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Precious in his Sight

Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel Brighton on 22nd June 1988

“Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee.”

Isaiah 43:4

These words relate to God's Israel, spoken of in the first verse as Jacob and Israel, and to those people who answer to the description, and have the characteristics and the experience of that character. Indeed, what amazing words of grace they are! ‘Since thou wast precious in my sight.’ Those who are the subjects of this wonderful favour will very readily acknowledge and confess that there is just simply nothing in themselves to merit the esteem of God or give any delight whatsoever to their Creator. This matter, the love of God and his favour and being precious in his sight, is a matter of amazing, free and sovereign grace. One hymn writer speaks of the same precious truth in those two lines, so sweet to some of us:

*Sinners are high in his esteem,
And sinners highly value him.*

(Gadsby's 89)

This amazing mercy, this wonderful condescension on the part of God is far beyond our conception. To think that any one or other of Adam's fallen race, who are sinners such as you and I, should be so highly esteemed of God that he says that they are precious in his sight, and describes them in his Word as being jewels of such value, which are ever precious before him! He has said: “And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.” (Malachi 3:17)

We will look at some of the things recorded in God's Word which may give us some intimation as to the high value that God puts upon the children of his choice and how precious they really are in his sight. How great is his heart of mercy, love and kindness which moves toward them! After that we will come to the very important point—am I one of these people? Seeing that they are a people whom God has loved, that they are those who are highly esteemed of him and precious in his sight, then what are God's thoughts toward me? Are they thoughts of love and peace? Are they thoughts of grace and kindness toward me? Does he, and can he, look upon me with delight as being one of those whom he has chosen in his love and mercy, whom he has appointed to that glorious inheritance that he has promised to and provided for his people?

Two things principally we must notice about their preciousness. ‘Since—seeing—that thou wast precious in my sight.’ It is usual for us to conclude by the price a person pays for a thing that that is the value they set upon it. Just so it is in regard to this. First, look at that amazing and humbling act of God the Father in respect to the preciousness of that people whom he has determined shall be his people, that they shall be his jewels, likened unto gold and silver and precious stones in the Word of God. What has the Father, the first person in the Trinity, done that they might be his, in the harmonious exercise of his perfections, infinite justice, holiness and righteousness? Why, he has done that which is the greatest thing that it is possible for him to do. He gave his Son for his people, that unspeakable gift. Should we ransack heaven and earth to find a greater demonstration, a surer proof, we could not find a more sure and certain token of God's goodness than this. God can give nothing more than his eternal, only begotten and ever beloved Son who dwelt in his bosom from eternity. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32) So here is the measure and degree of God's mind toward his people in that he esteems them precious in his sight; he gave his Son a ransom for them.

The second wonderful evidence of this matter is that the Son of God himself, who is equal with the Father in every supreme and divine perfection, gave his life for his people. He shed his precious blood. He gave his life (which is the same thing). Nothing less than by this wonderful, blessed and sovereign way the Son of God purchased his people. It was at the price of his own invaluable blood and life.

So we may, by those two things, conclude how great is God's esteem for his people, and how highly they are esteemed and how precious they are in his sight. This matter is too great, too amazing, too wonderful and too profound for our poor finite minds to realise or comprehend. This, when it is truly received, when God the Holy Spirit is pleased to manifest and reveal just a little how precious Jacob and Israel (that is, God's chosen, elect, loved, redeemed people) are in his sight, is overwhelming. It is profoundly humbling when one is given some realisation and feeling of what they really are in and of themselves, as being worthless, guilty, wretched, ruined, undone, and apart from meriting nothing good, meriting only the wrath of God. If one realises that God can esteem such a person as precious in his sight—highly esteemed, graciously received, and so much so, that God has done the greatest thing that God can do to secure himself a people for his praise, having redeemed them and saved them and delivered them from death and guilt and ruin and sin and all their deserts and is bringing them to himself as his own eternal portion—this will humble. We read in another place: "For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." (Deuteronomy 32:9) They are a purchased possession, purchased by the precious blood of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now the important point in regard to this is—Am I one of these people? Has God highly esteemed me, a poor sinner? Am I one of these who are precious in his sight? We may rest assured, absolutely assured of this, that it is impossible—both in regard to God's power as well as God's grace—that he should ever lose one of his people. He will preserve and save them to everlasting and eternal life. They are so precious in his sight, so highly esteemed by him, that he will never lose one of them.

*For O! they ne'er shall lose their God,
Or God e'er lose a saint.*

(Gadsby's 772)

Every one of them is precious beyond our calculation. God highly esteemed them.

