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Sermons Preached at Scaynes Hill by Mr J W Walder on Lord's Day morning July 27th 1980

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. Psalm 32:1-2

Before attempting to look more particularly at the experience, the very vital, necessary and blessed experience of forgiveness, I want to notice first a few necessary and salient points with regard to the great unspeakable blessing of forgiveness that is before us in our text. The hymn writer says:

*What call we small things – sin's whole cancelled sum?
'Tis greater than all things, except those to come.*

Well then, let us look a little at this great matter as to the source, spring, and precious channel thereof, and the wonderful and blessed truth that there is the possibility of pardon. The Psalmist in another place says: "There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." If my memory serves me right, I do believe the first little ray of hope I had in my poor soul was the feeling of the possibility of pardon. When I was in my teens, labouring under a sense of the guilt and burden of my sins, which I thought would sink me down into hell, I was shown that pardon was a possibility, which encouraged me to beg with real earnestness that I might be given it, and enter into the blessedness of my text.

I want to set before you that there is forgiveness with God, and that He is ready to pardon, and that this blessed mercy is unconditional, and is bestowed absolutely free upon the ungodly, upon those who know that in and of themselves they are transgressors, and therefore subject to divine wrath, and richly deserving of hell for their sin. Where shall we look for the beginning, or spring, of this wonderful blessing of forgiveness? It is in God Himself. Why is it that God will forgive the sins of His own people? Because it is in His nature to do so; because it is part of His eternal and most glorious and holy name. He declared by Moses' mouth long ago: "The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the third and fourth generation." He will show mercy unto them that fear Him. So then, the reason that God forgives is because He will. His name, and His eternal glory, is manifested in so doing, and it is His supreme delight to show mercy in blessing with pardon those who are His sons, and being determined thus to do has, according to His merciful character, designed means whereby He can do so justly in perfect harmony with His righteousness.

The reason why God can forgive is because His only begotten and ever beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, took upon Him His people's nature, and visited this earth, and bore their sin and punishment. The time when the Lord God Almighty, Jehovah, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, one eternal and co-equal God in three Persons, actually forgave those sins, was when the Lord Jesus Christ expired upon the cross. There and then, there was a fixed, complete, and final pardon of all those sins that had been imputed to Him, laid upon Him, for which He suffered, and made perfect and absolute satisfaction to the holy law of God. There and then, there was the divine and blessed act of absolute pardon. This is something so profound and so infinite and so glorious that it is impossible for us poor sinners to enter into it in any large degree. We can be brought to

taste and feel a little of the sweetness and blessedness of it, but to really understand how much of God's glory, holiness, justice, and power, wisdom, and might, and goodness are manifested in this great act is beyond the conception of our poor finite minds. But of this we can be fully assured, that where-the church of God is concerned, all their sins are actually forgiven.

What is left then to be accomplished is for the Holy Spirit to bring every vessel of mercy, who is appointed to eternal salvation, into the knowledge and experience of that forgiveness. Every one already born into this world, and all that are yet to be born into this world, who are of the elect, have their sins already forgiven. But they will not be brought into the blessedness of it, and realise the blessedness of the man whose sins are forgiven, until it is manifested to them. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, His prerogative and glory, to bring into the blessed experience and knowledge of this grace this wonderful mercy. And it is by His teaching and operation and influence we can be brought to feel our need of it, and to enter into the blessedness and wonder of this great grace of forgiveness.

Then the manner in which God forgives –which I hope to enlarge on later in looking at the experience of it – is that God does forgive in an absolute manner. He completely forgives, and that in a way that is in harmony with His sovereign character, sovereign grace, sovereign mercy, and His holiness, justice, wisdom, and every other supreme perfection which are exercised in blessed harmony in this wonderful grace. I do not wish to stay too long on doctrine, but go on to consider the demonstration of it by the Holy Spirit in the heart.

