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JG/4

Sermon preached by Mr J.Gosden at "Ebenezer" chapel Clapham  
on Wednesday evening 19.3.58

Text: Psalm 27.8 and 9

"When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek. Hide not Thy face far from me; put not Thy servant away in anger: Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation".

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How remarkable are the changes in the Psalms respecting the experience of the people of God. In one short Psalm you find the praying person low down in desolation and trouble and a few verses further on the same to rise up in faith and then presently you find him returning thanks to the Lord for hearing prayer. What a wonderful prayer book is the book of Psalms and if we are living people and our religion comes from heaven no doubt we shall find from time to time our own soul's feelings and experience in these wonderful records of the soul experience of the people of God.

He begins this Psalm on a note of confidence, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" He was strong in faith then, feelingly, all because of the Lord's presence and the knowledge of His salvation. It is one thing to feel even for a little time strengthened and fortified in mind by some sense of the Lord's presence, the light of His countenance and a solid belief of an interest in His great salvation. When a feeling sense of it is in the heart nothing can daunt a sinner, but he did not live there, did not stay in the same spot, but was exercised in many things. The one thing he did want, what every child of God wants when healthy in soul, was the abiding presence of the Lord. "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple". He loved the habitation of the Lord's house, the place where God's honour dwells; - a true religion in the soul will have the same effect. Outward form and ceremony and all show of religion, that which many people are pleased and satisfied in, never satisfy a living soul. Religion is not merely a formula, it is not a duty merely, a performance, it is a life, it is the soul's exercise before God and communications from God to the soul. If we have nothing of that and our religion is merely a detached set of notions then we must be dead; but hunger and thirst and desire, want and need, -these are the things that appertain to true religion as is evidenced in the Psalms and in the case of every person taught by the Holy Ghost. There is a centre in real religion and that is the Person of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the great object of worship and of trust.

In the text the Psalmist acknowledges the source even of any motion Godward

to be in God and that is a very important principle in real religion. We perhaps do not always perceive the truth of it, but every motion Godward is from a power exercised from heaven. Nature can go a long way in religion but never take a person one step Godward or heaven-ward; all our springs are in God. "When Thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek". It is a wonderful mercy, a greater mercy than many realise, to be a truly seeking person, seeking after God and the knowledge of God. "When shall I come and appear before God?", said David. Have you been made a seeker? We hear a good deal, at times, of people talking to young folk and speaking of them or to them as being seekers; God forbid that we should discourage any person in any right thing, but to be a seeker after God is a rarity, it is the consequence of divine election, it is the effect of a divine power. It is one thing to turn to religion and another thing to seek after God. O this is one point about a seeker, he will never be satisfied with his seeking, never be satisfied because he is a seeker, never be satisfied without finding what he seeks. How can we be satisfied with hunger? How can we be satisfied with desire? The natural man cannot be satisfied with desire or hunger and therefore if we are made truly seeking people we shall seek until we find. It is a wonderful promise of Christ, very encouraging to poor people who know what they want and cannot obtain it, "Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened" (Matt.7.7) This is Christ's own word and when He sets a person seeking He does not mock them, "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain; I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right". (Is.45.19) You seeking people here who have not attained to what you want, who know two things, and perhaps nothing else in religion, you may know a good deal, too much, of outward religion; you may know two things by divine teaching, you know you are a sinner and you know you need a Saviour. If that is so the Lord has done something for you which will issue in eternal blessedness. Effectual conviction of sin with the Spirit's leading that convicted person to the Lord Jesus to obtain salvation through His merit, this is the work of God that will never fail of a good issue. Blessed be God for the Holy Ghost; He is the efficient worker in the soul of all experimental religion, including the first work of regeneration whereby a person is brought to feel his need, know his danger and flee from the wrath to come.

"When Thou saidst, Seek ye my face"; often times in early days when the Lord deals with people and they do not know what is the matter with them, they get disconsolate, everything seems turned upside down, they lose an interest in temporal things, cannot find satisfaction in them, they walk here and there seeking rest and cannot find it in religion, in the world; they may turn here and there, immerse themselves in different occasions and occupations but there is no rest because the Lord determines that His people shall find rest and satisfaction only