This is manifested. If indeed we are purchased by blood and are really redeemed by the life of Jesus Christ—if we are a truly sanctified people, if we are God's portion and those that are precious in his sight—the day must certainly come when this will be made manifest. This God has said: "I will be their God and they shall be my people." (2 Corinthians 6:16) It is impossible that this great God, who so highly esteems his people, should suffer Satan to possess any one of them finally and completely, or that they should be lost or ruined. No, that is impossible. God will put forth his almighty grace and his gracious power and he will separate this people from the rest of the people upon the face of the earth and make them manifest as being that people that are his and are precious and esteemed in his sight.

Now, what is it that will, in the first instance, distinguish them, set them apart, make them to be evident and manifest as God's purchased people, or make them to differ from all the rest of the people upon the face of the earth? Nothing other and nothing less than the new birth. As Jesus said, "Ye must be born again." (John 3:7) That will distinguish a person from every other person upon the face of the earth, because they have got divine life, eternal life imparted to their souls. By reason of this everything becomes new—desires, longings and feelings. They will have new sorrows, new joys. They will be among those who are praying, repenting, seeking, waiting and longing souls upon earth. They will be those to whom Christ is made sensibly and believably precious. These will be they who will know the earnest desires of the Psalmist: "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." (Psalm 42:2) The world is satisfied with the world; God's people are only satisfied with God and those things which God has freely to bestow upon them, which dwell in all their richness in the Lord Jesus Christ. A man who has life imparted will possess the fear of God. He will have a praying soul. He will be one who bemoans his condition and mourns over himself and seeks after God and his salvation. He will stand out in a crowd as clear and as plain as can be and be made manifest because he is called by grace and a partaker of the new birth and is vitally different. His religion is not one that he has manufactured himself, it is not something he has learned, it is not something that he has been brought up to; it is something that God has given him. A child may be trained up to anything by diligent parents, but there is not a person upon the earth who can impart divine life to a soul or give a person a saving and real religion. That is God's gift and is bestowed upon his people. It distinguishes them as his people, his jewels, the people whom he esteems, toward whom he has a purpose of love, mercy and goodness.

Let me ask the question—do we know the time in our experience, the day or the period, when we believe God first imparted life to our souls? Everything was different, the Bible was a new book, the services of God's house were no longer irksome but attractive, the things of God were no longer treated with indifference, but we had a concern and an exercise. We were no longer lifeless, lethargic, indifferent, cold, unconcerned, but now thirsting, possessing a real concern and exercise. This new birth and all this feeling of longing and exercise and desire is the fruit and the effect of that salvation which Christ has wrought out for his people, that redemption which he has perfected and completed. It flows through his death and life.

These are the people that are precious in the eyes of God. Their souls are valuable, they are highly esteemed. This is one great reason why God will bestow upon them every rich and needed favour and blessing and will preserve them unto eternal and everlasting life. These people will also be those who are caused to walk in those ways which are pleasing in the sight of God as being the outward evidence of inward grace and life imparted by God. They are a people that are caused to differ. God has indeed, from the beginning, even to this very day, separated the sons of Adam. What separates Adam's sons? What is it that causes some to be among those who are God's people while the rest are left? Well, it is grace, it is life imparted. We may prove this from the Word of God in every instance therein recorded. Abraham was brought out of Ur of the Chaldees and was precious in God's sight. So was Jacob, called by sovereign grace; Hezekiah the King of Israel wrought upon graciously and powerfully, and we see everything in his life, his prayers and supplications, as proof of the Lord's mercy to him. Being precious Manasseh also was powerfully dealt with. Other jewels high in God's esteem were the publican, the dying thief and Mary. All were among these jewels, all esteemed by the God of amazing grace.

There can be nothing more wonderful, nothing more blessed for which we have cause to give thanks unto God, than if he has given us grace, called us by grace, separated us from the people upon the face of the earth, made us really different among those people. 'Since thou wast precious in my sight.' If we get a touch of this, just a touch, if just a little inkling of it is imparted, if some persuasion and sweet witness of the Spirit be given, this is that which will produce in the soul a felt, deep, sweet, precious, enjoyed humility. It will make us say, 'Why me? Why me? Why should God look, upon me in such mercy and goodness?' This is that which will bring forth praise, humility, godly fear, meekness and worship. May it be God's good pleasure to cause us to feel it. May it be our happy case! 'Since thou wast precious in my sight.'

