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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTIST

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham at Galeed Chapel
Brighton on Sunday evening 9 December 1928

Luke 12 verse 32

"Fear not little flock for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"

We looked a little this morning at national affairs; not at all pleasing, nor exhilarating; not hopeful. It is needful though, that we should, by the mercy of God, look at things about which we cannot but be interested. This evening we may come by the help of God into what is much smaller - a little flock gathered out of the world, out of the wilderness, cared for. "I am the Good Shepherd" said the Lord Jesus, and it may be, I pray it may, that some may find themselves within the fold who often question whether it is so with them. Jesus has been speaking to His disciples about not taking thought as to what they shall eat, and what they shall drink, nor wherewithal they shall be clothed, setting forth the emptiness of this life, the insignificance of all things that pertain to this life, and He says to them "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things, things about which you often are too anxious, shall be added unto you and lest they should begin to look again and again, as indeed they do, have always been doing, at their necessities, and not always at His fulness of supply, He says - "Fear not little flock"

In the first place let us notice that a flock of sheep is a peculiar property, not among the whole herds of cattle, but just a peculiar property, purchased, folded with the mark of the owner. This is the case with the saints of God. Commending the church at Ephesus and the elders thereof to God, He said to the elders "Feed the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood" They belong to Him. They are His property. They are not common property. His, exclusively, His, eternally, and, that being the case, He will take care of them. Now let us look at this point. A flock is a peculiar property and it becomes by the Spirit's grace a vital question with each person in this flock as to whether really he does

belong to it. It may be that some here are exercised on that point. It is not an obsolete hymn that sometimes we sing

'Tis a point I long to know
Oft it causes anxious thought
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I His or am I not?

Is that a question, a living question, with some here? Do you want and desire and seek above all else to know whether you belong to the Lord? Tis a great question. There are many things in you as you feel, which appear to be against your being the Lord's. There is so much self, so much sin, so much ignorance, so much enmity, so much carelessness, and so much care for this life, that you can scarcely ever deem yourself a child of God, nor can an honest person brush all these things aside and say he wont take any notice of them. They are real objections to a person who is born again, and if they be in any of you, now I have one word to say and that is "God help you to take all these objections in all sincerity and lay them before His divine majesty. Do not try to put them aside. Do not try to answer them yourself. Take them by prayer and supplication as you may be enabled to the Lord. Am I thine? Tell me. Speak to me. Teach me. Make me know by Thine own voice, gospel and testimony and witness that I am Thine. Then you will understand what Toplady writes, the witness that I am Thy child will impart unspeakable joy. It is an unspeakable joy to one who gets it. To have the witness of the Spirit that he is the Lords. That he belongs to the sheep, to the flock, the little flock. Then, O then he can say, "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength" Then also he can say he glories in the Lord. "Let him that glorieth glory in the Lord" But see this. It is a little flock, a little flock. Jesus had but few with Him in the days of His flesh here, and after many had followed Him the bulk of them left Him, went back, and walked no more with Him. It is a little flock. God made choice of Israel, not because Israel was the greatest in number of all people, for Israel was the fewest of all people, and it is so today. A very searching consideration this is. If you bring to bear upon it the parable of the sower, it is very solemn. Four hearers. Three of them wrong. What a proportion. What a searching. Three wrong out of four. Then you may say, do I belong to this little flock? Crowds about Christ will be found. Crowds will be

saying - We want none, we seek none but Christ and preach none but Christ but when the first trial comes all that is burnt up. "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches". A little flock. Now this little flock is spoken to by Christ Himself here. He is the Good Shepherd and when He says "Fear not," He has power to remove fear. But a shepherd is over the flock, and there are three things concerning the work of a shepherd which I would name to you, three things. First, the shepherd is responsible for leading his flock into good pasture, green pasture. God reproves the shepherds of Israel, that they did not lead His people there, into this and that good pasture, that they did not take them to clean water, but that they trampled the pasture, the scriptures, under foot and led the people to fouled water. Now the good Shepherd leads His people to green pastures. "The Lord is my shepherd," said the Psalmist "I shall not want" "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." This is a point, let us look at it. Do you know what it is for Christ to lead you out of self unto and into Himself? To lead you to the word of the living God, making it in some way, some particulars, spirit and life to you? What it is for this Good Shepherd to lead you to some Psalm or chapter or some part of the glorious gospel of Christ, so as that you are nourished? It is called nourished up in the words of faith and good doctrine. Now brethren take notice of this - it is a matter of experience, a matter of real experience. Christ does lead His people. He sends His Spirit to them, and the Spirit brings the gospel to them, and He bids them partake of it, and that is to them what a green good pasture is to sheep - nourishment and this is the work of the Shepherd. "I am the Good Shepherd. I give My life for the sheep". I lead them and when I go before them they follow and when they follow Christ they follow Him into green pastures, into the Word of Life, into the word of liberty, into the word of truth. Let me just name two or three things that answer to a green pasture, and first the gospel of the grace of God. That answers to a good pasture. The gospel nourishes faith. The gospel reveals God. The gospel brings the atonement, brings the righteousness of Christ to a sinner, It brings a clothing for him, a cleansing for him. It brings eternal love to Him. It brings what Peter speaks of. It brings the sweetness and the efficacy of election.

