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Willing in the Day of God's Power

Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel Brighton on 5th March 1987

“Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.” Psalm 110:3

These words relate to the Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Friend and Saviour of sinners. The Psalmist in prophesy, speaking in the first verse, says: “The Lord hath said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”

Two things we have to attempt to consider; the first is that the Lord Jesus Christ has a people and they are called in our text ‘Thy people.’ We will attempt to enquire who these people are. Secondly; that there is a power which belongeth unto him which is an effectual, almighty, gracious and wonderful power, put forth, exerted, operating upon the hearts and wills and souls of this people, who are his people, so that there is a willingness wrought in their hearts. Such willingness is produced by the almighty power of the goodness, grace and love of Christ that, when felt realised and enjoyed, influences an unreserved willingness to this glorious, rightful and blessed Sovereign of the souls of that people whom he has purchased to be his subjects, children and friends.

First then, this great and important point: Christ has a people. ‘Thy people.’ Now there are three considerations of this. First, they are his people as they were given to him by the free donation of the Father. Jesus himself says: “Thine they were and thou gavest them me.” (John 17:6) The Father by that eternal choice of love and grace, as he set his heart upon them from all eternity, said: “They shall be mine ... in that day when I make up my jewels,” (Malachi 3:17) and it is this people that he gave his beloved Son to redeem, save, justify and glorify. There is that blessed Scripture concerning Christ’s glorious work in the salvation of that people given to him: “Behold I and the children whom God hath given me.” (Hebrews 2:13)

Secondly, they are his without dispute on account of being purchased by him. They are the flock which he has purchased with his own blood. There was nothing considered too great by this precious person that he might be in real purchased possession of his own inheritance, which is Jacob: “For the Lord’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.” (Deuteronomy 32:9) So then they are a people bought by his precious, infinitely invaluable blood.

Thirdly, they are his by virtue of an eternal, indisputable covenant union. Christ and his people are one. He is the eternal, ever living and everlasting Head of his people. The church are the members of his mystical body, just as truly and just as really as you and I may claim our hand to be our own hand as it belongs to us, and is part of our body and part of us and of no one else. So Christ lays claim justly and rightly to every member of his mystical body, they are his. Not a voice in earth, heaven or hell can dispute the right of Christ to those who are his people: ‘Thy people.’

Now the experience spoken of in our text, which I hope to look at a moment in some measure, will be our own personal, indisputable evidence and proof of being one of these people: Christ’s power put forth upon our hearts and our souls. It is only his people that will ever know this power and be made willing in the day of his power. ‘Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.’ The rest will be left to their own rebellion, as we read later in the Psalm: “He shall judge among the heathenHe shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.” (vs. 6-7) It is a wonderful mercy then if we know something of the power of Christ and if, though born into this world rebellious to him and his wisdom, we are made willing in the day of his power, for this people of his are indeed made willing by that power.

This is a wonderful word, it is a blessed statement, it is a sweet experience. They are not forced, they are not under some despotic rule, nor driven. Nay, it is by his gracious power. They are affected and they are made willing, truly willing, in the day of his power.

There might be many ways in which to look at the day of this power but I desire to confine my remarks to that day of his power in our own personal experience, that auspicious, wonderful, never to be forgotten day when the Lord, who sits at the right hand of God, puts forth his almighty power. It is exercised toward and upon each one individually, one by one, until every one of them is effectually and mightily wrought upon so as to be made willing in the day of his power, and made the happy, blessed and favoured subjects of the effectual reign of his sweet grace, love, favour and power.

What is this power? "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." (Matthew 28:16) It is powerful grace, it is gracious power. It is almighty love; it is that power given unto Christ whereby he is an almighty, able and willing Saviour. Power to save, redeem, pardon, sanctify, justify, glorify—all power is his.