We must look first at what is meant by transgression. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven." What is transgression? It is indeed everything that is in any degree whatever inconsistent with the holy nature of God, and that as declared in His Holy Word, both in the law and in the gospel. And my friends, as we know, the gospel is the believer's rule of life. The precepts, statutes, and commandments of the gospel are far more comprehensive, and reach much higher, deeper, larger, and broader than all the commandments of the law. There is so much more in the gospel precepts and statutes that regard the sinner's deeper feelings, thoughts, intentions, desires, affections, and every other part and particle of a man. Everything therefore that is inconsistent is a transgression. Those who know their own heart will readily recognise and feel that they cannot live one moment without transgressing, and our whole heart, breathings, and desires are inconsistent with God's nature, His will, His holy law, and gospel; therefore we stand in need of forgiveness continually, that our transgressions may be forgiven.

I must dissect it a little, and enlarge on this great matter, transgression, of which we are, every one of us, guilty, whether we feel it or not. My friends, it is my desire, for myself and for every one of you, that not one of us should be left to say we have not sinned. The apostle John in his first epistle says this: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...if we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar." Friends, who can imagine greater blasphemy than to call God a liar? But O may we, each of us, every one, be brought unto the intervening verse: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Let us look a little further at this transgression. First and foremost it is that which is the cause of all the rest,

*When Adam by transgression fell,
And conscious, fled his Maker's face,
Linked in clandestine league with hell,
He ruined all his future race.*

We, every one of us, transgressed in Adam. God said of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: "Thou shalt not eat." But Eve first, and Adam afterwards, partook of the forbidden thing, and so transgressed, and by that transgression ruined their whole race, and "sin entered, and death by sin," and every one of us is involved in, and is guilty of Adam's transgression. Blessed is that man that has had that transgression forgiven, which was commonly called by the Puritans, and still is known by us, as "original sin." It is because of this we are born sinners; we are transgressors from the womb. There is no such thing as an innocent babe; we are born sinners; we are transgressors from the womb, and go astray speaking lies. There is no righteousness in us. And my friends, we are not sinners because, we commit sin, we commit sin because we are sinners; it is because we are what we are, that we do what we do. Our whole nature is sinful, therefore we sin. And what a wonderful thing it is if we know the blessedness of the forgiveness of the first transgression.

Secondly, there are those transgressions against God's holy law: the Ten Commandments given on mount Sinai. All that know their transgression by the law will know it is all very legal, very grievous, and genders bondage. The transgression of God's holy law does not merely concern our practices; it concerns our motives; it is the inner, deeper thoughts and intents of the heart; the angry thought, the wanton look, the blasphemy of the mind – the very thought of foolishness – that is sin. What a terrible thing it is to be a transgressor of the law, when that is brought home to the heart and conscience. My friends, I make no apology for probing. I want and desire to be probed myself. It is my desire that no sin and transgression should be hidden. What I want is for it to be forgiven – not hidden. There comes to my mind an incident that happened some years ago. I was talking quietly to a woman about spiritual things, when suddenly she got up, and went out from the room in anger, saying, "I don't like you. You probe my conscience too much. I cannot stand it." I thought: How solemn! If we cannot stand before a poor sinful man, how shall we stand before God? If we cannot stand before man's probing, what shall we do before a holy God?

There is this transgression then, and when God intends to forgive it He will search it out, and bring it to light. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." The law does not make us sinners; it shews us that we are sinners. It brings it to light, shows up what was there before, though we did not know it. When God drops down His plumb-line, and puts it against our wicked hearts, we begin to be conscious how crooked we are, how greatly we have transgressed against the law.

Then there are transgressions which are of the nature of omission. The sins of omission are as great as the sins of commission. We come short. The demands of the law are that a man keeps it, and that without the least deviation. Who can do this? A poor sinner finds he cannot do it for one moment. He is a transgressor from the womb. He is a transgressor in every way, in motive, in desire, or in thought; in some inward or outward way he is a transgressor.