Now another point I have to attempt to consider is this: 'Thou hast been honourable.' There are three ways in which I want to try and look at this. First, to be honourable in one signification of it is to set forth the praises of him who possesses us. Indeed and of a truth every one of these characters does set forth the praises of God. I will not confine my remarks to that which may be felt in our hearts and proceed from our lips at times for the whole condition, deportment, conversation and state of a saved sinner is to the praise of the God of free mercy and sovereign grace. All of these persons who are redeemed and are precious in the sight of God are purchased by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every poor, helpless, ruined sinner, saved by sovereign grace, honours God. His very case as being saved by grace sets forth the praise of Jehovah in his wisdom, sovereign love, power, mercy, grace, justice, righteousness and every other supreme perfection which is exercised and influenced in the salvation of sinners. Creation sets forth God's honour and praise. That is amazing. The wisdom and power that was exercised in the creation of the universe is beyond our conception. God spake and it was done. That wonderful work worships and praises him and sets forth his honour and glory. Divine providence exercised throughout the whole world sets forth God's praise, it honours him. But there is a greater work, a far greater work than this, and that is the great work of redemption. There is nothing that sets forth God's honour and praise more than that. Every redeemed soul is to the honour of God's grace, mercy, love, goodness and sets forth the praise and honour of his majesty. 'Since thou wast precious in my sight thou hast been honourable.'

But there is a second way in which we will look at this: 'Thou hast been honourable.' These people are honourable indeed in their birth. That is, that new birth that I have been trying to speak of. They may indeed be very dishonourable, as doubtless everyone is, in their natural birth, being by nature fallen sons and daughters of Adam. And in all their conduct and conversation by nature they are dishonouring God,

living in such a way and practising such things as are dishonouring to the God of heaven, living in sin, sinful practices, pursuing the lusts of the flesh, living in pride and all the debauchery and lusts of the flesh; perhaps not outwardly, but inwardly in the heart. But we have the authority of the Scriptures to declare the fact that a person who is begotten again of the Spirit is a son of God. Can there be any greater honour? Can anything be more honourable? Oh, it will be an honour, says the hymn writer, when God makes up his account:

*When God makes up his last account
Of natives in his holy mount,*

*'Twill be an honour to appear
As one new-born or nourished there.*

(Gadsby's 360)

It will be an honour. O, they are honourable people 'Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable.'

But thirdly they are honourable also on account of their relationship. Every one that is truly born again of the Spirit is one with Christ in blessed covenant union to the Son of God. This union is set before us in the Word of God under many figures, amongst them the marriage bond. Being one with him, his name is upon them, that new name, for they shall be, and are, no longer known in the sight of God by their former or their old or native name. They have a new name, for they are born again and are partakers of the name of God who has begotten them, for as they are joined to Christ they are partakers of his name, a new name, and they are honourable—not in themselves, but on account of their part and lot in the communicated comeliness, righteousness, merit and honourableness of Christ. He has said, "Thou art perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee." (Ezekiel 16:14)

Now there is something further that is honourable. 'Thou hast been honourable.' Wherever it is real, wherever it is truly bestowed, wherever this is the case, there must be fruits and effects. It cannot be otherwise. If grace does not make a difference to us, what does it do? If the new birth brings about no radical change, what does it do? Why, the new birth will change a man completely. There is that vital change which is so necessary. Grace will make a difference. If we are partakers of grace there will be evidence, an outward effect of inward grace, the outward manifestation of the inward life. Therefore, these characters who are precious in the sight of God will evidence in life and conduct those things which are pleasing, acceptable and honourable in the sight of God.

Let us try and look at one or two of these evidences. The Word of God tells us that God is well pleased in his people, that they are accepted before him. Is there anything acceptable, is there anything honourable, in a person in the sight of God who is walking in pride, in self-righteousness, in independence, with an impenitent, unbelieving, wretched and hard heart? Is there anything honourable about that? Is that pleasing in the sight of God? No, but the opposite is. Is it pleasing, is it honourable and honouring to God, if a man or woman, being the subject of God's grace, continually bemoans themselves, repenting in dust and ashes, falling down before God with a broken heart, feelingly confessing their sins? Is that pleasing in God's sight? Well, he says it is, and we may rest assured that God speaks the truth in regard to this. When he looks upon a sinner in this condition, it is an acceptable sacrifice to him. A broken and a contrite heart, a sinner mourning over his poverty, humbled and crumbled in the dust of self-abasement. This has an honourable effect, for by this the sinner acknowledges both God's grace and mercy, holiness, pity, righteousness and love, and it is honourable. Is it pleasing in the sight of God to see a poor sinner on his knees supplicating for mercy? Well, what does the Scriptures say concerning the publican? "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." (Luke 18:14)—it was honouring to God.