Now without power there is nothing wrought. There must be power and there must be the exercising of that power. But let me emphasise this point—where his people are concerned there is a gracious, saving effect. It is upholding, strengthening, saving grace and mercy. It is almighty, and the effect of it upon the heart is to produce the willingness that we have in our text. One of the most effectual things is to feel in our souls a powerful manifestation and communication of the dying, redeeming love of the dear Redeemer. If anything will make a man's heart willing, the love of Christ shed abroad therein will do it, and cause that heart to be perfectly conformed to the blessed will of Jesus Christ.

Before I look at this willingness, I want to commence at the very beginning of it all. What is the case, state and condition of this people, 'Thy people,' as they are born into this world, sons and daughters of Adam? They are at that time in the world, of it, and in an unregenerate state and condition. A will they have indeed, but what can we say of the will of man by nature? It is in bondage, utter bondage. In bondage to sin, Satan and the world. There is no such thing as free will in the heart of man; he has not a free will, he is in bondage. If any of you are familiar with that clear and wonderful treatise of Luther, the German, who wrote on this very subject—*On the Bondage of the Will*—you can understand that he sets it forth better than ever I can. So long as we are in this state and condition our will is at enmity to God, it is perverse, obstinate, it may be very strong in its workings, but it is puny. We only have a will to evil, we have no will to good, and left in this state and condition, according to the carnality of our natural hearts and minds, we shall do all sorts of things which are consistent therewith. But we have no will for God, no will for his ways, no will for his strength and no willingness in regard to any kind of bowing or submitting to the truth or will or mind or purpose of God. The will is adamant, obstinate, against every injunction of the Word of God, whether law or gospel. The heart of man says, without exception, 'I will not.' Repent? 'No, not me!' Believe? 'I cannot and I will not!' Obey? 'Never!' The heart is by nature obstinate, perverse, and evil. But the day comes with every one of God's people when the words of the hymn writer are fulfilled:

*The appointed time rolls on apace,
Not to propose, but call by grace;
To change the heart, renew the will,
And turn the feet to Zion's hill.*

(Gadsby's 76)

We cannot begin to realise the measure and degree of power that is put forth in this sovereign and divine act of Jesus Christ. It is far beyond our conception. There is an effectual, irreversible and everlasting change wrought when this day of power comes: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power."

A thought comes to mind which I will attempt to explain—I do not quite like the expression 'renew the will' since the old will is not really changed or renewed. What really happens is that the Lord is pleased to give a new nature, makes a new creature and gives a new will. The old will still remains and to the dying day of a believer this is his lamentation, his grief and sorrow. There are times when he still feels a measure of rebellion, obstinacy and perverseness and that wretched will of the flesh which can do nothing but lust according to its evil and sinful nature. Unless God is pleased to subdue this, for that is what he is pleased to do at times, we find that there is still that unwillingness felt within us to unreservedly fall before God and acquiesce to his will. But the new man, the new creature, the new heart and the new will are always

willing to do that which is according to God's will and purpose. It is this precious person, who by his Spirit works in the heart to will and to do of his good pleasure. Until the time comes when power is first put forth, we have nothing but a perverse will, but when the power is put forth then we have another will, a new will, which makes us willing in the day of his power. Yet so long as we go on in this old sinful nature of ours we shall find oftentimes the alternating of these two things, the will that is perverse and at the same time a will that would do good. One will obstinate and perverse, the other submissive and acquiescent. It is only as this blessed person is pleased to put forth his power afresh, again and again and again, that we are made willing in that day of his power, else we obstinately rebel against his will:

*We only are to God resigned,
As be the grace imparts.*

(Gadsby's 682)

We stand in need of a constant communication of this power to our hearts to be made willing in the day of that power.

Now I want to enlarge a little. My friends, have you and I been made truly and thoroughly and readily willing to leave the hateful ways of sin? Willing to do it? Knowing well that the way in which we proceeded and the things we followed, must inevitably land us in eternal perdition? And has the power and grace of Christ made us really willing to turn our back on that which we pursued previously? Willing to do it? Not driven, but sweetly drawn and detached in some measure from our former conversation so that we have fled from the wrath to come? This is the first part of being made willing.

