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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden  
at Shovers Green Anniversary  
on 6 June 1938  
Evening

PHILIPPIANS 4 verses 6 and 7

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing  
by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving  
let your requests be made known unto God. And the  
peace of God, which passeth <sup>all</sup> understanding,  
shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"

This heavenly direction is a way between two terrible extremes, extremes to which we are very liable. One of them is undue anxiety concerning our various matters in life, and endeavouring to carry our own burdens and manage the difficulties which confront us, and the trials with which we are exercised - the sin of independence. The other dangerous gulf is that of carelessness. To both of these extremes we naturally are liable; sometimes to one and sometimes to the other, and both of them evil. And the Lord here, in this merciful, condescending, and very extensive direction, warns His people to walk in a medium - the way between. "Be careful for nothing". Not that we are to dwell carelessly, but that in all the cares which weigh upon us, we are just to take them to the Lord.

Now this is not easy, not quite so simple as may, upon the surface, appear, for before there is any prayer, any going to the Lord with our difficulties, our cares, our burdens and anxieties, we must be brought off ourselves, brought off our own understanding, our own strength, our own wisdom, and altogether off our own resources. That verse of the hymn is shamefully true of us:

Long we either slight or doubt Him  
But when all the means we try  
Prove we cannot do without Him  
Then at last to Him we cry (396)

It is a very solemn mark of our carnality, of our pride, of the stoutness of our hearts, which the Lord brings down by solemn discipline, and makes His people glad to be permitted, and to deem it a wonderful privilege and condescension in God to allow a sinner, to bring his requests and his difficulties and lay them out before Himself.

This word is spoken to the people of God. As we said this morning the Apostle is addressing those in whom God has begun a good work, and one of the cares and burdens and anxieties frequently pressing upon the minds of those in whom this good work has been begun, is a question whether it has been begun, a question whether you have passed from death unto life, whether your spot is the spot of the Lord's children. Seeing that their spot, their heritage, is so wonderful, so great, you can hardly believe it belongs to you. The great truths you were just now singing, very great, very precious to whom they belong, may very greatly try some of you because you may feel in your hearts a solemn lack of assurance that they do belong to you. What are you to do with that anxiety? Some people will say you ought to believe. Others will say, there is the Word of God; trust in it. Some will say you should not be too particular if you have a hope. But the child of God says, nothing can satisfy me but God's own voice; nothing can give me rest until He tells me His Name; nothing can pacify my heart until I know out of His own mouth that I am a child of His, and therefore necessity is upon that person to refer this heavy anxiety to none but the Lord. If a thousand godly persons, saints of the Most High God, were to go to a person upon whom was the anxiety and care of this particular matter, and vehemently declare their belief that it was well with him, it would not satisfy. Nothing can satisfy the soul of a child of God concerning this vast matter, but the witness of the Holy Ghost, and that witness is to be requested.

You find patterns of this in the Scriptures, especially in the Psalms. The best prayer book, the only perfect one that has ever been printed, is the Book of the Psalms, inspired by the Holy Ghost, and I doubt not many of you find a great encouragement and strength in your souls by finding your own desires, your own petitions, put into words for you by the inspiration of the Spirit in the Psalms. But encouragement is one thing; satisfaction is something more. Do not

disparage in any wise the least encouragement you feel in your souls. Some of us have made many mistakes, and that is one of them. It is an unkindness to the Holy Ghost to disregard encouragements because they are not satisfaction. There is something satisfying in the encouragements, but they are not full satisfaction. They give strength, they give patience to wait, they put point and edge to prayer, they give that holy violence of which the Scripture speaks: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force", and all this violence and force and energy comes from God, God the Holy Ghost. I have sensibly felt, and perhaps some of you also have at times, a kind of cloud come over my mind, like a frown of God, on account of one's disregard of some help, some touch, some encouragement given, because it was not all that one wanted. Cherish every touch you get, my friends. You may yet live to value the least evidence, the least token, that the Lord regards you in a way of mercy. But, on the other hand, if the Spirit is at work with you, He will, from time to time, stir you up and not let you rest in anything short of the closest intimacy with Christ, and the fullest assurance of interest in His salvation; without the testimony of God Himself, which is indubitable, that you are His and He is yours. Make request, says the Holy Spirit here by Paul. Do not try to carry this, do not try to assure your own hearts, do not try to deduce from evidences that therefore you are a child of God. Evidences have their value, and that is very great, but it is a false experience that builds for eternity on evidences alone. You cannot climb up to heaven on evidences; you may be strengthened by them, you may be encouraged by them, but you can never rightly rest in them or in any graces of the Spirit. O, it is a sweet thing, a blessed thing, to be able to trace any fruits of the Spirit in your heart! You will find from time to time that the very fruits of the Spirit in your heart make you want more, and that they themselves are not your credentials for heaven. The base on which the child of God is to rest is the grace of God in Christ, but the assurance of interest in that is to be requested. See what the Psalmist said - and do not some of you say it fervently, and from time to time, urgently? - "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation". Nothing but that can fully relieve the mind of the burden of uncertainty and anxiety; nothing is indubitable but that. We read in the Scripture of the "full assurance of faith". We read of the sealing of the Spirit unto the day of redemption. We read that the "Spirit

itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God". Now if the Lord has begun that good work in you, you will not be able to rest until these blessings are in your experience. That does not mean you are to cast away everything else. You are not called upon to do that, though probably each one here will learn, in various measures, that solemn Scripture: "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" It is not an easy thing to get to heaven. Though you will be carried to heaven by the power of saving grace, you will not be carried there without much tribulation and conflict and opposition, and that will be chiefly in your own heart. "Be careful for nothing" says the Holy Ghost. You cannot cast off this care except by prayer, by referring it to the Lord, and you will find, my friends, a relief in doing this, as enabled. A deliberate addressing of God with reverence and godly fear by the help of the Holy Spirit, a taking of your cares to the Lord, is a sure way to relief, and ultimately to deliverance. Not that prayer changes the mind of God, not that it alters His purpose, but it is the method designed by God through which to communicate blessings. The hymnwriter said true when he declared:

Prayer was appointed to convey  
The blessings God designs to give (882)

The Lord could give salvation in all its completeness to a sinner, without that sinner's prayer, were it His will, but it is not His will in His infinite wisdom, and sometimes you may see His wisdom in these methods of grace; they are very admirable. In His wisdom He has designed that His people shall ask. "Ask, and it shall be given you". When He gives a heart to ask He has a heart to give. "Seek, and ye shall find". When He gives a heart to seek, He intends to be found of the seeker. And "Knock and it shall be opened unto you". When He gives the grace to knock and seek entrance, He intends to give to that sinner free access to Himself. He is first. Your requests, your prayers, your sense of need and of desire, are the consequence of His grace, not the cause of it.

"Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication". The Lord, by His servant Jeremiah, says, "With weeping and with supplication will I lead them", by which we are to

understand His teaching in their hearts of themselves, of their need, of their unworthiness. Producing in them grief for sin, and producing the prayer of faith, is His method of leading them on in the ways of salvation. It is an internal work, not an external, superficial organisation or theory. It is something inwrought by the Holy Spirit in the secret recesses of the soul, and an "honourable and glorious work" is the Spirit's work; scorned by professors, hated by the world, loved by the people of God. O, it is a wonderful thing to feel the inworking motions of the Holy Spirit; His holy convictions, the prompting to pray, and discovery of the fulness of Christ. There is an energy, a sacred healthfulness in those instructions, that only those to whom it is given can understand. And sometimes there is a deliberate choice to go to the honourable way of prayer, not only because it is God's method, but because, being God's method, it is so profitable an exercise, for what you get in answer to prayer, even in providential matters, is doubly sweet, and we are not forbidden to pray about providential things; they are often mingled with soul exercise. Here it is: "Every thing by prayer and supplication". The greatest interests, the vastest concerns of your immortal souls, and the most trifling of temporal concerns, may be made, as the Spirit enables, matter for prayer.

