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Sermon Preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
by Mr J.K. Popham on Friday Evening
17th October 1930

Text Acts. 11 verse 23

Who, when He came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

This word is part of a divine relation of God's providence and grace, uniting in calling many people by His grace in Antioch. At this time Antioch was a large city, having probably about half a million inhabitants. God began to show that the tongues of fire divided, as Joseph Hart says, to show that now the favour of God would be divided between Jew and Gentile.

Sudden a rushing wind they hear;
And fiery cloven tongues appear;
And sat on every one;
Cloven, perhaps, to be a sign,
That God no longer would confine
His word to Jews alone. (Gadsby's 715 verse 2)

This great thing began to be manifested, and God used a strange circumstance to show this. The great persecution which we read took place on the martyrdom of Stephen, and the disciples went everywhere being scattered, they went preaching the gospel. Peter was brought to preach to Cornelius and his friends, and the Holy Ghost fell upon them. Barnabas was sent down to Antioch, on the report of God's dealings with the people in that city to enquire about it, and the text tell us the result of this. He went and saw the work of God, that the hand of the Lord was upon the preaching at Cyprus and Cyrene, and he came and spoke unto the Grecians. The hand of the Lord in the preaching of the Lord Jesus was upon them, and great numbers believed and turned to the Lord.

What a wonderful dispensation, God's infinite goodness turning poor sinners to Himself, giving them faith, and that faith causing them to turn to Him. People do turn to God when He quickens them, they cannot do otherwise, they see their danger, then is revealed to them the Refuge, the only refuge. They see their sins, and then they forsake them, in the power of the Spirit. They see that there is no good apart from God, and then they turn to Him.

Real conversion is a turning to God, not turning from one creed to another, from one idol to another, from one religion to another, but a real turning of heart and soul to God. As we read further on in the Acts, that God granted to the Gentiles repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. "Spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord". (Acts 11 verses 20 & 21). Repentance toward God is a singular blessing, given as Joseph Hart says,

Repentance is a gift bestowed
To save a soul from death; (Gadsby's 241 verse 1)

It is this repentance that is implied in the word, and turned unto the Lord. It is not a state of the brain, but of the heart. Not a change of thought, but regeneration, whereby God makes Himself known. Then the knowledge that He gives of Himself, gives a knowledge of themselves, to whom that grace is given. And then they become concerned about God, and about themselves as having sinned against Him. His character becomes dear to them, and their acknowledgement of His character, and their confession of their sins as done, against Him, (always mark that,) is that they enter into the very nature of true repentance.

It would do us good from time to time to examine ourselves, in regard to repentance. It is not a gloomy thing, though it is attended with grief, pain shame and fear, with much fear at times. But it is that spirit towards God, that regards His name and His character, and is entirely different from natural repentance, which is towards self. Like Esau, if he could have got some earthly good, as indeed he did later, then he had no regard for God. He went out and found himself possessed of much land, and he had enough. He said to his brother later on, "I have enough, my brother;" (Genesis 33 verse 9).

When we repent towards God, then we hate self, when we repent toward God, then we are careful to confess our sins, and clear ourselves. Not clear ourselves of sin, but of idolatry, of hypocrisy and all wrong things, and seek to order our ways according to God's word, in respect of salvation. Then this repentance was accompanied with faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Which I understand to be real faith, discovering His Person, His death, His burial, His resurrection and Ascension into heaven. Faith eyes the Saviour, and it was this faith of which Barnabas spoke as it were, saying when he was exhorting them "that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." They could not cleave at all without faith, but with it they could and did cleave to Him. These are the people to whom Barnabas came, being sent by the Church at Jerusalem.

