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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Blunsdon Hill
on Wednesday 7 May 1958

Psalm 139 v 23 and 24

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me
and know my thoughts: And see if there
be any wicked way in me, and lead me
in the way everlasting"

I said this afternoon these words are the expression of an honest soul, the desire of one who cannot trust himself, but who seeks the Lord's merciful help to put him right where he is wrong. It is an evidence of gracious humility thus to refer one's case to the Lord, and it is a manifestation of the Lord's condescension to hear such a prayer and put people right where they are wrong. It will be our mercy if we are really honest before Him in praying this prayer, and also if we can feel honestly that we do hate with perfect hatred all Christ's enemies, particularly the enemies against Him in our own hearts.

There may be many wrong ways with us, many wicked ways; that is to say (margin) "ways of pain"; but I do not propose to elaborate on that much this evening, except to say this: one "way of pain" which leads only to bondage and trouble we may inwardly be in, and that is a way of legality. We may be walking inwardly in a legal spirit. It is an error. Legality will do us no good; and yet if we have no regard to the law of God we are wrong there. What we need is for the Lord to show us the preceptive teaching of His Word in the light of the gospel, and to inspire in our hearts that motive of obedience contained in the Word we just now read: The Lord Jesus said to His disciples: "If ye love Me, keep my commandments". Now that is the rule of all gospel obedience. You may turn the precepts into legal tasks, and you may even think that because you walk in some way outwardly answerable to the precepts you are therefore right. You may be outwardly right among men, but wrong in spirit; and I am persuaded of this, that this legality is one great cause of bondage in many in whom there is the grace of God. We do need the Lord to deliver us from it, and to fill us

with gospel motives. Nothing can enlarge our hearts but the gospel, which is not a disregard of the law, but a knowledge of the law as fulfilled meritoriously by the Lord of life and glory, and as He suffered all its sanctions to take away His people's sin.

But to try to speak a little more this evening of the last clause: "And lead me in the way everlasting." That, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ; as He Himself said, "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." It is an everlasting way. It is a way of life, a way of prayer, a way of covenant love, a way of heavenly peace; and yet in it there is much conflict, much difficulty. But the Lord will overcome all the difficulties for those who walk by faith and not by sight.

But we need leading into it; and that implies what every person rightly exercised knows: he cannot walk in it apart from divine leading, apart from the Holy Spirit's guidance and unctuous instruction.

I mentioned doctrine. There is a sacred doctrine, the doctrine of Christ and sometimes the Lord leads in doctrine when He suspends the comfortable experience of the truth. You may not quite enter into that, some of you; others will. "Whom shall He make to understand doctrine? - them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts". It is a place of solemn experience. There are times when conviction of sin is so heavy, when the experience of indwelling sin is so solemn, when temptation is so fierce, when unbelief is so strong, that the only thing that will meet the turn is to have the doctrine of Christ revealed. You have to cast yourself, as it were, the Lord helping you, upon the sheer doctrine of Christ. And first of all, it is this, His co-equality with His Father.

Those remarkable words, the opening sentences of the 14 John, just now read, are full with doctrine expressed graciously and encouragingly to those who are troubled in their hearts concerning God and His perfections, and their sins: "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in Me. Not another God, but God as revealing Himself in the Person of Immanuel, God with us. Everything is there really. He is the way, the truth and the life and

if we get a leading into this by the Spirit we shall find it strong consolation, a rock, a foundation upon which we can stand every storm. As it is said in the 28 Isaiah - "Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." Unbelief is always in a hurry, but true faith is a sedate principle, and true faith exercised in a poor, troubled, weakling sinner, has only one object, only one foundation, and that is the Person and the work of Christ. Bunyan, I think, said his Pastor, Mr Gifford, advised him to pray that the Lord would set him down well in the doctrine of Christ. "For" he said, "whatever you take on trust will fail you when you most need it".

"Lead me into the way everlasting". Lead me by faith into the mystery of Christ; the mystery of His Person, the Son of God equal with the Father. We can never enter into it but by the Holy Spirit's guidance. Men may speculate about it and theorise about it, and try to explain it by human terms and human relationships, but it all comes to nothing. It will all go when temptation comes. When some heated winds of doctrine blow, all that is gone. Establishment in the truth is only by the Holy Spirit. O, do you pray that the Lord will lead you into this? into the truth of Christ's eternal Sonship, His eternal Deity, His co-equality with His Father?