It brings God, that is the first thing. When God makes a person His, this is what He does. He takes him into the gospel, and the Spirit is efficient in this, the efficient worker. Says Christ, promising the Spirit "He shall glorify Me for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you". This brings us my brethren to a very close question. Has the Holy Ghost ever made known in us the Lord Jesus? Now that is what certainly He will do if we belong to Him.

And the second thing that the Spirit does , leading a person into what answers to a good green pasture, is to make known some word or words which applied, become the sinners, and it is like the roll, the sinner eats it. O, it is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb to his taste. There are people who know what it is for the word of God to be given to them. It is in this book, beautiful, blessed, infallible book, and some parts of it are taken by the Spirit and in answer to that word of promise in Deuteronomy - "My doctrine shall drop as the rain and my speech shall distil as the dew", it is a divine communication. A word let fall on a fearing heart, a plaster of figs for a sore boil. A remedy for sin, a life for a dying soul. A sweetness for one who tastes the bitterness of sin, a life that moves his affections. A light that guides his footsteps, tells him where to go, what to avoid and what to follow. A word that supports him under trouble, that sanctifies affliction to him. A word that pledges God to him. A word in which is involved the character of God. His character is engaged to bless and to be with a sinner. He engaged Himself to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob. He engaged Himself to Jeremiah, telling him that He would be with him, that his enemies should not overcome him, and it is the same today in a measure. O, if the measure were larger. It is the same, so that sinners can say occasionally, they heard the voice, of their beloved. It has stilled their fears. It has comforted their hearts. It has pointed out the way of life to them, and told them who must give them victory over sin, and self, the devil and the world. This answers to the Shepherd leading His flock into a good pasture. And a third thing that answers to this, is that the Holy Spirit gives ineffable sweetness, in leading the sinner to the Father through the Son. "By whom"

that is, the people of God, "by whom" Jesus Christ, "we have access to the Father by the Spirit," O sinner this is intimate. This is entering into the house, that house, that hiding place, that secret place of the Most High, that shadow of the Almighty, where no death can come, no arrow, no pestilence, and when a sinner is there he is healthy in his soul. He is comfortable in his heart. He may be in great trouble in his circumstances, but he now has green and good pasture. These three points in experimental religion, must be known in some measure by the people of God. It may be a complaint of some here, that they must conclude that they are not of the flock, because they have not had these three things. Well, if you have not had them, it is a mercy to know that you have not, and a mercy to be kept from claiming what does not belong to you, but that does not shut you out. A lack in experience, does not make a person manifest as not being the Lords, but it will, as felt, and as the sinner is under the Spirit's guidance, lead him, to ask God to give him what he lacks. If you, any of you, who are born again, lack this rich experience, go to the Lord for it. Go to Joseph. There is plenty with Him. Go to Him for what you feel you lack.

Now a second thing that belongs to the Shepherd's work is this, to look after the sheep with respect to diseases, to which sheep are incident. All sheep, I understand, are liable to certain diseases, and the work of a shepherd, the duty of a shepherd, is to take particular notice of the flock in this particular. We are liable to diseases. We are very apt to get diseases. We have the disease of sin in our nature, and it breaks out here and there. It breaks out into some form of disease. One form is unbelief.

If unbelief's that sin accursed,
Abhorred by God above,
Because of all opposers worst,
It fights against His love,

How shall a heart that doubts like mine,
Dismayed at every breath,
Pretend to live the life divine
Or fight the fight of faith,

You have got that disease. You will never find a believer, who has not at some time, the disease of sin in that dreadful form.

Who can heal it? Who can remove it? Who can enable a sinner to believe in the face of sin, world, devil and all things that can come against the soul? Who can enable him? Jesus can. Why, He is more than a match for it, my friends. If Thomas says I wont believe, Unless I put my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into His side, that was wounded by the spear, I wont believe. Well, Thomas one day with the disciples was met, and Jesus came into the midst, the door being shut for fear of the Jews (What shut door can keep Christ out) Thomas, saith He, "Reach hither thy hand" and you know what a cure that was for Thomas. O it was a cure. "My Lord and my God," said Thomas. He can heal the disease of unbelief. "Be not afraid only believe."