There are also those transgressions against the holy gospel. That I will now attempt to look at more largely, because I want to show that legal convictions and gospel convictions are vastly different things. Those who have their transgressions forgiven are often sensible of their trespasses against the statutes and commandments of the gospel. What is the great commandment of the gospel, the greatest of all, the chiefest? "And this is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ." So then, all thoughts, feelings, motives, affections that spring from unbelief are transgressions. There is no sin so awful as the sin of unbelief. It is the top one, the most awful one, the one that has God's wrath so manifestly against it. What does it mean? Let me give a simple illustration. If you said something to me, and you affirm that what you say is fact and truth, and I said, "I don't believe it, and will not believe it," that would mean I call you a liar. If we discredit what God declares, then that is so where God is concerned. Unbelief dishonours God, makes Him a liar. It is therefore an awful sin, a sin to be confessed, mourned over, and lamented. Jesus said: "When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on Me." Now this is transgression. And I could enlarge all the more on those things that are transgressions against the holy gospel of Jesus Christ, the precious Word of God, and every other inconsistency.

Now, having said thus much – and I feel it is enough to say at the present time about transgression – blessed is the man who has these things forgiven him, blessed indeed he is. There is only this alternative: cursed is the man whose transgressions are not forgiven. We shall not find anyone anywhere who is otherwise than a transgressor, as we read together (Romans chapter 3): "They are all gone out of the way." All are transgressors. I believe there are a few that know it, and a few that feel it, and at times put their hands up in the sight of God, and confess with shame, "I am guilty."

Now that is what I want to come to, if I can – to look at the experience which is necessary to entering into the blessedness of forgiveness. What will be the necessary preliminary experience to knowing the blessedness of forgiveness, and the preparation for this wonderful blessing? But briefly, before we look at the way forgiveness is manifested, let us look at that which accompanies it – both the negative side, and the positive side. A forgiven man is mercifully delivered from the wrath of God, delivered from the punishment due to him, delivered from the condemnation and the curse of the law, delivered from the death that is due to him for his transgressions, delivered from the sting of death, delivered from the power of the grave, delivered from the dominion, power, guilt, and filth of sin. So that, from this aspect of it, he is a blessed man.

On the positive side, he is blessed with God's love, His smile, His mercy, goodness and presence. He is blessed to be manifestly a child of God, and to have a title to the inheritance of the people of God. He shall presently enter through the gates into the celestial city. So that, on both aspects of the subject, he is blessed. He is blessed in regard to that which he is delivered from, and in that which he is brought into. Such is the blessedness of having sins forgiven. The whole matter is really finished in God's eternal purposes and decrees, and was actually accomplished by the work of Christ which His Father gave Him to do. The sins of the church were actually forgiven by God when Jesus died to make atonement. Every one who has an interest in this will be brought into the experience of that forgiveness which Christ has already obtained for them by His finished work. What a vital thing this is, for what good will doctrine do to us if we have no experience of the truth? We may believe with all the power we have the truth of the doctrine with regard to forgiveness, but what will

that avail us unless our own sins are forgiven, and unless we know the blessedness of this blessed man? Is not that important and very vital?

Let us look at it, then, to see if we do know something about it. What is preliminary to the blessing? When the Holy Spirit is pleased to come to a vessel of mercy and begin His operations in the heart, the first thing must be conviction. We must be convicted of our sin before we can be sensibly forgiven. Let us not confuse matters. Let me try to be plain here. There are two kinds of conviction: that which is natural, and that which is spiritual. It is only the Holy Spirit's work in the heart that will avail us anything at all. We have instances in God's Word, teaching, and making us tremble while we rejoice, causing us to be prayerful, careful, and anxious in such matters. We have such characters in God's Word as Ahithophel, King Saul, and Judas, and many others, who acknowledged their sin, being convicted in some measure and degree that they had transgressed. Each of them acknowledged their sin, but they were not forgiven. Theirs was only legal conviction, therefore only brought forth natural sorrow, and did not end in salvation. That conviction which is the work of the Holy Spirit, is felt and known in the heart. A conviction, which is by His power and influence, will bring us to despair of ourselves as to any hope or help in ourselves, but not to utter despair of eternal life. Connected with, and joined to, the work of the Spirit in the heart, there is a "may be" that the Lord will be gracious to us. It does not work black despair, and the sorrow of the world, which is only found in those who are the subject of natural conviction.