Allied to that truth is the sacred and fundamental doctrine of the Trinity and the covenant of grace into which they entered before the world was. There could never be a way for sinners to go to God and to heaven unless that way had been devised by God Himself before the world was - one of God's acts in Himself, the council of peace that was held in eternity in respect to the salvation of the election of grace. "Lead me" into this, into a believing contemplation of that divine council before the world was. It is in the Bible. We should never imagine it, were it not there. It is beyond all the possibility of human thought to contrive such a plan and such a decree, but there it is in the Bible; only it is one thing to read it, say in the 1 chapter to the Ephesians and the 8 to the Romans, and another thing to be led in it by the Holy Ghost. The latter experience is a settling thing. The truth of it becomes a solid thing in your heart, the sacred solidity that you feel about this covenant.

Then the next point is this the setting up by the Lord of a Mediator, to be revealed in due time, fore-ordained before the world was, but revealed in due time. That is, the coming forth of the Son of God into human nature prepared for Him to inhabit. This is a truth, not a theory, not a notion, but a real truth. And when people are led into it they see in the Person of Christ the love of God, the grace of God, the wisdom of God, the mercy of God, the justice of God, the power of God, all concentrated there; for "it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell".

Next there is the doctrine of His obedience, His Priesthood and the cross. "Lead me" into that! O, my friends, we often think about it and speak about it and read about it, but does the Lord lead us into it? He does His own people, and it is only there that they can find peace with God. Only through the precious, redeeming sacrifice of the Lord Jesus can they ever entertain a hope of escaping hell and reaching heaven. Sometimes you have to cast yourself without any present feeling upon that sacred Truth, upon the Rock of Ages, sink or swim.

Another doctrine is the doctrine of election, a stumbling block to many through pride and prejudice and carnal reason. If our carnal reason prevails it will be proved to be a "way of pain" to us. an evil thing, for true religion, though it is not contrary to sound reason, is Heaven high above carnal reason, and the doctrine of Christ's precious death is one of those doctrines that only faith can receive and only the Holy Spirit can reveal. Ah, but you have to cast yourself upon Him, whether you have an interest or not! Sometimes people are tempted about election. You may, some of you, be perfectly persuaded that the Lord has a people, and that that people are blessed, that they are saved. But the point you want to be at is this, "Am I one of them?" And who can tell you? Only God Himself, only the Lord Jesus by His Spirit. And there is a warrant in the Word of God for every convicted sinner, whether he knows himself as a chosen one or not, to go to God through Jesus Christ for the pardon ^{of} his sin, and therein the proof of his being an elected vessel of mercy. Now this is a venture of faith, and I believe the Lord does lead His people to make that venture. Have you made it? Have you solemnly

taken your soul in your hand, as it were, and gone to the Lord in view of a vast eternity, confessing your sins, pleading the blood of Christ, asking to be forgiven? Whether accepted or not, this is the last resolve. Ah, that is a wonderful resolve! Only those led of God can make it

I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try,
For if I stay away, I know
I must for ever die.

But when people are led thus, they are led to a place where grace abounds and that is the throne of grace. O, Jesus occupies that throne. The blessed Person of incarnate Deity now glorified, who once occupied the cross as a suffering Surety and there put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, is enthroned on high, and occupies that throne to dispense the blessings of the covenant of grace. You see the unity there is in the truth, the eternity of the truth, the unchangeability of it. The covenant made in eternity now in the hands of the Mediator who was the Substitute for His people on the cross. He it is who hears the prayer of coming sinners and dispenses those blessings that they are taught their need of and to seek after.

Thou art coming to a King;
Large petitions with thee bring

And who can pray except they are taught by the Spirit of Christ? "We know not what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered". Lead me in this way Lord.

If He does, you will find a sacred Friendship in Christ. You will find you are coming, not only to a King, but to an almighty Friend. O, it is wonderful to know a little of that condescending familiarity of Christ, where He speaks to poor unworthy sinners - as He does! He speaks to poor sinners, invites them to Himself, and blesses them with the forgiveness of their sins, and assures them that He has redeemed them with His blood and that He is their Advocate with the Father. Lead me in this way! "No man cometh unto the Father

but by Me". And I believe in this way of prayer, believing prayer, as led by the Lord the Spirit, people learn the doctrine, experimentally, of the Trinity. And that is very wonderful because it embraces in experience the doctrine of the grace of adoption. Our relationship to God in Christ by adoption is made out when people are led to walk in the precepts and by prayer. It is the Holy Spirit who bears witness with those people that they are the children of God.