Another disease is hardness of heart, lack of prayer, absence of warm desire, and of love. Some here know that, and who is able to heal that? Christ. He has a plaster for it. Take, said God to the prophet Isaiah, take a lump of figs and lay it on the sore boil of Hezekiah. He has got a plaster for you if you have got this sickness, and this will answer to the work of the Good Shepherd. Blessed be His Name, many a time He has melted a hard heart. Many a time He has removed that bitterness and that lack of affection, and that prayerlessness which so often afflict. He has removed them all. The gospel is more than a match for any sin.

There is another disease and that is rebellion. It is like a silly sheep butting against the hedge, determined to get through, no matter how it may be torn; determined to get through. I expect somebody here will have to say I have got that. I have had that. I have been determined to have my own way, to do as I like. Determined not to take any notice of what God does, in His kind providence to me. Ah, if you are allowed to break through, you will suffer, but you wont get beyond the Shepherd's care. He goes on the dark mountains to seek a lost sheep&that is His cure. O what a cure when the wanderer finds the shepherd cared enough to go after him. Cared enough for his soul to fetch him back by affliction. Cared enough to say kindly to him O wanderer, return. This is part of the work of the Good Shepherd, and these three diseases I cannot name now for lack of time, the people of God are incident to, and they get the diseases, but the shepherd has a cure for them and He

applies that. The blood of Christ thy soul can cure of everything that is wrong.

A third duty of a shepherd is to defend the flock. Beasts of prey, wolves, lions, leopards, and every kind of wild beast and boar out of the forest will have thoughts to prey, if possible on this little flock. O no, the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep. "I am the Good Shepherd, I know My sheep. They know My voice. I know them. They pass under My Name, I tell them, I number them, I put my mark on them. They belong to me. They cost Me groans and blood and bloody sweat and death. They shall pass again and again under My hands. He cares for His people. O there is no saint here that ever gets away from the eye of the Shepherd, the Lord Jesus. What a mercy, and He never tires of this business. We give Him plenty to do, if I may speak so familiarly. We give Him plenty to do, alas, I know this point, but He is kind. His love is infinite. His care is infinite. He cares for you says Peter. He cares for you. Cast your care, your anxiety, your fear as to what you shall eat and what you shall drink, as to the enemies, and the diseases of your soul, cast your care of all these things on Him. He, whose eyelids never sleep, careth for you. And so, gathering up all the enemies that you have into one, namely, the devil, it is written "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. Little flock, fear not.

Now in the next place look at the fear. Fear not. If there were no fear there would be no word like this, but because the people of God have fear, there is a "Fear not," spoken to them. There are two things with regard to fear. The first is the ground of it. The ground of it is in self, in unbelief, in ignorance. The ground of it, you will find again and again in your own heart. You will find it in indwelling sin, in inability to walk after the Spirit, in inability to cast your care on the Lord. In waywardness of spirit, in determination to do as you will, without consulting the Lord. O how many wounds have some of us got by self-will, and this is a ground of fear. Sometimes you will be, as it were arrested in your spirit, and come to question yourself. What is all this? What is all this? Conscience says, indwelling sin. Then your own heart may say - have you any right, any ground, to think you are a child of God? And the accuser of the brethren may come

and accuse of hypocrisy and all kinds of evil, because of this indwelling sin, and the outbreaking of it, the eruptions. That is a ground. Do you know it? Some of you know it. The fear is that you are wrong, that you never had a good beginning, that you are not born again, that your convictions were only natural, that the comforts you have sometimes felt, were not given by God; That the scriptures which you enjoyed were not applied to you by the Holy Ghost; that the way you have walked has been so crooked, you cannot think the Lord has guided you. You think you are not interested in the blood of Christ, because it has not been as yet, so powerfully applied to you, as you want. You fear you are not interested in the gospel, because it has not been made spirit and life to you, in the way Paul speaks of in the Romans saying, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone that believeth, for therein is revealed the righteousness of God, from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith." And the fear is also, that you have no part, nor lot in the love of God, have no inheritance such as the Apostle Peter says, - have not obtained mercy - such as Paul said the Ephesians had obtained; and fear that the fear of God is not before your eyes, because you are not tender, nor careful, neither careful of your spirit, nor of your speech - the unguardedness of your spirit, and the quickness of your speech, to say unwise things. This will, to you, at times, be such a fear in your heart. O could I do this, could I be that, could I walk so foolishly, so thoughtlessly, could I walk in such self-determination as I do, if I were a child of God? And the fear also may be this, that as you have so often yielded to sin, you are its servant. "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey." Just think of it. You have obeyed sin, and now you have a fear that you are its servant; and again you may fear on the ground of the enemy having so frequently overcome you. He has caught you. He has caught you in your affections, and carried you away to some loved, but forbidden, object. There are many other fears, but with these I must be content at this time. Now the Lord Jesus looks at this poor people, and compares them to a flock, a flock surrounded by enemies, confronted by armies. You may compare them with what you read in the Kings - Israel pitched in the valley like two