"But in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God". In this prayer and supplication, in this making request to God, there is an act of faith. What God promises, the Spirit teaches His people their need of, creates in them a desire for, and causes them to request it of the Lord. The Spirit never prompts people to pray for what the Lord has not promised to bestow. Therefore, one of the things in this way of prayer is real submission to the will of God, and in walking in that submission to the will of God, one thing is sometimes made out to the soul as very sacred, namely, the example you have for it. The greatest example the world has ever seen, or ever will see, of unreserved submission to the will of God, was that of Christ. When the cup, containing what our minds can never conceive of the awful wrath of God against the sins of the Church, was put into His hands by His divine Father, His prayer was: "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me! Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt". Now we have not any submission ready to hand, but if we

are under the instruction of the Spirit, and pray in the Holy Ghost and in Christ's Name, that will be one ingredient in our prayer - submission to the will of God - and very sweet it is to be really brought to submit to the will of God. So, in affliction, in trial, in bitter disappointments, in poignant griefs, in reproaches, in persecutions, in temptations, in mortifications that come to you, when your will, imperious as it is, would assert itself, and your pride would stiffen your neck, then to be enabled by a power, not your own, to fall down flat before God and just make your request to Him: "If Thou wilt, Thou canst; if it be for Thy glory, Lord deliver me from this, bring me out of this trouble, liberate me from this bondage, save me from this enemy, heal this affliction. Submission is a sweet ingredient. When there is no real submission to the will of God, there is no real prayer. You may make requests, and make requests for what you feel to want, but there is no real prayer, and you know when this submission comes, you feel the difference; God is first then. His wisdom, inscrutable but perfect, is before the eye of faith; you see His power, and authority, and infinite resources in Christ. And though you know you are at His disposal, yet until this submission comes, there is no submitting, but when the submission comes, then you fall down, you lay your will before the Lord, you present, with trembling, your requests, humbly enquiring if they accord with the holy, perfect, good, and now acceptable, will of God. Personally, I know of hardly any other state of soul so sweet, so restful, as the prayer of faith and submission. There is an activity about this submission; there is such a realisation of the wisdom, and goodness, and mercy, and faithfulness of the Lord Jesus, that you refer the whole thing to Him: "Let Him do as seemeth Him good; it is the Lord".

And there is another thing, necessary and bestowed by the Lord, in prayer, this making request, namely patience. We want the request granted immediately on our asking, and, alas for us, we either faint, or rebel, or give up, if the prayer is not immediately answered, and that, in the way we mark out for the Lord. The Lord will correct for that and make us see how foolish and proud we are, how unkind to Him and to ourselves, by that. Says the Holy Spirit by the Apostle: "We shall reap in due time, if we faint not". What does that imply? It means that there is a time of watching, and in that time of watching

we are liable, through unbelief, to faint. Therefore we must ask the Lord to hold us up, to enable us to wait and watch unto prayer, according to His Word: "With all perseverance and supplications". Perhaps this is one of the greatest tests of true faith. Look how Abraham's faith was tried! We read: "God tempted Abraham", tested him. He knew the character of his faith and saw the motion of Abraham's heart responding to that first promise, when he said: "Fear not, Abram, I am thy Shield and thy exceeding great Reward"; when God called him His friend and made the promise to him, and Abraham responded with a living faith. But that faith that God saw was tested for many long years, tested till the promised son came, and tested after the promised son had come, by Abraham being commanded to offer up Isaac to the Lord. And so we need patience, the patience of hope. We need grace to persevere in believing in the prayer of faith: "Ye have need of patience", says the Holy Ghost by Paul to the Hebrews, "that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise". After ye have suffered His will, after He has accomplished His will in disciplining you, in trying your faith, "that ye might receive the promise", and for the sustaining of every trial you need patience. "Let your requests be made known unto God".

There is sometimes felt the need of wisdom. What is wisdom? It is the fear of the Lord in departing from the snares of death. What is wisdom? One thing is to know the will of God. He that is wise in his own conceit, God abhors. O, what self-direction has done for some of us! Mercifully, a child of God cannot utterly destroy himself, but I believe that some of us have done what we could. Self-direction is a dreadful evil; doing things in our own wisdom and prudence, without prayer, will be sure to bring bondage and trouble to our souls, pleasant though it may be to be too proud not to manage fairly well. But depend upon it, you will have guilt on your conscience, and the Lord will show you the folly and bring you to own it. Better to say, lead me in Thy truth; guide me by Thy counsel; show me the way wherein I should walk. "If any man lack wisdom" - and who does not who knows the folly, the gross ignorance, the darkness of his natural and fallen understanding - "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God". Do we do that? Friends, do you live a practical religion in secret? Are you compelled by very necessity of circumstances, and enabled, by