in Himself. "When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek". It is heart work; yes, the true religion of Jesus Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, is in the heart, that is where the exercise is, not in the brain only, though of course the understanding is influenced and illuminated, the Lord deals with His people through their understanding and in their affections and how their heart does go out after God, after His salvation, to be made one of the least saints. I believe some young people in better days than these have been attracted by beholding the gracious deportment and observing the spirit of the Lord's people and have longed to be like them. Have you felt that, some of you? Have you looked upon a child of God and felt O that I was like that person, possessed their grace, knew their God, enjoyed the blessings they enjoy of salvation? It will become a personal thing, and when it becomes a personal thing, it will separate a person for the time being, though perhaps they will seek the companionship of the Lord's people. Their own case will be their own case. You will not be able to live upon the faith of another, will want to hear the Lord for yourself, find Him in your heart, receive in your conscience the forgiveness of your sins and be possessed of the Lord Jesus as your Redeemer and Almighty Friend. So you seek. What do you seek? Well one thing I believe that the child of God, the exercised sinner taught of the Spirit, will seek diligently is the Word of God. I have lately felt myself that we have, some of us, thought too little of the written Word of God. Jesus said, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me." (John 5.39) Do not look for something in the air. We speak, and speak properly, of the revelation of Christ, but that is not some vision, something in us; it is something in the Scriptures. The Lord is revealed there, He speaks there, shines there, He comes there and brings His people there. There is a finding of Him in the blessed Word. How wonderful it is to know it, to see Him in the glass of the Gospel, first of all as attractive, as suitable, altogether sufficient if we are made to possess Him who is found in the Scriptures. If you have found Him in the Word of God by the light and life of the Spirit He has made Himself precious to you in His person and work spoken on your heart. I do not want to be fanciful but there is such a thing as beholding the Lord's glory in the glass of the Gospel; that attracts a person to the Lord. I know we may see the glory of God in that forbidding light of Sinai that fills us with dread and I think it is true to say that everyone who is taught to seek the Lord's face will have some knowledge of that forbidding light, God out of Christ in a broken law. This would only make a person feel his great need of a refuge and Christ is that refuge in the Gospel. Poor sinners fleeing from the wrath to come are attracted by Him and He speaks. He speaks by the Spirit through the Scriptures, He is found there. Did He ever speak to you? Did He ever shine upon you? "Look Thou upon me, and be merciful

unto me, as Thou usest to do unto those that love Thy name." (Ps.119.132) Sometimes you may see a light shining through the Scriptures like the countenance of the Lord or hear in your heart His voice through the Scriptures speaking to you kindly, and one thing is this, you will seek to hear His pardoning voice as you were singing in your first hymn (941), you will look for that. You will be looking to receive into your heart a pardoning smile. Wonderful it is, the shining forth of the Lord's countenance into the conscience. "When Thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek". It is an attracting thing, the face of the Lord, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is a greater glory than any other glory that is revealed of God. The glory of the law is wonderful but the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is more wonderful still, it is a glory of grace, the glory that is in salvation. "Surely His salvation is nigh them that fear Him; that glory may dwell in our land". You may feel sometimes a little touch of that glory and see how God is glorified in and through Jesus Christ by the salvation of poor sinners such as you are. Then you will want it brought home, to come to you, to know and feel that He has saved you with an everlasting salvation. You will seek Him in the Scriptures. O you young people, the Lord help you and give you gracious, believing diligence in the Scriptures. I believe the enemy has a good deal to do with our neglect of the Word of God, alas that it should be so. If we are negligent in the Scriptures we may profess religion but that negligence will be manifest in our spiritual life even if we possess the life of God.

Then there will be a seeking of Him at the throne of grace, that secret spot; it is the Spirit that conducts a poor sinner there, and there will always be a reason for going, a sense of need; prayer is the expression of the soul before God, of need, it is a pouring out of the heart, the upward glancing of an eye to God in Christ. There is no prayer without a Mediator, no access to God without the Lord Jesus, the Man at God's right hand. It is a wonderful thing to find a way to God through Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus said, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me". (John 14.7) Do you ever come that way by the leading of the Spirit, find access by grace, unburden your conscience and plead with God for mercy through blood? "My heart said unto Thee, Thy face, LORD will I seek", but as I have hinted, and as this word implies, there are difficulties in seeking the Lord's face, obstructions inward and outward.

