a sample of His intercession for them. I do think that there is love of an unexampled kind in this. His delights were with the children of men, His love was fixed on His people from before all worlds, but O how, out of His meek and lowly heart, that love flowed in His most significant acts upon the earth and this one of the greatest and most significant of all that He should give a pattern of His intercession; to give to His poor people thus to hear His intercessory prayer to His Father on their behalf. And it is for their use, and, - as the Word of the Scripture declares so, that all Scripture is profitable, and that it is given by inspiration of God - it is for the use of the Church in all ages. Said He to His Father "Now come I to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves." There was a purpose in His speaking audibly and in this audible prayer being recorded by the Holy Ghost in the Bible. Think for a moment of the Bible, without the 17 chapter of John. We can hardly conceive what a terrible blank it would be, what a shortness,

what an incompleteness there would be in the Scripture without this chapter. And herein, in this verse, the Lord Jesus Christ gives the reason why He expressed audibly this, His petition to His Father. As I have said, He did not express audibly -except a very short prayer on the cross expressing His great sorrow, when He said "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me" - but most of His bitterest, personal sorrows and griefs and pains, He expressed to His Father in secret and they are hidden, as I have said, in the Prophets and in the Psalms. But this, that should be for His people's good, for their comfort, for their security, for their strength, He spoke audibly. "These things I speak in the world" I would like to notice very briefly, for of course one cannot go through all the things which the Lord Jesus here speaks, some of the things particularly which He speaks of to His Father . "These things I speak in the world".

And first of all I feel that the greatest thing that He speaks of in this chapter is His own eternal Sonship. You will find that, in the 5 verse I think it is, He thus expresses Himself to His Father: "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine Own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." This thing He spoke at this solemn time for His people's good, and a great thing it is. And as it may be opened to us, it will amaze us - it has amazed me and filled me with wonder - that this glorious Person should be who He is and yet have done what He did. Being the eternal Son of the eternal Father; being, as the Apostle Paul expresses it in the Hebrews, first chapter, "The brightness of His Father's glory and the express image of His Person". And that truth He here expresses "... with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." This, as the Spirit may open it to us, will lead our minds back to eternity; will lead us a little into the mystery of the eternal Godhead, the Trinity, and to the eternity of the Person of Christ. Holy, infinite, infinitely wise and just and sovereign, yet eternally united to His Father as the Son in a relationship and a union. A relationship true, unspeakable but true relationship. United to Him in the single essence of the eternal Jehovah. This Person is beyond all our comprehension as He is God, of whom John speaks in the first chapter, I think it is, of this gospel, that He was in the bosom of the Father. "No man hath seen God at any time" (John 1 v 18). People think they know God; they make altars to Him and worship Him like the Athenians did who had an altar

to the unknown God, but the Scripture declares what every child of God knows, "No man hath seen God at any time". But herein is the glory of this truth, that though no man hath seen this invisible God, "the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him". And that only begotten Son is the Man Christ Jesus whom the disciples looked upon and heard praying this prayer to His Father and His God. The second thing of which Christ speaks that I would name to you is this, that His Father sent Him. He says that His disciples believed that He came out from God, that His Father sent Him to do the things that He did. This is infinitely important and calculated to be matter for holy joy in the hearts of poor, needy sinners who need a firm and holy foundation for their faith to rest upon. He came, not to do His Own will. He came not unsent. He came not, if one might speak so, He came not independently. No - independent, sovereign though He is, the sovereign Lord of all - He was sent by His Father. He came out from God. This gave validity to all that He did. This made it proper that all that He did should have an efficacy in those for whom He did it. There is no disunion in the Trinity. There is no discord. One single triune sovereign will is in the Trinity. One Trinity of love is in the three Persons, and all running in one direction, toward the church, and the Son came, according to the everlasting covenant, accordingly to the commandment in that covenant given to Him by His Father and the Lord Jesus thought it necessary, expedient and profitable for His people to speak this thing in this, His prayer to His Father, that His disciples might hear the truth of it from His Own lips once more. As the Father sent Him He was invested with all that was needful for His work. As God He needed nothing, but He was sent that He might obey God being His servant, and that of His people. For this a body was fitted Him by His Father: "A body hast Thou prepared (or fitted) Me"; fitted with all qualifications. It was formed by God; holy, without spot, incapable of sin was that holy thing born of the virgin Mary. And the Son came, as being sent by the Father, to take that body into union with Himself and, says He, "I have given them the words which Thou gavest Me" - He came as the Prophet to declare His Father's words - "and they have received them". They have kept them, said He to His Father, concerning His disciples. What are these words which He came and declared? They are the words of the covenant, and principally they are these, that it is the will of the Father that all men should