They did not send an Apostle, they sent a good man, a teacher, an approved person to Antioch that he might enquire into the reports that they had heard of the work at Antioch. And when he came he saw the grace of God. Grace in God is grace in Jehovah, in the Trinity. It is the purpose of love, it is the election of grace, it is the setting apart of some people for eternal glory. It is predestination to a conformity to the image of God's dear Son. It is in God the Father, of whom we read in Jude, that the people of God are, "Sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:" (verse 1) God chose them, and as Christ in His prayer recorded in John's Gospel, said, in prayer "Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me;" (John 17 verse 6). Have we any evidence that God gave us to Jesus, to save? It is a great thing to know that, to possess an indubitable evidence, not always indubitable to yourselves, but an indubitable evidence that God gave out to His Son Jesus Christ. It was that, which made Him pray this prayer, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." (John 17 verse 15). He distinguished between these men given to Him and the world. "I pray not for the world". A very solemn distinction, the thought of it may penetrate you, the fear that you are among those for whom He does not pray, may pain you at times, but the distinction is there. It is good not to quarrel with it, it is good to believe, and good to come before God with the enquiry, Lord may I be one of that favoured number given Thee to redeem. To keep and ultimately to present to Thy Father, as a pure, just, blessed Church, without spot, wrinkle, blemish or any such thing.

But this grace of the Trinity, is not that intended in the text, it is the outflowing of that grace, it is an operation of that grace, beginning with regeneration, carried on by continued operations of the Eternal Spirit. It is the creation of faith, it is the gift of love, it is the grace of hope, it is a true visible separation from the world, a separation more evident than now. In a sense necessarily so, because then there was no camp between the temple of the idols and the temple of the living God. So when a sinner turned to God, he turned away from idols, he turned away from it so visibly that he left the temple of idols, and entered into the temple of God. This is the grace that Barnabas saw, the fruit of God's operation in the soul, what is called by the Apostle Paul, in the Galatians, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law." (Galatians 5 verses 22,23). These fruits, are the grace of God Barnabas saw. How many of us carry about the grace of God, so that a good man meeting us, a man of whom it might be said, that he was, full of the Holy Ghost and faith, that he could see that grace in us?

It is not Pharisaism to believe you possess grace, nothing humbles a sinner more than a sweet persuasion that God loves him. Nothing more puts him in the dust than a sense of God's favour to him, and nothing more effectually separates a person, a child of God, from this world, than, that wonderful grace of faith. I would speak a little of this grace, in the first place, the grace of faith. It is a grace that has to do with God, and that may be a good test for us, whether we have religion enough to take us aside from business occupations that are lawful. Apart from self, as it were, yet with wretched self, to deal with God. Faith has to deal with Jehovah, with His perfections. For God has come forth from the infinite depths of inexhaustible light, in which He naturally dwells, and has dwelt from eternity, and manifested Himself in Jesus Christ. That is a great manifestation, it is implied in that word, "And without controversy great is the mystery of Godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (1 Timothy 3 16).

Now does not that mean this, among many other things, that every believer has to do with God because he needs Him? Faith makes him understand that, the Spirit's teaching tell him what he needs, and faith receives that testimony. Now needing God, that faith, created by the Holy Spirit goes up to Him, deals with Him. Take the danger a sinner feels in himself, being sinful, what does faith do? It runs into the name of the Lord, which is a strong tower and a fenced place. And there faith, though it may lack the assurance of an interest in God, stills, deals with God. Now is that your religion? If it is not, you are not right, but if it is you are right. We shall be wrong in many things, "For in many things we offend all." (James 3 verse 2). But if we have faith, faith that deals with God, then we are right. So far we shall be separated from the world and its gaudy toys. Faith perceives them, and says that they are dross, nothing sustainable, nothing abiding in them.

Faith sees Christ, the pearl of great price, the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in Him, all truth and all mercy dwelling in Him, with all power in Him. Love for sinners, with the great High Priest offering Himself without spot to God. Faith looks out, faith goes to Him, faith believes, and there she hangs. Now if we have got that, then the grace of God is in us. True grace, as Peter speaks, "that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand." (1 Peter 5 verse 12. And again in the Romans, where the Apostle says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." (Romans 5 verses 1 & 2).