the sacred, secret, strengthening promptings of the Spirit, to deliberately pray that the Lord will give you wisdom? We need wisdom to know the will of the Lord, and we need grace, and strength, and submission, to walk in that way when it is discovered, for you may depend upon it, the Lord's way is not the way flesh would choose. The way the Lord chooses for His people is a way of mortification, a way of testing, of tribulation: "In the world ye shall have tribulation". The means of tribulation are varied, but the tribulation itself comes to all the Lord's people, and is it not a mercy? Tribulation is a separating thing; it is the separation of the chaff from the wheat, and that in one's own soul. Sanctified affliction, sanctified trials of various sorts, that is, trials and afflictions in which the Spirit gives the grace of submission and prayer, are wonderful blessings. By means of them the sinner learns a little of what he is as a sinner. He learns a little of the value of grace and of divine faithfulness, both in chastising and in comforting, for afflictions do not always last; the Lord does not always chide, nor for nothing, but for the profit of His people, to bring them to prayer, to His feet, to lay them low and keep them there. Alas, that the old man should be so often resurrected after he has been seemingly mortified, and therefore we need the Lord's patience in administering to us the solemn discipline that some of us have. And, as you are taught this, you will be brought to see the mercy of not being allowed to settle on your lees. There are times when we are sullen and rebellious because of the troubles we get, and O, what a desolate place that is! Repining, rebelling in heart, because of these painful trials that come, one upon the other, until the Lord opens our eyes, humbles our mind, and causes us to see how wholesome it is that the Lord employs these things to do us good. Seldom do we think of prayer, but for trouble. That is a very sad truth; sad, as it is a manifestation of our carnality and sloth, but a blessed truth in regard to this, that the Lord sends sufficient trouble, and then mercifully causes us to call upon His Name in the time of trouble. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

"In every thing"; this means every thing. It embraces your whole life; it means impossibilities, it means the least difficulty, it means every enemy you encounter, every extremity and necessity

into which you can come; it embraces the whole. It is as if the Lord says, now, I am ready to help you, I am ready to do the best a God, with all the resources in heaven and in earth, can do. Ask, make your requests known to God.

We need wisdom in regard to our daily life; we need strength to do our duty, skill to undertake things, and power to accomplish things undertaken. We meet with unexpected difficulties; we are mortals and our mortality is a burden. Everything about us and in us, we may at times very solemnly feel is weakening. The only thing that does not weaken is sin; that is a very sad thing and a great care. You may sometimes feel so weak, so insufficient, so incapable, that you are afraid you will utterly fall and will not rise again. You cannot carry this care, this burden; you cannot face the difficulties with which you are confronted. Your wisdom is used up, your strength, your powers, are gone; there is no strength shut up or left. And with all that, sin is mighty, one of the greatest weaknesses and burdens. What are you to do? Says the Lord, Come to Me, make your requests; I am ready to help and to strengthen. Wait upon Me. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength". "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." Have you proved it? Some have, and the proof of that is a far better mercy than never to have felt weak, never to have felt insufficient.

I take it that the Apostle Paul would, if he could, have escaped the experience he had by the thorn in the flesh. Old nature would not have a thorn in the flesh; mine would not. O, how nature kicks sometimes, repines, rebels, and faints! But there is a way between, a way that the lion's whelp cannot tread, a way that the vulture's eye cannot perceive, but a way in which fools go, in which fools, wayfaring men, travellers to Zion's city, go by the conduct of the blessed Spirit, and that way is grace. "My grace is sufficient for thee." That will do my friends.

"With thanksgiving" Do not leave that out. I think I hinted at it this morning. I have found a cloud upon my spirit, a check upon my prayers, and a kind of fear in my mind that prayer was not received because thanksgiving was lacking. Do not omit thanksgiving; it is good to give thanks. You may be in difficulties, you may say with

Jonah in your haste, you do well to be angry, but on consideration you may see there is much cause to thank the Lord. All the woe that you have is less than you deserve, and than I deserve, and every mercy above what they have in hell is undeserved mercy. The goodness of God does sometimes melt the heart, and you will find, even if you have a hard heart, as you try to thank Him that you are out of hell and pray for a soft heart, He will give it you and give you gratitude. The Lord is good unto them that trust in Him; it is no vain thing to trust in the Lord. He acknowledges, He approves of, the prayer of faith, and of the trembling gratitude and thanksgiving of His people. You will be assailed when you venture to thank Him; the devil may say, it is presumptuous; you do not know He is yours, and he may suggest all manner of things against gratitude, but out it will flow to the Lord.