The second part of being made willing is a true and real and gracious willingness to be saved by grace. Now there is not a single person upon this earth who is willing to be saved by grace until they are made willing. They will be willing to be saved in any other way, they will look at any other sort of purpose or scheme of salvation, but not at this. It is the power of Christ and the power of Christ alone that can make a man or woman unreservedly willing to be saved by grace alone.

The apostle Paul was brought to this point when the power of Christ was put forth upon his heart as he went down to Damascus. He felt the power and he was made thoroughly willing to leave the world, that is his Pharisaic and his self-righteous profession, to cast it all away most willingly. He was made willing to be saved by grace, made willing for Christ to be all the glory and honour of his salvation. What a blessed thing it is if our hearts are made willing for Christ to have *all* the glory, not part of the glory. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord." O what a profound depth, what an infinite depth there is in these words! "That I am the Lord." "That he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 9:23-24) Made truly, wholeheartedly and thoroughly willing to submit unreservedly to his sovereign grace and own him Lord and Saviour. We are not willing to do this until we are made willing: but 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.'

Now another part of this willingness is that willingness of the heart to follow Christ, to go with him, just as the heart of Rebekah was made willing to go with Abraham's servant. "Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go." (Genesis 24:56) Now no man is willing to follow Christ and willing to do that which is so absolutely necessary in this pathway until he is made willing. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Matthew 16:24) That is too hard for us, we cannot do it, and there is a dreadful unwillingness in us at every thought of it; but O, my friends, if Christ puts forth his power in our hearts and makes us willing, and he alone can make us willing, then our hearts are made truly willing to relinquish all and follow him. The power of his grace, the power of his love, the power of his precious blood, the atonement in its efficacy felt in the heart will bring about this willingness, so that we are sweetly detached from all else and made willing to follow the Lamb. 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.' Have we ever known for a few moments this blessed willingness wrought in our poor hearts? Willing, like the apostle Paul. "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine

own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” (Philippians 4:8-9)

This willingness was powerfully, effectually and sweetly wrought in the heart of Moses. I remember a season when I was in my teens, I could take you to the place where I really felt willing to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Just at that moment, eternity was so great in my feelings and the love of Christ was so sweet that I desired truly to be numbered among his people now and for eternity. Moses was made willing to turn his back for ever upon all the attractions of Egypt—the throne, the crown, the treasures, the pleasures, the ease, the comforts that this world could afford. He turned his back upon it; he was made willing to forsake all. It is not natural to us at all. This is not nature. Moses chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” (Hebrews 11:25) He counted the treasures of Egypt nothing in comparison; for he had regard unto the recompense of the reward. It is a wonderful thing to be made willing to leave, relinquish, and cast aside everything that is not according to the will of God, in regard to our profession and confession of his name. He must do it. We do not possess this willingness for one moment unless this power is upon us. If that power is withheld we soon find our peevish, rebellious, obstinate will rise up and our proud and conceited self-will come upon us. But, ‘Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.’

Two points in particular regarding the exercise and feeling of our will. One is a willingness to serve. This must be wrought by his gracious power and that in regard to the whole will and mind and purpose of God concerning us.

What is that which will make the heart really willing, and work in us that ready, willing, sweet and desirable obedience? It is the power of his love. What is that love which does not yield obedience? And what is that obedience that does not spring from love? The Psalmist David knew a little of it in his own heart’s feelings. He had such an intense longing that his way might be according to God’s testimonies. “O Lord, teach me thy statutes.” (Psalm 119:12) He was blessed at that time with a sweet acquiescence in regard to God’s will, commandments and statutes. He saw the blessedness and virtue of the atonement. But alas, if your heart is anything like mine by nature, O! what rebels we are! We are so much like the mule which will lay in the furrow in an obstinate state, and may often say I cannot and I will not, and there is awful obstinacy, but O, ‘Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.’ What a wonderful thing when we can truly and unreservedly say: ‘Lord, show me the way thou wilt have me to go, strengthen me to walk in thy ways, uphold me, support, strengthen me, give me a willingness to do that which is consistent with thy holy mind and will.’ Now there is a willingness to serve and to be obedient. “Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee.” (Isaiah 30:21)