That comes very close. You remember what the Lord Jesus said to His disciples - "I ascend unto My Father and your Father; and to My God and your God". O what words! And if the Lord should grant to you and to me a sacred realisation of an interest in that, in Him as our Forerunner, our Representative, our Elder Brother, not ashamed to call us brethren, why, the love of God is there, liberty is there, and you will find it to be a sacred leading, a way of holiness. In the 35 Isaiah it is said of the highway - "The unclean shall not pass over it" and yet it is only convicted sinners who feel the pollution of their sin that can walk in it, and in walking in it they are cleansed and brought near to God in reconciliation and in that relationship.

But never will that relationship be made out to us while we are walking crookedly. I want to try to keep things clear as the Lord may help. Our walking in the precepts of the gospel is not meritorious, and yet if we neglect the precepts and walk crookedly, we shall find the Lord leaves us in bondage and darkness and doubt. I would not dare to suggest for one moment that you can automatically walk in the precept and therein claim the blessing, but I would say this, the Lord has connected a promise of the blessing with obedience to the precept. But all the merit is in Christ's obedience, not in yours. For instance, you take that word "Come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." What a leading that is! The obedience is the obedience of faith, and the blessing is the blessing of grace; and to know and feel something of adopting grace and a relationship to God in Christ, how high a privilege!

Then that brings in the inheritance. From eternity God has entailed on His elect people an everlasting inheritance, an unspeakably blessed inheritance, reaching beyond all thought, all communicable blessedness. Think of it! An inheritance of which Peter says, it is "undefiled and fadeth not away". Perfect holiness, perfect happiness, conformity to God, a holy, happy state of bliss! "I go to prepare a place for you", said the Lord Jesus. And this inheritance belongs to the children, the children who, by divine grace, are quickened into divine life and caused to flee from the wrath to come, to lay hold upon the hope set before them. The Lord guides them, and gives them in this life little earnestings of that inheritance, touches of His goodness and of His love; deals with them as with sons. And that, dear friends, will include all the vicissitudes of this life of pilgrimage. "The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" it is said. Why? Because the Lord leads them. It may be in darksome paths providentially, circumstantially. "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." Precious promises! And says Peter, "By these ye are partakers of the divine nature." Think of it! If you have a promise sealed home upon your heart, by the Spirit of grace, you are a partaker of the divine nature! That is to say, you are a new creation in Christ Jesus, "created in righteousness and true holiness," after the image of Him that created Him. Gadsby said - truly a word that needs explanation lest we stumble, but it was a true word

Holy men, and only they
Walk in this blest way of love

Not holy in themselves by nature, but holy as possessed of an interest in Christ, as being born again and made new creatures in Christ Jesus.

Then again, this leading in the way everlasting is a leading in the will of God. The will of God in Christ Jesus concerning His elect people is to do them eternally good and to turn to a good account all the incidental difficulties and changing scenes of their pilgrimage.

And what does that mean? Why, it means this, if the Lord leads us in the way everlasting we shall be brought continually to the throne of grace in our troubles to wait upon the Lord for help, to call upon His Name in time of trouble, and to submit to His will in every dispensation. "God dealeth with you," says Paul, "as with sons". With whom? With those who endure chastisement. Again, the Lord Jesus declared after His resurrection and ascension into heaven - He declared it from heaven - "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore and repent." Do you ask Him to do that for you? so to sanctify the dispensations of His hand as to cleanse you from your sin, to bring you to new repentance, and to prove to you that you are a child by His thus dealing with you, and that it is in love and covenant goodness and not in anger that He thus deals with you? Lead me. Is not this infinitely better than seeking to have merely a smooth path through life? One of our greatest follies, in my view, is to be continually trying to avoid trouble, to try to find the easy pathway through this world. Well, what did the Lord Jesus say? "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but in Me peace; be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." If the Lord lead you in that word you will not escape tribulation, but you will know that in tribulation there is profit, and there is peace in Him, and it is everlasting peace.