And there is a solid assurance of the reality, and of the sufficiency of that precious Person and His vicarious death. This faith that God gives, has to do with the blessed fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and thither faith runs from time to time. Then getting near to it, she says,

O put me in with Thy own hands,
And that will make me well. (Gadsby's 444 verse 2).

Faith goes to the throne of grace, that wondrous throne of which the Lord said, "And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony." (Exodus 25 verse 22). And faith is that open mouth, that empty hand, that panting desire, that longing as a thirsty land, that goes to the throne of grace and seeks to have communion, and receive communications from God. Less will not do, every believer goes to the throne of grace, to which he is invited. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4 verse 14).

Faith goes to the Lord Jesus for the words of life, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." (John 6 verse 68). Nothing else will do, she goes to Him for strength because she is weak as a creature, faith being created in a creature, and a creature is dependant. A creature is weak, and faith is often weak, she goes to Him for sanctification of affliction. If you are in trouble, and are gracious do not try to bear that trouble yourself. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity;" (Proverbs 18 verse 14). But a trouble may be like a sword to let out some of your blood, that you can well spare. The chastening of God will bring you to the Lord for sanctification, asking to be made better by the cross. If you have faith you will go with all your fears, all your sinkings and your depression, all your despondency and the fears you have about your circumstances, lest they should be manifestations of divine anger.

If you get a reproof, your living faith will come to accept that reproof, and you will say, "Thou our God has punished us less than our iniquities deserve," (Ezra 9 verse 13), and

If with my sins compared, 'tis light,
And all in faithfulness is sent. (Gadsby's 873 verse 3)

This faith cleaves to the Lord, and seeing Him to be everything, she says to Him, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." (Psalm 73 verse 25).

Now let a Pharisee come and keep you company for a few hours, he will not understand you. One might call you a mystic, another would say you are deceived, but let a man of God come, who has gone the same way, and has the same faith, let him listen if he can to your groans and sighs, then you will find this, he understands and is very glad. The Psalmist said, "They that fear Thee will be glad when they see me;" (Psalm 119 verse 74). So the Lord makes people manifest by their faith.

Faith, one more remark about it, faith will always lead those who have it to worship God. When you turn to the Revelation and hear them sing, "Worthy is the Lamb" your faith joins with the song. When you go to the Psalmist and find David under a dispensation of trouble, saying "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good," ((1 Samuel 3 verse 18). you say, I know what that means. When you find a good man saying, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God." (Psalm 42 verse 1). You can say I am a companion of that person. "When he had seen the grace of God."

There is another thing and that is love, it makes those who have it to say sometimes, that the name of the Lord is precious, that the Person of Christ is precious, that His blood is precious. "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious:" (1 Peter 2 verse 7). Love has arms, love has a heart with arms to embrace, and a heart to contain, so to speak, the Lord Jesus. A heart to say, there is none that I desire beside Thee. Love has a spirit in it, to cast everything on the Lord, and to feel thankful that all our times are in His hand. "My times are in Thy hand," (Psalm 31 verse 15), and faith and love unite in saying, I would not have them anywhere else. Who but a God of grace can bear with, and acknowledge so wild a heart, and manage circumstances, that are sometimes like a tangled skein of wool? So love will distinguish the people of God from time to time. They love Him, and some have at times, "loved not their lives unto death," (Revelation 12 verse 11), for they cared more for Christ than for this present world and their own lives.

Another thing in these good people was hope, real hope, not like the writing on the sand, not hope simply about temporal things, but real hope in God. Hope that broke out in the Psalmist's heart, when he had been saying, he was disquieted and his soul was cast down. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God:" (Psalm 42 verse 11). Is His arm shortened that it cannot save, is His ear heavy that it cannot hear? Hope in God, and this hope keeps a person from violent rebellion, it keeps him from despair, it keeps him from giving up waiting upon God. The devil may say, there is nothing for you to wait for, but hope says, I wait for Him.