honour the Son even as they honour the Father. That the Son has had a commandment given to Him to lay down His life. That all the sins of the church He has become responsible for. "I give My life a ransom for many". "The true Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep". And this, as I have said, not in His Own sovereignty, but by the commandment of His Father, and we are not to understand this, that it was not His will to suffer for He declares when He came into the world that He delights to do the will of His Father. "I delight to do Thy will O My God". Yea, it is written of Him in the Proverbs, that His delights were with the sons of men. He delighted to redeem the church. And just before He suffered, at that institution of the Lord's Supper, He said that He was straightened until He had accomplished it. So anxious - if one may use the word anxious of the holy Son of God for want of a better - was He to have His people redeemed, to redeem them.

The next thing I would like to name which the Lord Jesus here speaks, is the union that is between Himself and His people. "I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one." If the Holy Spirit should give those few words the life, the importance, and the blessedness that they really contain to us, it would fill us with a holy, humble confidence and joy in the Lord. This union between the church and Christ is the foundation of all the blessings that she receives. It is the cause of all her experience of the love of God. It is the foundation and the security of her final perseverance and her being with God at last. Her union, after the pattern of the union that subsists between the Father and the Son, subsists between the whole church and every individual member of it, and the holy Son of the Father, God the Son incarnate, the Man Christ Jesus. I wish the Holy Spirit would cause us to see the glory of this and feel the blessedness of this union, such a union as does not subsist between any two persons of men. A union different from all other unions, this union. "I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one."

Then one other thing I would like to name is this, the will of Christ that His Church should be kept by the power of God, His committal of the church to His Father. That they should live in the world; that they were not to be huddled in one corner of the world and

kept in a seclusion of superiority to other men; they were in the world, but the Lord Jesus prayed to His Father that He would keep them in His Own Name from the evil of the world, and this was for their good that they should hear Him pray, that they should understand what His wishes, what His will, was concerning them and how He would secure these desires to them, even by committing them to His Father. And there is one other thing I must briefly notice, and it is this, that it is His will that those who did not believe in Him may be brought to believe in Him by the preaching of the gospel. "Neither pray I for these alone but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word." "Shall believe". "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God". And what a mystery, and what a blessedness, what a freeness, what a sovereignty, there is in this chapter, and what a sovereignty there is in the gift of faith. "I pray not for the world, but for them whom Thou hast given Me." And there were some unbelievers, some yet to be born, given to Christ and His love was upon them. He prayed then before He was crucified, audibly, in the audience of His disciples, for men down to the end of the world. Have we a hope that He prayed for us? "Neither pray I for these alone but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word."

And the last thing I would notice is this, in this point, that it is His will and He expresses it to His Father, that all that were given to Him might eventually be with Him. (v 24). Not now; not that they should miss the trials and duties and relationships of life; for He said "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world"; that is an improper thought for believers to think and nourish in their minds. Christians have a duty as citizens, and in their relationships, and the love of God does not dissolve those things, does not exonerate them from them, but rather puts upon them more insistently the necessity of performing those proper, needful duties. But these things, done in the fear of God though they may be and are by the people of God, as that fear is in exercise, are not their end. This was the end that Christ had in view and He expressed it to His Father. "I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given me, for Thou lovest Me before the foundation of the world." And if we have a hope of that we may well sing as we did in the hymn just now: "Blessed are the eyes that see Him". Blessed are those who have a

hope that they will see Him and blessed are those who trust Him to bring them home at last.

