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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Sermon preached by Mr.J.K.Popham
on Sunday morning, 24th January, 1937.

Text: Lamentations of Jeremiah 3 v 40.

"Let us search and try our ways and turn again to the Lord."

Jeremiah saw the terrible fulfilment of God's threatenings in the event of the people continuing in their rebellion, and his soul surcharged with grief at the sight of the fulfilment of those fore-tellings, poured out itself in all these sorrowful lamentations. He could see the fulfilment of God's awful word uttered by Him, in an intense patriotism as we should call it. He was a faithful prophet. God ordained him to be a prophet and put into his mouth words to pull down, to throw down and to destroy, and all that was fulfilled. Looking then on this condition of things, he poured out those lamentations. You would not have expected him to do other would you. If you look, if I look on present things in the professing world, in the profane world, in the modernist world, in the paganism that is in our own land, can you rightly expect that you should be entertained with bright things which have no existence in the word of God. Let us as a small congregation professing the glorious gospel of Christ, but mourning for the most part our lean condition, and the little authority and blessing attending the ministry in the land, I mean the ministry of the gospel, can you expect, or look for anything beyond this in regard to present things - lamentation. For my own part, I can say this, that I want to-day, what the church in her low condition speaks of - Let us, bad as we are, dark as we are, guilty as we are, and forsaken for the most part though we are, let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. A search and a trial mean this - an examination. An examination must be according to a standard. If you have a measurement, you have a measure. If you have a weight, you have a scale. If you have a search and a trial, you have a certain test. Let us search and try, or test our ways, by two standards. First, internal, second external. Internal. What is the attitude of my soul Godward? That is a fare test

is it not? Would you be tested as to your condition, and prospect for Eternity by any other standard than that. What is the attitude of your soul toward God, God the father in His love, not sparing His Only Begotten Son; God the Son in His free and wonderful love in coming as the servant of His Father to make an end of sin; God the Holy Ghost in quickening your souls, if indeed they are quickened. Look then at this - How stand your souls toward God. Is He the first and the last? Is Christ the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, in whom you are delighting; or is it so rather when the Beloved said- "Open to Me." You said I am in bed, and I am comfortable and do not want to be disturbed.

Search into this point- How you are Godward. You will have plenty to do. Your thoughts in the night, your wishes, your aims, your intentions, and if you bring these to the test you will be saying, "Woe is me, woe is me; I am often as one who has no centre; like a vagrant, a vagabond. Now that search will do you good. It will bring you to a point. "Restore my soul." will be your cry, when you are engaged in this very solemn business of searching and trying your ways.

Internally. Look at that first, let the outside for the moment alone, look inside, how about this word. I am disposed to say, from my own observation as well as, alas from my own conduct, that God will solemnly say this to a great number of professors - They have rejected my word and what wisdom is in them .. (Misunderstood the Word of God, mostly we do.) or the lack of authority felt, or the lack of application, the lack of the Holy Spirit granting something to us.

And search and try your ways. O, when churches are brought as the seven churches in Asia were brought by Christ to certain things, not simply to them as churches, but to what was in them - False professors tolerated, false teaches tolerated, Immoral practices in some tolerated; false riches in others boasted of; rich and have need of nothing.

Search my brethren, search your ways, internal ways, and if you find things wrong there, the Lord help you to do here what you are exhorted to - turn again to Him.

Externally. Is the church of Christ on earth, a real thing to you, or is the general profession of religion that with which, more or less, you are content; satisfied that there is a professing church.

Have you a real spiritual interest in the church of God. It will be a good thing to look at as closely as you can. What is the attitude of your heart and affections and loyal support of the church of the living God. Bring your whole heart and mind, and your whole conduct, external conduct in regard of Zion and try it. I am not talking to you as a man above all this. I say these things out of my own searching. I am not at ease in Zion.

Let us search and try our ways. What are our ways with regard to the throne of grace? Could some of you not honestly sing this, or sigh it, seldom do we think of prayer, until necessity presses us. Do we understand, alas, Newton where he sighs

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"Few if any come to Jesus,
till reduced to self-despair."

Search and try your ways in respect to reading the word of God. A few chapters in the day, are they enough, or are you led sometimes to cry to God - Lord tell me in Thy mercy what that passage means? What is intended by that word? The closer you live to yourself, the nearer you will try to get to God. The more you see of yourself, the more you hate yourself, and then the more you will want the blood of Jesus Christ. What is your judgement concerning Jesus Christ? O, of course we believe in Him. What does that belief do for you? Look at it. What does that belief in Jesus Christ which you profess, do for you? If you are pleased with it, and say I am glad He is a saviour, there is not much result, but if your heart and mind go out to Him, and long, and pant and sigh and cry and breathe, that is something better. Without Him, what are we but dead things. In Him we have life, if we have life indeed. Search this, and when you have searched and put to the test, everything into which you have searched, now there is another point, and turn again to the Lord. Turn again to Him. You did go to Him, often in the past; you received answers of peace in the past; your soul was fat and flourishing for a time; you had genuine humility once and you walked with that garment, adorning the profession you made, how about it now? If you are away from God, I will tell you, you are in darkness, and you do not know where you are going to. If you walk in the day, your body is full of light. If you walk in the dark,

then your body is full of darkness and you do not know where you are going.

