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Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel, Brighton on 22nd March 1995

"Though thou shouldest bray a fool in mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him." Proverbs 27:22

I confess these words are indeed most unusual for me. But as they have been laid upon my mind, by God's help I will attempt to try and look first a little at that which is spoken concerning the foolish soul – that no unsanctified experience will be of any use in causing a man's foolishness to depart from him. I will then try to look at the opposite of this – and by what way and by what means God is pleased to accomplish this in the hearts of His people. May we indeed prove in our own poor hearts that we have been delivered from our foolishness.

First we must find out who this soul is, and what God has declared in His own word of truth, concerning the sons of men. All and every one of us, as we are born into this world, the sons and daughters of Adam, are fools in the extreme. It is impossible for the human heart to be stupid enough, or foolish enough, to satisfy the carnal desire and the carnal mind. Just according to our circumstances, or our upbringing and our acquaintances, so this vile thing, this great thing in our hearts, may manifest itself in our ways and our conduct. Those ways, in the sight of God, are nothing other and nothing better than foolishness. Indeed, when we are brought to know and understand a little of what is contained in that deep fact of the fall of man, we shall acknowledge that we never have been, in and of ourselves, anything other than foolish, and never shall be. We shall be made wise alone by the grace and blessed work of God in our hearts.

Let us notice one or two people in the word of God whom the God of truth calls fools. The first is the man that said in his heart, there is no God. The foolish without exception say this, and you and I among them. To deny, through our atheism and folly, the being of God, is a fatal matter; it will leave us exposed to the wrath of God. To pursue that path, *giving credit to and believing such a dreadful lie, will only end in self-destruction.*

The second illustration is the difference between those characters who heard the words of Christ and did them, and they who heard the words and did them not: "And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7:26-27) No-one but a fool will build upon sand, and that is our nature; that is our religion; if we have a religion in the flesh, we shall build upon sand. But "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock." (Matthew 7:24-25)

Now this is the behaviour, the condition of all in a religion except those whom God has dealt with; they are all built on the sand and it will not stand. It will be our mercy, if God is pleased to hound us out of all our foolish refuges, and to deliver us from every foolish foundation, and bring us to Christ as our only way of salvation and glory. So the man who built his house upon the sand is to be considered a foolish man.

The third person to consider, who is recorded in God's Word for our instruction, is that man whose goods did greatly increase: "And he said, this will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' But what did God say?"

'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee'; then whose shall those things be...?" (Luke 12:18-20) So that all that lay up treasure for themselves, all that seek first the things of this world, the vanities, substance and so called pleasures and profits of it, God calleth such foolish persons.

The fourth and last illustration is when the Lord Jesus Christ spoke a most solemn, discriminating, separating parable to the people; He said there were ten virgins, and five of them were wise and five were foolish. He declared that though there was so much that was similar, and by their outward walk and conversation perhaps, nothing by which they could be distinguished – they all had lamps, they all had a light, they may all have attended the same ministry, heard the same gospel and believed the same doctrines – but the foolish had no oil in their vessels with the lamps; so they came to a breaking point when they most needed it and they were proved to be foolish. (Matthew 24:1-13)

These things are left on record in God's word for the trying of the righteous, to cause them to tremble at the word of God and to seek that God would, in His great mercy, make them right and keep them right for eternity.

Now in the words of our text, God says 'though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle,'- it will not change his heart, it will not do anything for him, it will not rid him of his foolishness, it will not cause him to be wise. Just to enlarge a little upon this part of our subject, to see what we may understand in the spiritual significance of it - this fool being brayed in a mortar among wheat. It matters not what awful calamities, what unspeakable affliction, what dreadful circumstances may be the lot and portion of this soul – and there have been and there still are such cases where these foolish persons have most alarming distresses and troubles, that have the tendency to bruise to break and to crush them – but it did not cause their foolishness to depart from them. No, not an atom! It needs something greater than this.

What is written in God's word concerning this - the soul that is brayed among the wheat in a mortar. Take the case of Manasseh. He was the son of Hezekiah, King of Israel, and it truly causes our hearts to be much affected to read what Manasseh did in Jerusalem. O, he was awfully wicked! The dreadful things that he perpetrated and that he accomplished in Jerusalem; the atrocities, the wickedness, the baseness of his doings. Now God observed all this and sent a prophet to warn him, and He laid affliction upon his loins and dealt with him in a very severe manner. What was the effect? To make his proud nature prouder still, to make the despot crueller still. His foolishness did not depart from him, he went on in that God dishonouring way, which called for God's wrath to fall upon him. But you see presently what was done in Manasseh's heart, which *did* most effectually cause his foolishness to depart from him.