Another help in seeking the Lord's face provided by the Lord is the means of grace. We may over estimate public worship and yet on the other hand what sad lack it would be if you were deprived of meeting together with a view to worship and seeking the Lord. What is public religion and what are public services without the Lord's presence? Just formality. I would venture to say that, if we are satisfied with that, there is something seriously wrong in our religion. It is

well when there is a pinching hunger and thirst for God, when He is so needed and so desired that we go up to the Lord's house with ejaculatory prayers, seeking the Lord to be with us as He has promised us. Perhaps some of you have had a great deal of difficulty to get to services. I can remember in my early days when I lodged close to the chapel when I trust my heart was really set upon seeking God, no inconvenience would stand in the way of attending the service, but the service without the Lord's presence and blessing was nothing. The Lord will bless the means; I trust He does here from time to time in some of your hearts, He is not always absent, not always silent, the services not always dry, are they, not always dead. It is wonderful to get a touch, a glimpse, a crumb of mercy and even to get a reproof is something, as long as the Lord is not silent.

"Thy face, LORD will I seek". Then comes this deprecation of the Lord hiding His face. "Hide not Thy face far from me". There is nothing perhaps more discouraging and trying to a child of God than to find his mind beclouded and the Lord not shining, to find everything in a fog as it were. You read the Bible and gather nothing, see nothing of the Lord's goodness in the Scriptures. It may be you go to the throne of grace and there seems a barrier there, no entrance, no access, and the services of God's house barren, futile, wearisome. How painful it is to a child of God. A formalist knows nothing of this pain and trouble, he is satisfied with his own self-contained religion but a child of God cannot do without the Lord. The implication here is that, whereas we can provoke the Lord to hide His face; we cannot penetrate the cloud we make between Him and us, only He can do that. It is His sovereign prerogative and yet there is in this deprecation of the Psalmist living faith in the Lord Jesus; though a cloud is between, yet the dear man looks up to the Lord and deprecates that cloud as the Psalmist in the 80th. Psalm who said, "O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth". He dwells there, do you believe it? Has the Lord given you faith in an exalted Redeemer, that blessed God-Man who now is exalted at the mercy seat, who once lay down His precious life for His people? The more you believe He is there, the more you will want to have communion with Him.

"Hide not Thy face far from me". This seems to bring in somewhat of experimental religion. There are times you may know when, although you do not get that distinct sense of the Lord's presence, yet He seems not very far off. You may have an intimation, a little inkling of His presence, hear the rustling of His goings, you know what I mean, any intimation of the Lord. It strengthens your faith, puts you into anticipation, perhaps the Lord is coming. A few weeks ago I got a touch, I trust, in that word, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (John 14.27) and I thought I was going to have a rich, overwhelming blessing, but it seemed to come and go as if the Lord passed by and left that

little touch. He was not far from me, I did not get what I wanted but I got that touch and I trust it had an influence. Here he says, "Hide not thy face far from me". There are times when the Lord seems gone, as if you have lost Him, He is far off, you cannot perceive Him, like Job. Poor Job, blessed Job, said, "O that I knew where I might find Him". He looked behind and before, on the right hand and on the left hand he could not perceive Him, but he believed in Him, he needed Him and his belief and need kept him at the matter, "O that I knew where I might find Him"; he knew what he would do when he found Him. You may say that in your spirit sometimes, Lord do bring me near, do permit me to lay my case before Thee, do come and visit my soul and let me confess my sins and receive afresh Thy mercy. Job, at that time was strong in faith, he believed that the Lord was accomplishing that for him which would issue ultimately in sanctifying grace. "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." It is one thing to be patient in waiting for the Lord and a different thing to rest satisfied without Him; the latter does not belong to the exercise of grace.

"Hide not Thy face far from me, put not Thy servant away in anger". This is a stage lower. Sometimes you sit and meditate on your case and if the Lord has been silent and distant for a long time you may begin to meditate and wonder whether He will ever come again, whether He will cast you off, put you away, abandon you; that would be a serious matter. You will not be able to fold your arms and say, the Lord has said He never will, you will want to be satisfied that that promise is yours. It will be a great test of your faith and you bring it to Him, cry unto Him as in the 28th. Psalm, "Unto Thee will I cry, O LORD my rock; be not silent to me". God's people cry for the Lord in the secret of their heart when He is absent from them. "Put not Thy servant away in anger". O if the Lord should show His displeasure and permit us to go mourning to the grave in darkness and let us die in the dark, how solemn it would be. "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living". His hope was maintained and that hope caused him to cry out and wait and watch for the Lord's coming and deprecate being put far away in anger. You might truly say to the Lord we deserve His anger if you look at your heart, your life, your mistakes, your omissions, your wrong spirit, your innumerable transgressions. No wonder if He will put us away in anger but you will deprecate it, no child of God will be made willing to be cast away. It is painful to come to points sometimes. You will find you cast yourself upon the Lord waiting for His coming. "Thou hast been my help"; what a mercy to be able to say with all that we are, with all our sins to look back on, "Thou hast been my help".