*Confirmed by one soft, secret word
I seek no further light.*

(Gadsby’s 812)

Have you always found yourself willing to proceed in the way the Lord has designed for you to go? Have you always found yourself ready to do that which is according to the mind, purpose and will of God? I have not; but O, ‘Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.’ Willing to bear a cross, willing to bear a responsibility, willing to proceed in a particular path or profession? O, but you will be willing in the day of his power, not before. O the obstinacy that we still find in our hearts!

Now not only is there a willingness to serve, but there is a willingness to suffer. This is set before us throughout the whole Word of God, that the way of a true child of God, of his people, his redeemed people, who are in the way to heaven, will be a pathway of tribulation. There is the suffering, there is the cross, there are difficulties, temptations, oppositions, trials, enemies to encounter, a battlefield to stand upon, the flesh to deny, the narrow pathway in which to proceed, and are we willing? The flesh would love a comfortable, smooth, easy path to heaven. But, “If any man will come after me,” said the Lord Jesus, “let him deny himself, and take up his cross.” (Matthew 16:24) Let him deny his natural self, deny his religious self, deny himself in his own wisdom, supposed strength or merit, and let him absolutely, utterly depend upon me and follow me, being made willing to suffer.

I had an experience some years ago. I do not wish to speak much of myself but it does illustrate the point. I knew the path in which I had to proceed and I knew what it would mean and I well-nigh fainted at the thought of it. My natural heart shrank, utterly shrank, from the thought of it and I felt so unwilling through fear and distrust and self-pity and unbelief. But I trust that the Lord mercifully reprov'd me and put this question to my heart. Supposing that the Lord Jesus Christ had said that he was not willing to suffer for you, what would be your lot and portion? Well, there was only one answer. If he had been unwilling to suffer, we must go to hell, every one; and think of it—who he is, even the Son of God equal with the Father and the Spirit, and he was willing to suffer. Now that put me to shame—to think that I was unwilling to suffer for him who suffered for me. I trust that verse of the hymn was a true prayer in my heart:

*Thus make me willing, glorious Lamb,
To suffer all things for thy name;
At last be where my Jesus is,
And rise to everlasting bliss.*

(Gadsby's 771)

Now those things which I feared came to pass, every one of them, and indeed it was a pathway of suffering, and those words came to me: "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake," (Matthew 10:22) which words were fulfilled. But in the midst of all the distress I was strengthened and comforted by these words: "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. For behold I will shake mine hand upon them," (Zechariah 2:8-9) which were also fulfilled. But, O my friends, what will make us willing to suffer anything for his sake, but for Christ to shed abroad his love! If he reveal to us the power of his grace and manifest himself and smile upon our souls, if he communicate the power and the efficacy of his death—that will make the heart willing. Nothing else will. 'Thy people shall be made willing in the day of thy power.'

Have you and I ever been made willing to take up our cross, to walk in a difficult pathway, to suffer the loss of some cherished thing? Willing to do so? This is not nature; this is grace. Our hearts are made willing.

I want to go a little further, because this not only has regard to our spiritual experience and the willingness wrought in the soul in the day of his power regarding salvation—first leaving the world, following him, cleaving to him, taking up our cross, walking in that path which is a narrow path which leadeth to everlasting life—but also regarding everything which concerns us in our providential and circumstantial pathway. Acquiescence to the will of Christ is a wonderful thing: to lie passive in his hands and know no will but his.