Let us turn again to the Lord for several particular reasons. First, that with the Lord there is mercy. That with the Lord there is forgiveness and therefore, my soul shall cry- "I wait for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning, I say, more than they that watch for the morning. The watchman cranes, stretches his neck eastward to catch the first rays of light from the rising sun, and a living soul strains his neck, stretches out his expectations sometimes, toward Jesus Christ, that the beams of His grace and love may fall upon the soul. Is it so. Turn again for forgiveness, O what need of forgiveness we have, what need of forgiveness I have. You look at yourself, your thoughts for five minutes would be sufficient to consign you to hell. The thought of foolishness is sin. Let us turn then to the Lord for forgiveness. The joyful sounds, the joy of Christ. O that the Lord would grant us that joy. The joy of Christ was the end that he made of sin, and your joy, the joy of Christ in your soul will be from a sense, that your sins are forgiven and the smile of God, wonderful smile of God upon you.

Let us turn again to the Lord. Let us turn again to Him for the moving operations and instructions of the Holy Spirit. "Cast me not away from Thy presence", said one who was turned again to Him, "and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. If the Spirit goes for an hour what becomes of you, your thoughts, There is one thing I have dreaded for years again and again, it is in Isaiah - "A garden without water." A threat, "They shall be as a garden without water." and I have taken my lean soul, and laid it before God, and implored that that might not be my case, "A garden without water." Turn again to Him for the Holy Spirit. Turn to Him for that Divine Person to be in you, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus to make you free from the law of sin and death. A very solemn passage. "No condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death." I have poured over one word sometimes. The body is dead because of sin. You look at it. Is your body dead because of sin.

that is to say there is such a gracious influence from the Spirit on your heart, that you are kept from following after the flesh, it seems to be the meaning of the Holy Spirit there, that while you are under His divine influence, His benign shining into your heart, and bringing good-news of Christ from the far country, then you walk after Him; you mind His things. That is turning again to the Lord. Let us ask Him to grant us a renewal of the spirit of our minds by the renewing of the Holy Ghost.

Let us turn again to the Lord in His word, not generally simply but in regard of His blessed word to you. the influence of some promises was at one time very beautiful and powerful was it not, as if you lived in a promise pleaded it, looked at it, examined it, it means this- Lord fulfil it in me; it means that, Lord help me to regard it. Were you ever ashamed for forgetting the word of God given to you? Were you ever sorry that you disregarded Him in His word? O the times I have forgotten His word to me, and that is sad, that brings leanness. Turn again to Him in regard to His word given to you. A word sent to protect, provide for you, guide you, influence you, check you, make your conscience tender in the fear of God. Let us turn to Him for that blessing.

Let us turn again to the Lord and ask Him to grant that we may be obedient children, not fashioning ourselves according to the former lusts in our ignorance. Turn again to Him in that particular. Have you gone astray in that particular. The gospel is preached for the obedience of faith in all nations. Is the obedience of faith in you. When the Lord Jesus speaks and draws you, do you find a power, an influence? Yes. but when you find a death coming on you, do you feel afraid? Let us turn again to the Lord in that particular.

And let us turn again to the Lord in public matters, I mean in regard of the church of God in the world, the church of God as planted at Galeed. Her interest is very great, because it is the interest of Christ. Yes, it is the interest of Christ. If He is here, it is His interest; if He is with you that is His interest. You are His portion, and He is your portion. Look then at this great matter. The interest of Christ in His church. When all the priests, as we have in in Malachi were condemned by the Lord as having departed from Him in many

particular and most grievous ways, we read this- "Then they that feared the Lord, often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels:" Then there is to be a great blessing; a spirit of discernment. they shall discern each other, and have that holy, sweet, enlarging and comforting fellowship; the communion of saints.

Woe unto us, the narrow way of life and tribulation, appears not to have many people in it to-day, but there are some, and with these may we have union and as opportunity is afforded, have communion. Turn again to the Lord for these things. We had them once. How thankful we ought to be that we ever had them, but what shame, what confusion of face must belong to us who have departed from Him who gave them and so have lost them. Let us turn to the Lord for these things.