I cast an anchor here in the Lord Jesus, and however long He may be before He comes, I hope that He will come, and say like Esther, "and if I perish I perish." (Esther 4 verse 16). Is this your case, have you got real hope? Many disappointments come to us, in providence, in our friends, in God's dealings with us, disappointments of expectations with respect to God's word to us. We have built expectations on a promise which He never warranted, and which He will not honour, but these disappointments are not destruction, they are not the death of hope. Hope breaks forth, hope springs up through the scent of water, it springs up like a tree, with the root alive sprouting, and says, "Hope in God", there is a fulness in Him. O I would be thankful that I believe there is enough in God.

Dear friend, you have to leave everything and everybody, and come just to this, in your distress and anxieties, and in your fears "Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise Him", He will come to me. I do not deserve that He should come, I have sinned Him away many times by my hardness, my ingratitude, rebellion and unbelief, but I hope He will return. For His grace is more than my sins, His compassions are great, and He will hear the prayer of the destitute.

There is another word I would mention, it is humility, real humility. Humility which thrives in God's presence, that boasts in God's presence, that never says to a creature, look on me. True humility is spoken of as a garment by Peter, "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility:" (1 Peter 5 verse 5). It is opposite to all God's people naturally, and they know and tremble at it, but God is able to abase all who walk in pride, and their souls reach forth to this great, this beautiful grace, which in God's sight is of great price. It makes a person teachable, it breathes itself out to the Lord thus. "That which I see not teach Thou me:" (Job 34 verse 32). It comes back sometimes and sees where there has been a fretful spirit and a froward spirit, and then this is the confession, "I have uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not," (Job 42 verse 3) I will say no more.

Then the prayer is, "That which I see not teach Thou me." A humble man is a teachable man, a man who does not say, I know, but who says, I wish I did know, and prays the Lord to be his teacher, and so he is often found praying for instruction, "Give me understanding, and I shall live." (Psalm 119 verse 144). He is found among the least of all saints, and he takes to himself the lowest place. He does not think himself fit to be here or there, but just a poor sinful creature hanging on divine mercy, looking for justification and salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He finds himself as one was in John Bunyan's 'Pilgrims Progress', when he had difficulty getting down into the valley. Going down he got some slips, and you will understand this, who if you have been taken into the valley. I too get some slips here and there, some falls, pains and shame in the valley. O said one, I was never better in my health, you who have never been better in spirit will understand this, never more lively in mind, and never more exercised towards God. He was never dearer, never sweeter, to me then. Now when in this valley, some of us have known the opposite of this. I have, and the consequence of the opposite, what God does with the opposite. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4 verse 6) O humble soul, do fall on your knees and bless God for humility, and if pride is working may He give you grace to confess it at His footstool, and seek for mercy.

Another word, separation from the world, I did name this, but let us look at it a little. Separation from the world, must be important, not only to ourselves but to God, since the Lord Jesus prayed that his disciples might have it. "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." (John 17 verse 15). And Paul had the Spirit of Christ when writing to the Galatians, he said, "Who (Christ) gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world." (Galatians 1 verse 4). The world has maxims which are not Christian, "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." (Ephesians 2 verse 2). The world is full of murder, theft and all kinds of evil, and no child of God can say I am clear of all those sins. He has them in his nature, he has them in his feelings, he has them in a painful experience from time to time, but grace comes, grace takes the mind by the hand, as the Angel took Lot by the hand. And grace says, you must leave this, and so he brings the poor sinner out of the world, and into the Church, into a godly walk and conversation. Paul says in another place, "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3 verse 20). Now dear friends, put yourselves beside these scriptures, and examine yourselves. How do you stand? Well one may say, we are not in the world. Well what about your spirit? That may be in the world, when your body is here. O yes, how many of us have sinned in this chapel? How many of us have run away to this and that concern, while here in this building? Not this evening only perhaps, not especially now, but at times one has gone in unbelief to those family cares, O what shall I do tomorrow? The spirit of the world in your nature has looked at that cross which the Lord has given you to take up and follow Him.