But secondly let us notice what the Lord Jesus says is the reason He speaks these things in the world. "And these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves." This is a very wonderful word. Christ Jesus was a Man of Sorrows; He was acquainted with grief. You read I think about twice in His life that He rejoiced in spirit. You read much more about His groaning and being sorrowful unto death and in the Psalms you can read a little of His holy sorrows and yet here is this divine Man, Mediator and Redeemer, the Son of God, expressing audibly to His Father in this, His solemn, intercessory prayer, this, that He does audibly say these things to His Father that His disciples might have His joy fulfilled in themselves. We must notice, first of all, what the joy of Christ is. "That they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves." What is the joy of Christ? You read in Hebrews, the 12 chapter, that "For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne on high". Is that His joy? No. It is His glory, but not the fullness of His joy. What is His joy? This, that He should have with Him His whole church; that He should lead them to His Father and say to His Father: "Behold I and the children whom God hath given Me." That is Christ's joy. It was for this He endured the cross; it was for this He despised the shame. It is in the redemption of the Church, in the individual redemption of believers from their sins and their unbelief, to God, that He finds His satisfaction. "When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." Pleasure He has in redemption, in seeing of the travail of His soul; in poor sinners repenting and seeking for mercy through His Name, He is satisfied. And this joy is to be fulfilled in His people, that they shall be with Himself, that there shall be a completed church, a whole body, a company that no man can number out of every tribe and kindred and nation before the Lamb and the throne worshipping, praising, blessing, adoring, receiving eternally out of His fullness. It is beyond all our expression or beyond all our conception and yet the Scripture discovers it. Paul had it before him in anticipation and he said, "So shall we ever be with the Lord". And the joy of Christ, O the wonder of this; I do feel

it to be a wonder; the joy of the holy Son of God who was in the bosom of the Father from eternity, is this, that He will have His redeemed people with Himself; that He will condescend to need them; need them, not to make up Himself, to be complete, but to make up His mystical body, His bride, and this joy is to be fulfilled in the church. It is to be fulfilled in various parts of it, from the beginning to the consummation. It is begun to be fulfilled in this life. When first a child of God is brought from nature's darkness into God's light, caused to repent of his sins, turn to the Mercy Seat and receives from thence some manifestation of divine mercy, there begins in that sinner somewhat of the fulfilment of this joy. It is a step toward it; yea, more than that, I would say that even where there is spiritual repentance, conviction of sin, the divine life implanted, regeneration, that is a step toward the fulfilment of this joy. Though there is, in the person so dealt with, at the time no experience of the joy - there is experience of the life - but there is joy in heaven, and that is part of the joy. "There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance." Why, my friends, this is very holy and you may, some of you, be shrinking from so holy a subject and think you have no right to think of it; that you, being so vile a sinner, ought not to think of such holy things, but I believe that the commencement of this joy in the earth, the working of it out, is when a person is brought to learn what that meaneth, to love mercy and not sacrifice. Mercy through blood, free mercy, the removal of sin by the death of another. That is the gospel and it is that experience that brings joy into the sinner's heart. And does not this sometimes give to a poor, sorrowing person, joy; the first point that I named as having been spoken by the Lord Jesus, a real manifestation of the Person of the Son of God incarnate? It may not have been given to all here who fear God, but when it is in any degree manifested it produces a most solemn and unctuous and holy joy in the soul and this, in a most feelingly unholy sinner. My friends, the greater the sins appear to us, the more difficult our case appears to us, the more persistent our sins, the more we feel ensnared in our hearts, the more we are tempted by a subtle devil, the more difficulties we have to meet with, the more fear we have that we shall not get through, the more holy joy we shall have in our hearts when we are shown who the Person of the great captain of our salvation is, the holy and eternal and essential Son of

God incarnate. What a foundation this is. "Upon this Rock will I build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it", and a poor sinking, tempest tossed sinner, seeing that, is after being built upon that Rock and says, must say, as he sees it, to the Lord: "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I."