A public religion will be, where it is real, spiritual, a public reproach. Partakers of the sufferings of Christ, and everyone of you here, blest with grace, with Christ in you the hope of glory, and with tokens for good from time to time, that will be true of you, partakers of the sufferings of Christ. I saw a piece of rubbish the other day, Plymouth Brethrenism and the writer says the church is going to be carried up to heaven with Christ to be there all the time the world is fighting one another. That contradicts the scripture- The seed of the woman shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. As long as there are wars and rumours of wars in this world, there is one centre of enmity, bitterness and warfare, that is the church of Christ. What rubbish the devil does make people believe. No, let us turn again to the Lord, for His great interest in the church his own people. They are his portion and He is their portion.

Let us turn again to Him for that inward spiritual communion that once we had. I have been looking back a little on my long life, and I have remembered many many things, and one thing I remember was this, that it was well with my soul, more than sixty years ago, when I was full of fear, when if I were speaking to a little congregation of twenty or thirty people, and saw a stranger come in I would shake greatly and had to cry mightily to God to help me, and in these days there was a certain simplicity,

tenderness, fear of God and longing to have HIS approbation. You may go back to your early days and say they were better than these. I do not say mine were better, I think in some respects these last days of mine are my best, but there were features in the early days that one would be glad to have, even to-day. Search and try, and turn again to God for communion with Him. Better be an hour reading one or two verses and getting some instruction and moisture and influence and spiritual power, than read a dozen chapters, close the book and say, I am glad I have read it. The latter may be without profit, the former is really profitable. O my dear friends, there is much for us to turn unto God for. Let us turn again to Him. And one remark I would here make is this- Whenever we turn again to the Lord, the prayers of Ezra, Daniel, Nehemiah and other saints all of them mixed with confession, will be ours. We shall never leave confession of sin out when we are under a right influence.

Let us turn again to the Lord for perseverance in the narrow way. There are many things to turn us out of the way. Sins, heresies, evils, which if possible would deceive the very elect. Are you confident? O we belong to a gospel church. Yes, and you may die in that church without the life of Christ. O, but we believe in the truth. Yes, devils believe and tremble, which is something you do not do perhaps. Let us turn again to the Lord for perseverance. I do not know what may come to me to-day neither do you know what may come to you. I know this, that if your heart is set on God, and on reaching heaven, of being found in Christ, of having Christ in you the hope of glory, the devil ^{will} be so angry against you, that he will fight and perhaps you will get a shock, for in a moment some wrong things will come, and even some wrongs you may have suffered will come to your memory with a vengeance in your heart, forgetting the Lord's word, vengeance in Mine. I cannot express to you the fears that may arise, but you know them in your own hearts, lest you should come short; lest some iniquity should prevail against you; or lest Christ should be silent to you and go on not hearing me dying and dying.

Let us search then and turn to God for persevering grace, to have your eyes held on Christ. "Enlighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. Keep my feet from falling, mine eyes from tears. "Order my footsteps in Thy word, and let them

not slip." Such petitions will be in your hearts as you turn again to the Lord.

Turn again to Him in this respect . as to one you know. Not as to a stranger. You say perhaps, I am full of fear, but I did hear His voice, I did feel His power, I did receive something and I loved Him,with all my heart I loved Him, and now turn again to Him. O you say, the world has got hold of you. It will keep it if it can. Only God can break that hold. Turn to Him to break it. Turn to Him for fresh instruction. "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law". This will hold you when other things will not.

Turn again unto the Lord in regard of some words you have had. Ask Him to fulfil them; and ask Him to give you love for His word. "I have taken Thy testimonies unto me," said the Psalmist,"as a heritage for ever", and so dear friends, we have this great matter before us. I have not flattered you, I have not flattered myself, but you are in my heart, and prayers constantly, and I want if the Lord will, while I live to be with you, to help you, warn you and to be of real spiritual use to you, and I commend this solemn scripture to you now. Let us search and try our ways. Some hidden things, pigeon-holes, in your memories, some things tucked away in those pigeon-holes. Bring them out. Search them. Are they of a spiritual nature, or are they carnal? Do they lead to God, or turn you away from Him? As you see them , so walk.

Now beloved friends, the Lord help you and help me, seriously, solemnly , to prayerfully examine ourselves by this word, and by the word of Paul which comes to my mind now. "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, or no. Know ye not that except Christ be in you ye are reprobates."Take nothing for granted. May I quote again to you what Bunyan used to say about his minister, he called him holy Mr.Gifford and holy Mr.Gifford used to say to the people, Take nothing for granted, for be assured of this, that whatever you take for granted will fail you in the hour of need, of testing that is.

May the Lord bless you, and give you a heart to pray for me and grant us as a little cause and interest of Christ to be after Him, and the praise shall be His for ever.

Amen.