Let us look at this matter. When the Holy Spirit comes, as the Lord Jesus said He will, He proceeds from the Father and the Son. "When He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will reprove the world of sin." That is His work. There will be not merely and alone the knowledge of transgression, and the acknowledgement and confession of sin with the lip, but the feeling of it in the heart, a sense and feeling of the burden of our sin, and a right and true lamenting over, and mourning on account of it. Now my friends, to any of you who know anything of what it is to be conscious of your sin, and to put your mouth in the dust, to smite upon your breast, to lament and to mourn before God on account of your iniquity, I will tell you something. Those feelings are not the cause of God forgiving you your sin, but a proof that He has done so, although you may not yet be assured of it, or feel it. Real repentance given is a proof of forgiveness already obtained by Jesus, but not the cause of it. And the time will come when every penitent sinner will know the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven. Every one rightly confessing their sin before God will know His pardoning mercy sooner or later, as that is conveyed into the heart with power.

The Holy Spirit is a great sovereign in His working. The beginnings with some are very slight compared with others. Some are deeper. There is a very great difference between the Holy Spirit's work in Manasseh and in Saul of Tarsus; and that in Lydia and others - but all to the same end. Everyone puts their hand on their mouth and sits in silence before God, mourning over and confessing their sin. There is a point in experience to which every one of these is brought, which is shown in God's Word by the example left on record to this end. It is when the poor souls are brought to an extremity in their feelings, when such are brought to honest, sincere, unreserved confession. I do love the example we have in the case of Joseph and his brethren. It is a beautiful illustration of the Holy Spirit's teaching, and the dealings between Christ and every one of His true brethren. How those brethren were brought to fall down before Joseph twice in an unreserved acknowledgement of their sin, expressing no palliation of the case, no blaming everything else, no

pleading that they were provoked or enticed, or any such thing. But brought to this point: "I have sinned." "God be merciful to me a sinner." When one of those brethren pleaded with Joseph with much impunity, that was the time when Joseph revealed himself to them, and said: "Come near to me, I pray you," then he fell on their necks and kissed them. I am sure that must have conveyed that he held nothing against them; he freely forgave. Just so spiritually, there comes a time when the blessing is conveyed, and they who receive it enter a little into the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven.

Having come to that point, I want to notice two things in regard to it. There are two kinds of forgiveness. There is that which is judicial, and that which is filial. Judicial forgiveness God will grant in His due time, and that once only, because it is only needed once. A convicted sinner who is 'brought to the honest confession of his sins will only be called upon to stand before God as his judge once. As a criminal before the bar, he pleads guilty, guilty, guilty to every law charge that can possibly be brought against him. Christ his Advocate will plead for him, and God will forgive him. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." That is to receive a remission of our sin for evermore – past, present, and to come. That is absolute in its nature. If God forgives, we may rest assured that person is forgiven absolutely, not partly, but completely. That is judgment passed on the case and character. He is a forgiven person. That has no need to be repeated; that person is a happy, pardoned child. His condition is now changed; he is not now under the law any longer; he cannot be, he has nothing to do with magistrates and law; he is justified in God's presence, and is a happy, pardoned child; he is under grace.