In the book of the Revelation, we read how that God sent scorpions among men, whose power was to hurt and to sting, and they were given power to kill a third part of men upon the earth. Awful and dreadful, painful, distressing and agonising, were the things experienced. But what is recorded in spite of all this? "Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts." (Revelation 9:21) So that though there were crushing judgments and most dreadful things accomplished upon the earth, man continued just the same as he did before.

I hope here may be a reason why I should have to speak from these for they are very solemn considerations we have to make. John Bunyan says in one place, and it is quite right and perfectly true, that if it was possible for someone now in hell to come back to this earth, and live their lives again, they would live the same life as they had in the first place and be damned the second time. They would be no different. Because, you see, it is only one thing that can change a man's heart, and that is *grace*. O, his being brayed in a mortar among wheat with a pestle will not change him! It will

not take his foolishness from him; he will continue in his wickedness. O, what a wonderful mercy if God has dealt with us in His mercy, for I am sure that judgments will not move us.

It was my place to visit a man in hospital, of whom I knew little. The first thing I asked him, was how matters stood with his soul in his deep affliction. His answer was just this, very simply: "This poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his distresses." Psalm 34:6) Ah, I thought, here is a wise man, made wise unto salvation; a man who has been delivered from the native foolishness of the heart. He looked in one place only, he did not begin to talk about the doctors, nurses, hospital and so forth, no, he said, "This poor man cried and the Lord heard him." Now opposite him was a neighbour of mine, who I knew quite well through business contacts, and that man escaped from death very narrowly. A tree fell upon his car and crushed it to the ground and he just escaped death; he was badly injured and I thought it only courteous to speak to him. He said, "I do not know what I have done to deserve all this." I knew not how to answer him. You see the difference between those two men; one had grace, one had been dealt graciously with, and one was left to his folly – for when he came out of hospital he lived just the same, just as foolishly and sinfully as he had done before, it had no effect upon him. That was a demonstration of these words: 'Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.' The greatest affliction, the greatest judgments will make no difference; man will remain just the same as before.

Not only in our text, but in a number of places in the word of God, this is made very clear and plain: that God's judgments poured out, His visitations manifested, will not alter the heart or case of man one jot. The only effect of these judgements – not being sanctified – is to stir up more enmity, hatred, bitterness, rebellion, pride and determination to utter foolishness; the heart of man will do his very utmost to make good what God has undone.

What can I say concerning this matter? May we truly consider and conclude that it is an exceedingly solemn thing to be left to our own folly, our own wicked ways. For by nature we do nothing good, there is nothing but foolishness in every act and thought and deed; we do that which is for our own destruction and evil.

There is an implication here with regard to the providential and circumstantial pathway of God's people. Now the Scripture says: "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." (Proverbs 28:26) "Lean not unto thine own understanding." (Proverbs 3:5) Has it been our lot and portion? Whether it has been yours or not I know not, but it has been my portion to have done a very foolish thing, and brought myself into very great difficulties and straits. And when the Lord was pleased to appear, in answer to much prayer and long waiting and watching, and came most mercifully and made matters good, I thought I had learnt my lesson. But alas, I did the same thing over again. I thought my first act of foolishness, and all that it brought upon me had taught me to be careful, and prayerful, and watchful, and not so foolish in my thoughts and ways. But alas! how painful to find we make the same mistakes a second time and have no-one else to blame but ourselves.

It matters not what affliction or trial or distress we may have in providence; it matters not what deep distresses we may bring upon ourselves, and as Bunyan says, at times jump out of the frying pan into the fire yet we find that the things we have learnt seem lost. Affliction does not drive the foolishness from our hearts; only God can do that. Affliction and distress, of itself alone, will do us no good; it will make us worse. God must use it and sanctify it to us, for it to be for our good. As this is so very true, and proved to be so by the experience of God's people, so the opposite is blessedly true. What will drive this foolishness from the soul? what is it that will make a poor sinner wise?

what is it that will deliver him from himself? For that is the greatest thing that we need to be delivered from – ourselves.