The Lord said to Ephraim, "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities." What did it signify? I believe that it signified this, that although we cannot live upon past experience, the

helps the Lord has given us are to be recorded and remembered as helpful. When I look at past helps and look at my declension, sad backslidings, the many sinnings against love and blood this almost seems to emphasise the fear of being cast away and yet it does not, because the faithfulness of the Lord is involved.

"Did Jesus once upon me shine?  
Then Jesus is for ever mine."

That is a blessed truth but not to be abused to lull you to sleep without His presence but to encourage you to wait for another shining.

"Thou hast been my help", it is profitable, it is humbling, softening to the heart and sanctifying to the spirit, when you can remember by the Spirit's help past things, past promises. Has He ever spoken to you? Has He ever said to you, "Because I live ye shall live also"? Has He said to you "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee." (Is.41.14) Has He ever said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee"? O some words in this blessed Book are not only printed in the pages but burnt on some hearts and you are wealthy people, rich people, spiritually, upon whose heart the Lord has engraven any promise in blessed truth. It is a covenant promise, "I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them." (Hebrews 10.16)

"Thou hast been my help, leave me not". O if the Lord left us what would become of us? Personally, if He left us what could possibly keep us from despair, from falling into sin, from making shipwreck of faith. "Leave me not". If He leaves us to ourselves woe be to us, if He leaves us to our enemies and Satan's temptations then we are undone. "Leave me not", and if He leaves a people, what is left but form, if that remains. He speaks here, "leave me not" as if he should say, leave me not a moment. That is a wonderful promise in Isaiah, a blessed promise to be pleaded by people who dread being left of the Lord. The Lord said he would keep His vineyard, "I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day" - every moment, never intermitting His watchful care and love toward His people. It is not often we feel it, but you will deprecate being left, especially in trouble, to any sin, to rebellion and unbelief and Satan's temptations. "Leave me not, neither forsake me". To be left and to be forsaken are two suggestions, as it were, and the Lord's people deprecate being left for a moment. I have looked at that word in John; it has made my heart long to experience the fulfilment of it. "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him" - dwell with him. If He dwells with us that will be well, and has He not promised to dwell with His people? Look for it friends, whatever we lack and lose if only the Lord is with us, abidingly, if He makes His habitation with us and takes us for Himself and allows us to claim Him for ourselves, that is the best we can have here below, the world can go. What is the world to me,

"Compared with Christ, in all beside  
 No comeliness I see;  
 The one thing needful, dearest Lord,  
 Is to be one with Thee."

The world is a wilderness without Christ but with Christ the wilderness blossoms as a rose.

"Neither forsake me, O God of my salvation". It is all in Him, in the Lord is the salvation of Israel. Is He the God of your salvation? Has He made it known to you, given you faith to believe in Him as the Author of eternal salvation, accomplished by His precious death, and assured you by His blessed Spirit that He will not be in heaven and leave His people for whom He died to be a prey to sin and Satan? No, He will bring them at last to Himself. The Lord teach us to seek Him in the means of grace, in the word of grace, at the throne of grace; and when He grants us a little of His presence and union with Him we shall have heaven and we shall want to praise Him then and we shall want to be without sin. When you get a blessing from the Lord it emphasises the heinousness of sin, it endears the Lord Jesus to your heart and you want to be with Him. It may be the Lord blesses His people to make them His witnesses. He could take His people to heaven immediately He blesses them and satisfies them with His mercy, but it pleased Him to keep them here below for a time. Very solemn it is and yet very blessed; solemn because of the trial of faith. When I was blessed in my early days I wanted to get to heaven and believed I should do in due time and the anticipation was sweet but O the difficulties since, the trial of faith. The other thing is this; He keeps His people here below that they may be His witnesses to speak, as He said to one, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." The Lord Jesus Christ in His intercessory prayer to His divine Father said, "I pray not that Thou should take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil" (John 17.15), but the best part of that prayer, the ultimate goal of the desire of the child of God and the purpose and will of Christ is this, "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory". Then the sun will go no more down, there will be no more clouds, there will be no more weeping and mourning because there will be no more sin. May the Lord grant it to us in His time. Amen

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