Filial forgiveness is something that is to be repeated often, because it is needed often. Now my friends, those of you who know anything about it will know legal sorrow is a very sore thing, but you also know that filial sorrow is a very sacred thing, and very sweet. I recognise this point, that those who have not experienced it will not understand. You cannot, you cannot be expected to. But do seek the blessing. Do seek the blessedness it is to have sin forgiven, and to be a happy, pardoned child, and then to live in the exercise of filial fear, which will produce filial sorrow continually. Seek that sorrow which is sacred, blessed, and sweet; seek that you might know that filial pardon, which is very precious, for it is a Father pardoning His child. I will go further here. Some might question very deeply whether they have ever known anything about the forgiveness of their sin. You may say, 'If God had really spoken to my heart, and said, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee," I would not doubt it.' Well, if you know something about conviction and repentance, you know something of the fruits of forgiveness. Though God does not speak those words to you, you know something about the matter. We have examples in the Word of God where Jesus was pleased to forgive without saying the particular words. He did not say to the dying thief, "Thy sins are forgiven," but He did say, "Thou shalt be with Me." His sins were forgiven, or he could never have gone to heaven to be with Him. If God has said anything like this to us: "Sin shall not have dominion over you," it means that sins are forgiven, or they would have dominion over us. If God says anything that conveys to our hearts that we are sons or daughters of His, that also is an evidence, for how can we be sons or daughters unless our sins are forgiven? It may be a line in a hymn has come with power, such as: "Nor will he poor mourners condemn."

Now if He does not condemn them, He must justify them. There is no way between. If He justifies them, He must have forgiven them. You see, there are a multitude of ways in which the Lord conveys the blessing without the actual words. And although Satan may take hold of this and say you know nothing about it because the actual words were not spoken, he is a great liar, for the effect proves the cause, and if the effect is produced, then the cause must be there. When the blessing is known, then the cause of the blessing must have been experienced. Do we then know anything of that blessedness to know and love God as a God of pardon? You know, it is possible for God to bring forgiveness without any words at all. Good Mr Philpot used to say, "I would much rather have the power without the words, than the words without the power." I know two persons that received forgiveness without words. In both cases, they told me the moment came when they were so burdened with their sin, and so overwhelmed with a sense of their guilt, they could not speak. Both said, "My mouth was stopped; all I could do was prostrate myself in sighs and groans; I could not pray, that is, in words. The Lord knew my heart and my desire, then He came and took away the load of the burden without a word."

Now, if we know what it is to be bowed down with a burden, and then the burden is taken away, there is no doubt about it being taken away; when sin is gone we know it is gone. In those two cases there was not a word; instead of sighing there was singing; instead of mourning there was joy; instead of ashes there was rejoicing in the Lord; instead of grieving and groaning there was praise and gratitude. And whenever that change is brought about, that person knows the blessedness of him whose transgression is forgiven. Now, the blessedness of this character in the experience of pardon in a filial manner will go on, must go on till the very last breath. My friends, while we are in the body we shall still be sinners and transgressors. But what a wonderful thing if we know what it is to enjoy this favour in a filial way! Now, I am sure of this, there is no grieving, no sorrow for sin more pungent, more sacred, than that which is of a filial nature. Just to illustrate the whole matter a moment in regard to the filial nature of this, I will cite to you once more the case of the prodigal son. You see, he was a son. That is the point, he was a son. He spent his substance in riotous living, he sinned greatly against his father. The time came when he began to be in want, and he came to himself. He said: "I will arise, and I will go" – to whom? to my judge? No! – "to my father. And I will say, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight." Now, how many of us know the feeling? Do you know what it is? O let us come, let us return unto the Lord, for we have sinned against Him. The prodigal returning with a broken heart, utterly ashamed of himself, hangs his head, and says, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son." Look at the sweet disposition of the Father, for when he was yet a great way off, he ran to meet him, and fell on his neck and kissed him. What a wonderful effect that had on the returning prodigal! He never got so far as saying, "Make me one of thy hired servants." Pardoning love slew all his legal feelings, every one of them. He said, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son." He did not say anything about being a servant. What a feast was prepared for him! They killed the fatted calf, put shoes on his feet, and a ring on his hand. Blessed man! "Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven." The father never chided him at all; he freely, frankly, absolutely forgave all. So the poor prodigal knew something about the blessedness of our text. May each one of us know something of it in every point of view.

I must leave the subject for the time is gone. The Lord add His blessing