And unbelief has said, you will never be able to carry it, your rebellion has said I will not carry it. O the sin, the sin of our nature, but does it always prevail? That is a question, the answer is no, for "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace," (Romans 6 verse 14). And therefore, this is a beautiful religion as I view it, a beautiful religion, but mind how it has its use in the Spirit's grace. It has its growth from the Spirit's grace, it has its continuance from the Spirit's grace,

When Barnabas had seen the fruits of the Spirit, when he had seen the love of God, the grace of Christ, the doctrine of justification, the doctrine of sanctification, when he had seen separation from the world, and the true worship of God in that form given then, he was glad. And this lead him to speak to them in the way of exhortation. He was wiser than many are today, for many exhort the dead, Barnabas exhorted the living. I as a poor minister may speak to my believing friends, and say to them, and I do say it to them, now cleave to the Lord, hang about the cross, follow after this righteousness that the Jews did not attain to, because they sought it by works, and not by faith. This righteousness to which the Gentiles did attain to, because they sought it by faith.

My brethren cleave to this, cleave to the Holy Ghost whose operations alone can make you wise unto salvation, and can enable you to profit by trading, can lead you into the truth, into deeper understanding both of sin and of grace. Cleave to the Holy Ghost, cleave to God the Father from whom grace and peace come to the Church of God, as often you can, you find it written in the Epistles. What a salvation! Cleave to the scriptures, to the scriptures in two particulars, first the scripture in doctrine, never think less. God give us grace to think more and more of doctrine, The doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of His Person, all glorious God and Man in one Person. Cleave to the doctrine of eternal election, for no sinner will ever get to heaven without that, to the doctrine of particular redemption, Christ purchasing the Church with His own blood, to the doctrine of regeneration, and the gift and work of the Holy Ghost in the election of grace. Cleave to the precepts, to the promises, to all that God has said in His Holy Word. And cleave to Him in your troubles, in your difficulties, in your burdens and temptations. Barnabas exhorted them all, as if going into the assembly he would say, my brethren, I am thankful to see the grace of God in you, but you are in the wilderness, and you may have much affliction and much sorrow. Now do this, cleave to your Saviour. "Commit the keeping of their (your) souls to Him in well doing as unto a faithful creator. (1 Peter 4 verse 19). Cleave to His righteousness for your clothing,

To His power for your salvation, to His love for your comfort, to His compassion for your own consolation, cleave to Him. He exhorted them that they should do it, not blindly but with a purpose, a set purpose. Have you got a purpose in this? Ah faith says, I would fain get honourably through. A believer says, O if I might but come honourably to my grave and enter heaven. This will give you a real purpose, very different from saying, about salvation, Save us good Lord, miserable sinners, without a true heart. "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?" (Proverbs 17 verse 16). But here is a person who says, I want to be right, I want God with me, I want the blood of Christ sprinkled on my conscience, I want the Spirit of Christ in my soul, I want the spirit of wisdom and of understanding and of power. Now when that want is strong, when it is in your heart as a thirst or hunger, there is a purpose, an aim, an end in view.

This was the exhortation of Barnabas, cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, cleave to Him who may be cleaved unto, O what a mercy it is that we may, if we have faith, cleave to Him. The reason of all this gladness in Barnabas was this, for he was a good man. Anybody can have pleasure in his mind, taking a good man to be manifested by the fruits of the Spirit. A carnal man can have no pleasure, in a good man who has the fruits of the Spirit in him. He was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. And much people were added unto the Lord.

Now may the Lord help us to look at this, it wont take us into self. If you have this goodness, this grace of God, you wont be living in yourself, nor on yourself, nor to yourself, but you will be living on Christ. Living by faith, living in darkness, living in trouble, living in tribulation, living in weakness, and in all, living unto the Lord. So may it be with us.

Amen.