"Lead me in the way everlasting". It has a commencement here, but it will last eternally. All the conflicts that a child of God has, all the temptation he shall ever know, all the sorrow and trial that he will experience, is in this life. None in the life to come! That is a blessed hope. My friends, is your hope fixed on heaven? and do you sometimes feel, in this body pent, a groaning, not only to get out of trouble, but to be rid of sin? I believe that is one of the most sacred feelings a child of God can have, such a hope of reaching heaven because it is a place of holiness. It makes you long to be there. And what will that do? It will make you walk tenderly, it will make you fear sin more than trouble, it will make you fear all the pitfalls and snares and allurements of this poor world. "Lead me in the way everlasting."

Are we pilgrims? Has the Lord made Himself our object of attraction? Can we, dare we, say or hope we may say what Gadsby said

of Christ,

In Him there dwells a treasure all divine
And matchless grace has made that treasure mine

If so, the one thing you will want will be to have in this life as much acquaintance with the Lord Jesus, as close a walk with Him, as possible. And what will that involve? It will involve a putting off the deeds of the body, a putting off of the old man. Nature hates this; but grace loves it. The child of God has two armies. Paul well knew that. Every child of God knows it in his measure. "What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies." The Apostle said, "When I would do good evil is present with me. I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind". Very painful, very solemn! But he did not lie down there and rest. No, he did not make that his credential for heaven. What he did was to pray for deliverance. "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death: I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." He was led that way, the way of deliverance from sin to holiness and heaven.

Well, dear friends, this is a word most unpopular today. We love to settle down, we like nothing but comfort in religion, but it will be our mercy if the Lord brings us to this point, to pray that He will condescend to search our hearts, try us, and know our thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in us. Not that He does not know, but that He will discover it to us. I am very suspicious about myself sometimes, lest ease-loving nature should prevail, and lest one should unwittingly cover up something that is unprofitable, that is erroneous, wrong in spirit, leading from the Lord. Therefore I have to pray this prayer many times "Search me, O Lord; ransack my heart, my conscience; help me to come to the light, and show me wherein Thou contendest with me, and do not condemn me, but forgive me, and bless me, and lead me in a right path, in a plain path."

If the Lord leads us we shall be well led. If He keeps us we shall be kept infallibly. And all this means a life of humble dependence, a life of leaning hard upon the wisdom and love and mercy and grace of God in Christ. And is there a better life we can live? Is there anyone else upon whom we can lean, who can infallibly hold

us up and hold us on? You will find as He leads you sometimes He will make the promises a sweet support to your heart. He will draw nigh to you in them. Then you know that He is with you. As David said in this Psalm "How precious are Thy thoughts unto me O God! how great is the sum of them". You may sometimes feel, as you are led along in trial and difficulty and perplexity, what David felt in another Psalm. He said "In the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul." And he was supported by a consideration of who the Lord Jesus was, that notwithstanding the tumultuation of his thoughts he had a delightful consideration of the Lord. There was a solace in it. And so it is! O, if the Lord is with us it will be well! - if we are led to consider His immutability, His faithfulness, His unchanging, undying love, His eternal redemption obtained by the blood of Christ, His everlasting righteousness wrought out and brought in, and His ever prevailing intercession at the right hand of God. Is He precious to you? Can you say it is the one thing that you want, to know Him, to have secret communion with Him, to follow Him fully, to trust His grace, to enjoy His presence, to drink into His Spirit, to be made for His glory?

Well, may the Lord grant us this prayer and an answer to it! It will bring trouble; we shall have discoveries of what is in our own hearts; we may get some surprises; but O, there is plenteous redemption in Him. Never be afraid, my friends of convictions. Never be afraid of looking at the things the Lord shows you in yourself. To turn away from it is the height of folly. To come to the light and acknowledge and pray for delivering mercy is the wisdom of grace. And then the end - the way everlasting, everlasting kindness, everlasting love, everlasting life, eternal glory. We shall soon be done with this world, we shall soon be in eternity. Which way are we going? Are we in this way everlasting? Has the Lord put our feet down in the doctrine of His Word? Has He given us union? Because if we only have a detached notion of the doctrine without union to Him, that will not save our souls. But if He leads us in this way we shall be united to Him in it. O then He will never leave us! What a great promise that is - "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me"! And will it not be good at the end to find Him with us, to have a fulfilment of that word just now read "I will come again

and receive you unto Myself that where I am there ye may be also"

AMEN.