"That they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves." May I say that this is a part of the joy that a poor sinner finds in his heart as he approaches the Lord Jesus Christ at the throne of grace, His Sonship made so real and precious to him as that the terror of the eternal majesty of God is turned into an attraction; that he feels that God - though he may not at the time be able to say Abba Father - he feels in his soul a holy, humble hope that this is so as he realises the Sonship of Christ. I do not know how to express it because my experience is very small on this point. I have had just an inkling of it and it has produced a sensation of unctuous joy in my soul that God, the eternal Father is the Father of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and that He is the Elder Brother. He is not ashamed to call His poor, sinful and redeemed people, brethren. And this is the way I believe in which the people of God are led into the joy of the experience of being adopted into the family of God.

"That they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves." And is this a part of the joy, the love of God, communications of love, the love of God in Christ flowing into the soul in a sense of ineffable peace, coming, without a word, it maybe, but a touch, and you from your soul saying in your very inmost soul, precious Son of God, precious Christ of God, beloved Saviour. Is that part of the joy? Purer, fuller, and more lasting, indeed infinitely so in heaven, but is it not of the same kind? And the Apostle Paul in writing to the Romans on this particular point says that hope, his expectancy of the glory of God, did not make him ashamed because of this thing, that the love of God was shed abroad in his heart. Everything was against his hope as he tells us; hope against hope. But though sin is against hope, though defilement and guilt and darkness and ignorance and temptation, weakness and many, many things are against hope, this thing, the love of God in Christ Jesus, holds hope up and holds the person up who has this hope, and he is not ashamed of his hope. Ashamed of himself, ashamed of his sins sometimes, hardly dares to

hope for God's kindness and goodness, yet this thing, the manifestation of the love of God in Christ - "God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" - this truth in some degree communicated to the person does enable him to hope. Christ's joy was ^{prospective} something before Him. "For the joy that was set before Him", and I may say this, and I do feel this may take in well nigh all stages of Christian experience, that whatever attainment you may have been favoured with in the life of God, you will feel with the Apostle Paul that you have not attained. But wherein you have attained you have felt some little joy in God have you not? To receive in any measure attainment brings joy but joy is mainly fixed upon something that is before us. It was so with him. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable." And yet the little, sweet hope in Christ that you have here is worth more than all the world, but that is only an inkling of it. Perspective joy, joy of things to come in this life and beyond the grave, and it is all founded upon the union with the Son of God that the dear Lord Jesus Christ expresses in this, His holy prayer.

Just one brief word in conclusion and it is this, there is real joy in the soul of a sinner who has made out to him that he is included in that way which the Apostle Paul speaks of in the Hebrews. "We have such an High Priest". The High Priesthood, the intercession of the Lord Jesus, of which this blessed chapter is a holy, given pattern, becomes such a solid encouragement and strength in the soul at times that it is a real matter of unctuous joy to him. A treasury filled with grace, an able, suitable, unchangeable, living, powerful Saviour at God's right hand. You may say, well, what are all these doctrines? What relation have they to me? Well I am glad if you say so, if you do not dismiss it with that word but rather, as seeing the solemn, the tremendous sovereignty and discrimination which the Lord Christ expressed in this, His prayer, I say, if seeing that you are enabled, being drawn by His love, and the glory of His Person and His will and His suitableness, to beseech Him that you may be included in this prayer. "I pray not for the world but for them which Thou hast given Me." "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God but things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children." Now if the Holy Spirit will reveal it to us, that we are inside this prayer, and

united to the dear Redeemer who prayed it, and gives us, as a testimony of it, communion with Him from off the Mercy Seat, why that will take away all that vile enmity that may be in your heart and is in mine by nature against the holy sovereignty of God. He is the only One who can give testimony to this. May He do it in our hearts and get to Himself all the glory.

AMEN.