We will break it up into three particular aspects of the heart's feelings in being made willing in the day of his power. Firstly, what a wonderful thing to be made really willing to be just what he would have us to be and nothing different. O the disputing, the quarrelling, the questioning that goes on in our poor hearts! We want something to be different; we are not satisfied with what we are and how we are. We are not willing that it should be so. We want this altered, that altered, something else altered. But what a blessed thing when his power is put forth, the power of his grace and love, his sweet influence and presence! Then we are perfectly happy to be just as we are and no different, if that be pleasing and good in his holy sight, and to feel a sweet acquiescence in his sovereign will concerning us. This has an application to little things as well as great things. To bear the infirmities that we have, the weaknesses that we have, the things which affect our minds and our bodies. Not to be quarrelsome about it and dispute with the Lord or be so wicked as to question his wisdom, his love and his power, but to be willing in the day of his power and have grace given to trust in him for sufficient strength and help to bear us through. I am sure that if it were left to us we should try and choose some other difficulty, some other infirmity or some other cross than what the Lord has appointed for us. But, my friends, there is nothing sweeter than to feel an unreserved acquiescence in the will of God so that our will is swallowed up in his. That never can be except he put forth his power. It is in the day of his power we are made willing. So then, may we be willing to be what he would have us be.

Secondly, to be where he would have us be, nowhere else. This not only in regard to our dwelling, but regarding our position, our circumstances, and our place in relation to other things and other persons, just as the Lord sees fit. Perhaps you say, I really wonder as I look at this, at that, at something else, and well, it all appears so wrong and all seems to militate against me. O if I could but escape this, that or the other circumstance! Ah, but this is scheming and planning according to our own will and purpose. It is a blessed thing when we can lie at his feet and know no will but his. This is the very spirit of Christ when it is given. That blessed Son of God in his dreadful sufferings said: "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matthew 26:29) It is to be made willing in the day of his power, willing to be what we are and willing to be where we are.

Thirdly, willing, absolutely willing, to refrain from, to relinquish, to cease from everything which is inconsistent with his grace, will, mind and purpose. This is hard work sometimes, is it not? Ever such hard work. O, how we cleave and cling to things! The Lord may frown upon us, he may smite us and chastise us; still we go on obstinately, determined to have our own way and will and absolutely determined we shall not give up that which is pleasing to us. But he will remove that which he sees fit to remove from us, and we shall have to bow to his power, but—

*He never takes away our all,
Himself he gives us still.*

(Gadsby's 132)

Is that not enough to content a believer? To have God as his portion and his all? Ah, if the Lord appear and manifest himself and shed abroad his love, we shall be willing and ready to lay anything and everything down if he commands.

Well, that is one side of it. The other side is this: to go in that way in which he has commanded us to walk without disputing. Now there are many dark matters, many dark dispensations, many dark pathways and many things which might appear to be exceedingly perplexing and distressing; but is not the Lord infinitely wise? Does he not know what is best? Does he not know the future as well as the present? Does he not know what in his eternal mind concerns us? O what a blessed thing to be made willing in the day of his power! O those cross-handed providences: "Not so, my father:" Ah, says Jacob, "I know it, my son, I know it." (Genesis 48:18-19) The Lord knows best, and there are times when we believe he knows best.

What a wonderful thing when we are made willing in the day of his power. In regard to this I trust that I can honestly say I know a little about what I am speaking in regard to obstinacy, perverseness and rebellion of the will, for I stuck out against what I knew to be God's purpose and his will for well over twenty years, but eventually he made me willing by shedding abroad his love in my heart to such a degree and extent that I knew well his will and submitted to it. He does not drive his people, he makes them willing—He brings their wills into sweet and blessed acquiescence with his own.

May we know more of it, both in gracious experience as well as in providence. Thy people shall be made willing in the day of thy power.' Willing in everything that concerns us, every circumstance, present and future, to be just as the Lord would have it and no other; willing to be what he would have us to be, where he would have us to be, do what he would have us to do, and say what he would have us to say; willing in the day of his power. May that blessed, gracious, loving power be put forth in a gracious measure and degree upon our poor souls, and we be made consistent with the purposes and will of God and enabled to pray and say, as Jesus taught his disciples, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10)

The Lord add his blessing.

Amen.