James Bourne, when Pastor at Maney, had a family attending his ministry of whom he said: "I watched them for seven years when they were in as great trouble as I had ever seen anybody, but at the end of it they were no more delivered from themselves and their own ways than at the beginning of it." They still followed their own foolish inclinations and their wicked ways; it did them no good. Well then, surely it will be our earnest desire that God will deal with us, to make us wise unto salvation. What is the first thing in regard to this? God will communicate and impart to the hearts of His people, the fear of the Lord. Now that is the beginning of wisdom. Has God in any measure granted to us that sweet and tender fear that works by love, under the blessed influence and work of the Holy Ghost within our hearts? Before we receive that, we have no understanding, we have no knowledge, we are foolish. But this sweet fear is that which brings life, light and understanding with it. Its gracious work in the heart is a blessed monitor; it will cause our foolishness to depart from us and will cause us to act wisely. When the Holy Spirit is pleased to convince and convict us of our sin, and cause us to sensibly and feelingly stand before a holy and heart-searching God, we feel the influence and effect of the infinite gaze of God – the gaze of Him who knoweth all things, and of whom it is said that no man needeth to tell Him what is in man, for He knoweth.

I believe the first time that I really felt that there was a God I trembled exceedingly before His holy Majesty, and understood a little my sinful ways before Him. Now there is not a person upon the earth can persuade one, who is in that experience, that there is no God – for that person knows only too well, by personal experience, that there *is* a God. He will not be that fool that saith in his heart, there is no God, if he has had the experience of His powerful influence. When the Holy Spirit is pleased to sanctify unto us our sinful condition in the feeling of it and our afflictions on account of it, it will cause us to truly feel our lost, ruined and undone condition; then we shall not build upon the sand. My friends, do you need something better, far better than a sandy foundation? Are you after the Rock, waiting that God may set your feet surely and certainly upon it? For God's word says: "For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) and, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3) Even in a natural way, to use a literal illustration, if a person has got a disease, which will certainly prove terminal unless the only known remedy is applied, it would be foolish indeed to despise or neglect that one remedy. They that are wise would earnestly seek that they may have the benefit of receiving that one remedy. Now everyone in God's word is spoken of as a fool, who does not rest singly and alone upon Jesus Christ. Has God made us wise unto salvation? Has He revealed unto us the Lord Jesus Christ? And can we be satisfied with anything less than a felt and proven interest in His blood and righteousness?

We read in God's word of wise and godly men, and surely these are left on record for our instruction and for our warning, and that we should take heed lest we should fall. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12) You know, God raised up and appointed Solomon to be King in Israel, and Solomon, realising and understanding the importance and greatness of the position and the responsibility, being made wise of God, he prayed for wisdom. And I suppose that we may safely conclude that Solomon was the wisest man that ever lived upon the earth; I mean among natural men – Jesus Christ was the wisest – but among men Solomon was the wisest man that lived upon the earth. But you know – alas for him! and a warning for us – he was a foolish old man. Very foolish, for evil women turned him aside and he lost the possession of ten twelfths of his kingdom; he was left two tribes, the rest were taken away.

Now have we not at various times looked at these characters in God's word, who were princes in Israel, (and I have felt myself to be a Pygmy in comparison), and if they were left to foolish ways, what can I say concerning myself? They had much more grace than I, a much greater experience than I, they were princes in Israel! And yet the moment they were left, they fell. Not absolutely, not finally, but they fell through their foolishness. Now if God is pleased to deliver me and you from the foolishness of our fallen nature, affliction will not do it of itself, no, judgments will not do it. I have found many times in my life that affliction in itself only stirs up the very worst in me – it brings the filth, the scum to the surface, and as for praying, well it makes my heart that obstinate, that my mouth is well-nigh closed. My friends, there is nothing *whatsoever*, that will ever do any one of us an atom of good, either here or hereafter, but God's grace. That will do it. O, if we know something of God's love, God's mercy, God's grace, God's fear and the person and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ; the experience of this – and it must be had – will cause our foolishness to depart from us. And our constant and earnest prayer will then be to be made wise unto salvation, wise unto eternal life, and not left to go our own foolish ways.

There are times when God is pleased to deal very severely with some of us, as to our feelings, but let it be known that in this, God has no intention whatsoever of destroying us. His intention is to deliver us from that which *would* destroy us, had He not delivered us from it. God is infinitely wise, and in all His ways it will still be proved:

*He was too wise to err, and O,
Too good to be unkind. (7)*

Well, I do not feel to have made much of it, but I hope the Lord may use the few remarks for some use to our poor hearts. 'Though thou shouldest bray a fool in mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.' But it will, if God makes us possessors of the fear of the Lord. The Lord grant us that in large measure, yea, more and more of it, that it may be said of us, that he or she feared God above many.

The Lord add His blessing. Amen

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