It is honourable in his sight that a sinner should be found fearing God and trembling at his Word. O that is a good mark! "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." (Isaiah 66:2) Can we come in here as having those feelings in our hearts, and therefore, set among that blessed people toward whom God has thoughts of peace and goodness, a person precious in his sight? Do we tremble at his Word? Do we sometimes read his Word and those

things spoken in it, his word of authority, his word of warning, his description of a right and a wrong character, and do we tremble at it? Do we ever look at God's Word, the things written in it, and say within, 'Is it I? Is it me? Am I one of these characters who trembleth at his Word?' Does it search us, try us, make us feel we come short, and we tremble and long that God would come and assure our conscience that it will be well with us? Well, that is honourable in his sight. His fear, a broken heart, a suppliant cry, a humbling of one's self in the dust, a seeking and a desire to walk in his ways is honourable. It is the outward effect of inward grace, and that soul is high in God's esteem. It is not because of any merit in themselves, but all of his free and amazing grace and its effects upon the heart and spirit.

'Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee.' We notice that this is spoken in the past tense. 'I have loved thee.' We cannot possibly speak of the commencement or the beginning of the love that is spoken of here, for this love is eternal love, set upon these people before the world was formed or time began. God's love is from eternity to eternity. Those who were precious are precious in his sight and are those whom he foreknew: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." (Romans 8:29-30) O what a chain of glorious events! All according to the blessed motive and cause of God's eternal and unfathomable love to his people. God is always first, yes, always.

'I have loved thee.' In God's foreknowledge of this people who he esteemed so highly and who are so precious in his sight, what did he see in them to move his heart toward them? Nothing at all! O, that sovereign and great declaration of this God of Israel! "Jacob have I loved." (Romans 9:13) That must ever be a matter that amazes us and fills us with wonder. Why, why, should God love Jacob? A supplanter, a sinner, an unworthy character, one who in his practices and ways was anything but commendable. But the truth remains concerning him as it does concerning every one of us who have any interest in these great matters:

*He saw me ruined in the fall,
Yet loved me notwithstanding all.*

(Gadsby's 9)

It is eternal love. And seeing that it is set upon such characters as it is, it must of necessity be sovereign love, absolute in its sovereignty. It could never be fixed upon a sinner otherwise, for there is everything in us to call down the opposite to love from this holy, just and righteous God; but he loved because he would love.

This love is also free, without money and without price or desert.

It is immutable, absolutely immutable. There is nothing that can cause God to change his purpose, his mind or his feelings toward his people; it is immutable love. Nothing that ever has been, or ever will be, will cause God to alter or change his mind or purpose one iota. He says, 'I have loved thee,' and that means that he has loved with an eternal, immutable, unfathomable and unchangeable love.

Now this love manifests itself, it is revealed, it is made known. 'I have loved thee.' I love thee still through all the changing scenes of life. Whatever may arise, whatever may come in regard to changing events, circumstances or whatever, 'I have loved thee.' O, what a wonderful statement! What will this do for us if it is manifest? We shall love God in return. Let me ask this one question—Has God constrained us to love him? Has he given to us the desire at least, a living, longing, earnest desire—"I would love thee if I could. Allow me to love thee," a sinner says sometimes. Is there that drawing, that movement in our poor hearts God-ward as this love influences, constrains, and affects our poor hearts to love in return?

*Loved of my God, for him again
With love intense I'd burn;
Chosen of thee e'er time began,
I'd choose thee in return.*

(Gadsby's 940)

Now God is pleased to exercise this love in such a way that wherever any one of these people are concerned who are precious in his sight, he will love and correct them, he will love and reprove them, he

will love and instruct them, he will love and preserve them, he will love and pity them. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."

*Whom the Lord Jehovah loves,
He in various ways reproveth.*

(Gadsby's 623)

That is our mercy. God be thanked for his goodness! Where should we be, where should we get, what should we do if he were not pleased, in his love and kindness, often to reprove, correct and chasten us? We are bad enough as it is, what should we be without it? This is a token and evidence of his love. If God is pleased to love and instruct us, that love and instruction will be effectual, it will be unctuous, it will be profitable, for God's instruction is in love. We shall learn, not as a schoolboy learns his task, but we shall learn in the school of Christ, which will be for our profit. "My son, hear the instruction of thy father." (Proverbs 1:8) He will love and pity in the bowels of his compassion that move so freely, willingly and lovingly to his tempted and tried people. "For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." (Psalm 103:14) "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." (Isaiah 49:15) This is love which will never cease, never diminish, never fail, never be moved, and never alter. 'I have loved thee.' We may rest assured that everything that God has done, what he is now doing and what he will do in regard to our souls in all their vicissitudes and changes, in all their circumstances and all their alterations, in everything regarding time and eternity, must be consistent with God's love, the very best that love can do, the very best that love can appoint. Well, may it be manifest, made over to us that this is the case: 'Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee.'

The Lord add his blessing to these few observations.

Amen.