Well, this will be a life for us; it will last a whole lifetime. Making requests and then receiving answers; taking the answers to Him and thanking Him, and using the answers unto His glory. James has a very solemn word. I have sometimes thought that some of the things that we have requested have been withheld because of a wrong motive, and you know, my friends, my heart, and the Bible says your heart too, is deceitful and desperately wicked, unfathomably deep in its deceit, and we may think we are asking things for the glory of God, when it is to expend them on our lusts, as James says: "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering". "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts". We need the Lord to give us sincerity in seeking His glory, even in praying for blessings, and He will have it; he will give that sincerity. O, it is sweet to feel that simplicity of heart and that genuine desire in your soul for the Lord's glory. Sometimes you make a vow when you pray to the Lord in trouble and say, Lord, if Thou wilt answer me, and deliver me, and bless me, and bring me out of this trouble, then I will never cease praising Thee. It is good to make a vow, but it is better to keep it. Better not to make a vow than to vow and not pay. Have not some of us forgotten to thank Him? Ten lepers cleansed; how many returned to give thanks? One! The nine forgot the Cleanser. Are we better? No, in no wise, only as the Lord adds to His blessing a grateful, a thankful heart to acknowledge His goodness and offer our praise to Him, and it is profitable. I believe one of the sweetest employments

is to be able to thank the Lord and praise His Name for answers to prayer. It may be only a simple thing that the Lord does for you here and there, even a providential matter, but, having prayed for it, and having received an answer to your prayer, it makes that circumstance very sacred, and gives you the warrant and the privilege to thank the Lord for it. There are some Samuels yet. "For this child I prayed". It is good to take what you get from the Lord back to Him with gratitude, and to seek also grace to use what He bestows, whether health and strength or the means of this life, whatever it be, to use it to His glory, because true thanksgiving is not only verbal. We may utter this with our lips and not from our hearts, but if, with our hearts, we are grateful to the Lord for His mercies, then it will affect our lives; we shall not use what He gives us to ourselves, but we shall believe, and act accordingly, that what we are and what we possess is not our own. O, to be disposed of by the Lord, and to "commit ourselves to the Lord in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." But the chief thing is the blessing of grace and salvation.

All creatures to His bounty owe  
Their being and their breath  
But greatest gratitude should flow  
In men redeemed from death

And there is a promise attached to this, not of a blessing earned by the labour of a slave. Prayer is the irksome task of a slave in those who have no true religion. It is the duty of a religious person, irksome; and also it is often that to the people of God when grace does not prevail, but when grace is active it is a privilege to a saint, nor does he expect to earn the blessing by prayer. It is a mercy to be allowed to pray. But in this way of prayer, there is peace. "And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus". Peace is a very sweet thing. There is no peace in this world; never was less than today. The glitter, and glamour, and turmoil, and wickedness about us, and in our own nature too; there is no rest here, no peace here. "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me" -Jesus Christ, your all-sufficient Friend and Saviour - "ye shall have peace." The peace of God shall keep, garrison, watch over, your

hearts and minds. The word "keep" here is a very peculiar word. I believe only in two other places in the New Testament is this word used that is here translated "keep". One place is that in Peter "Kept by the power of God, through faith", and the other is where they let Paul down from Damascus in a basket, and he says the city was "kept with a garrison", and the word means that. This peace of God watches over, preserves, and keeps, or garrisons, the mind in the midst of trouble and danger. The peace of God; it is a holy peace; it passes all understanding because it does not depend upon, and often seems entirely contradictory to, circumstances. You may sometimes understand a little - it is nice to understand it experimentally - what the hymnwriter means

Calm amidst tempestuous motion  
Knowing that the Lord is nigh

Circumstances do affect us greatly, but when this peace of God passing all understanding garrisons our hearts and minds, then we are not unduly affected by circumstances.

"Through Christ Jesus". Every blessing comes through Christ Jesus

Every blessing, great or small,  
Comes to Zion through Him

and may this rich blessing of the gospel come to us. Look not for an easy path, my friends. As you are the people of God you will have difficulties, but if God be for you, and if He hold you to the path of prayer, it will be well. May the Lord grant it for His Name's sake.

AMEN.