flocks of kids and the enemy, the Assyrians, filled the country, and that is just what you feel like. A poor weak thing, and strong enemies, many cares, many wants, many difficulties, many fears, much weakness and defencelessness being yours. Now what says the Saviour? He does not say O these are only imaginations of yours. No, Christ is kinder than that. He does not say you have no wants. He could not say that, for He knows we have many wants. "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." But He says, "Fear not," - Look to Me. When we live in self, we live in fear. When we look to wants, we live in fear. When we realise our weakness, and nothing else, we live in fear. When we feel our ignorance, and do not see the wisdom of God, we live in fear. And this makes room for the kindness of the Lord Jesus, for He is infinitely kind. He says "Fear not," There must be a ground for this. Christ never speaks without reason, never speaks like this, without a ground for it. What is it? It is the pleasure of His Father and their Father. O think of it, sinner, think of it. The ground for this word of the Lord Jesus, is what His Father's good pleasure is. That good pleasure is that God will take His people to heaven. "It is your Father's good pleasure, to give you the kingdom". Hell may stand in between, but that wont alter the good pleasure of God, wont weaken His arm, will make no difference. Sin in you is between, but that wont alter the decree of God. A thousand fears all in between, but that wont imperil your state. O what a God is the God of heaven, the God of salvation. The good pleasure of God. Where is it? In Christ. It pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell in Him. "This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". Where then is the grace that you have to receive? In Christ. Where is the cleansing for sin? By Christ's blood. Where is the robe, the clean white linen that is spoken of in the Revelation, as the righteousness of the saints? It is Christ. Where is the power to bring these defenceless, these opposed, these weak people, these fearing people to heaven? It is Christ. There, in His hand, is the horn where is the hiding of His power. How shall I know that it is the Father's good pleasure to give me the kingdom, seeing I am what I am? Why, you will know it, by the Lord telling it you. You think of it. Here were these disciples being taught by the Lord Jesus, and He spoke to them, distinctly said to them "It is

your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. I am sending you as sheep among wolves. I am sending you into a world that hates me, and that therefore will hate you. I am not sending peace, but trouble. I am sending a fire, a sword. You are going as sheep among wolves, but fear not. They may tear your natural life, but they wont kill your souls. They wont rob you of salvation, for you are chosen to an inheritance, undefiled and that fadeth not away. Undefiled. Why says a sinner, I cannot hope to get there, for I am defiled. But the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. All sin. Men may take your character away, but they wont take your soul. They may try you in many ways, but they wont destroy you, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom, and the devil, the roaring lion, walking about seeking whom he may devour, he will never succeed, with regard to a child of God. Why one may say, I have got nothing on me but filthy rags. Well, it is a merciful word, in the prophecy of Zechariah. Joshua stood before the angel, clothed in filthy garments, and Satan was there, the accuser of the brethren was there, but the Lord was there, and that was enough. The Lord was there, and, if Joshua could not speak a word in defence of himself, and of course he could not, because he was clothed with filthy rags, the Lord could speak for him, and did. Turning to the accuser of the brethren, the angel of the Lord said, you have no case here, get thee hence. He rebuked him, and did not say this is a pure man, this is the man who has never done any evil. He is in the fire, or has been in the fire of sin and wrath, but he is a brand plucked out of the fire. O this good Shepherd. This divine Shepherd and the pleasure of the Father in Him.

Now in conclusion look at your leisure at that word in the Hebrews, where the captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering and what He had to do to bring to glory all whom the Father gave to Him. Fear not little flock, fear not poor sinner sitting here. Fear neither self, nor time, nor the devil, Cast yourself, weak and foolish though you be on this good shepherd. The good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep. Now may the Lord help us by speaking this word to us, so that, though trouble will come, though judgment may fall upon us in the nation, and judgment begins at the house of God, and the righteous will be scarcely saved, yet this is true - It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.