

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at "Ebenezer", Clapham
on Wednesday evening 6.2.51

Hymns: 1142, 1139, 921 Reading: 1 Peter 1 Text: 1 Peter 1.3

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

How the apostle traces all the streams of blessing that flow down to the church of God to the Father as the ultimate source. The hymnwriter says,

"Blest be the Father and His love,
To whose celestial source we owe
Rivers of endless joy above,
And rills of comfort here below."

And here the apostle says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".

The Father has been pleased to make Himself known in the Person of His incarnate Son. It pleased Him thus to reveal Himself, to send His Son into the world to testify of the Father and to make known the Father's mind, to tell of the Father's love, the Father's grace, His wondrous purposes, to declare those things which He had seen with His Father and to speak those things which His Father commanded Him to speak. So the Lord Jesus Christ is the manifestation here upon the earth of the Father, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son", and the Lord Jesus said that He did the works that His Father sent Him to do, He spoke the word that His Father commanded Him to speak. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father". "The Father that dwelleth in Me He doeth the works", so that every work Christ did upon earth, whatever miracle of healing, whatever work of mercy, it was the Father who was in Him, He was doing the work equally with the Son; and in all the mercy and compassion that He manifested to poor, ruined, needy sinners who were about Him He was just revealing the mind of the Father, the heart of the Father towards these poor sinners. When He spoke, for instance, to the woman who wept at His feet in Simon the Pharisee's house, and spoke the word of pardon to her heart and conscience it was the Father who was in Him to speak the word equally with the Son.

This is very wonderful to consider, there is something very blessed about it to think of the Lord Jesus Christ as being one with the Father, to think of the Father being always in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, in every part of His ministry, and in all that He did and all that He suffered. "I and My Father are one". "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". You notice here that God is spoken of as "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". Had there never been a world created, had there never been angels or men, God would have still have been the eternal Father of His eternally begotten Son; but here He is said to be "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ", and when we think of the Lord Jesus Christ, if we think of Him rightly, we shall think of Him as inseparable from His church. Christ and His church are one.

"Hail, sacred union, firm and strong!
How great the grace! how sweet the song!
That worms of earth should ever be
One with incarnate Deity!"

Christ and the church are always in the mind of the Father one. Christ is the Husband of the church, she is His bride. You cannot think of a husband without thinking at the same time of His wife; if you speak of a shepherd at once the thought comes of the sheep of his flock. If there is no flock there is no shepherd so Christ and His church are one, and as God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ so He is God and Father of His people in Him. Christ has taken His people into such union with Himself that they are brought near to the Father in Him and through that great work He accomplished on their behalf, made nigh in the Person of the Lord Jesus, made nigh by His precious blood.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". You remember the Lord Jesus said, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20.17); your Father because My Father, your God, because My God". This relationship in all the fulness of it is in Jesus Christ. There is no other ground at all for this relationship than the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and what sure ground it is, to be called the sons of God in Christ. It is not our own works that bring us into this relationship; it is not anything we have done that brings us into it; it is solely the grace of God in Christ that brings poor people into this wonderful relationship, to be able to say,

my God, my Father, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name". "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ", and as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ - how He loved His Son. He loved His Son from all eternity, but the Lord Jesus speaks of the Father loving Him for this express reason, because I lay down My life for the sheep. In a peculiar and special sense the Father delights in His Son because He laid down His life for the sheep. The Son's laying down His life for the sheep is so acceptable, so pleasing a thing in the sight of the Father, that the Lord Jesus said, "Therefore does My Father love me." All that Christ is He is by the Father's grace, by the Father's appointment, because of the Father's love to His people. "Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption", He of God is made unto us these things, made unto His people all that they stand in need of, "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell", a fulness of grace, a fulness of everything that His people need to make them righteous, holy, to make them accepted of God and to make them blessed for ever more; all is in Jesus Christ,

"A fulness resides in Jesus our Head,
And ever abides to answer our need".

It is the Father's good pleasure that it should be so. O to think that the holy Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, should have such delight in a multitude of worthless sinners, that He should be pleased that all fulness should dwell in His dear Son the Lord Jesus Christ for them, that they might receive out of that fulness grace for grace, that they might be blessed in Him, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".

O if we were favoured to feel more of the reality of these things how it would cause our hearts to burn with love to the Father. O how we should admire and wonder at the Father's grace. How dear the eternally begotten Son is to Him. O it is beyond all conception, our poor minds cannot enter into it, the wonderful relationship in the Godhead between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one inconceivable God, the Father loving the Son, the Son loving the Father and the Holy Ghost dwelling with Father and with Son in mutual love. Think of the love of the Father to His dear Son and then think of this, "He spared not His own Son but freely delivered Him up for us all." It pleased

the Lord to bruise Him, to put Him to grief and all because of His love to sinners. We may well be amazed that the holy, holy God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, should have such love to a multitude of worthless, rebellious, sinful men and women upon this earth; that He spared not His own Son, sent His own Son into the world to accomplish salvation for His people. God hath given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. Then you think of what a preciousness the Father sees in the Person of the Lord Jesus. He is called the Lamb of God, the Lamb the Father has provided for a burnt offering. John said, "Behold the Lamb of God". Since Christ is the Father's provision that by Him He might accomplish the vast purpose of His grace, He must be sufficient, there can be no lack in that which is provided by the Father's wisdom and His love.

"Chosen of God and precious". O, what value the Father sees then in the Person of His Son. What a mercy it is for us if we can come in with those words of Peter, "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious", and not only precious in His Person but in all that great work He accomplished, in the righteousness He wrought, in the sacrifice he offered, in the death He died, the atonement He made, the victory He gained. O how precious He is to His Father. We read of the precious blood of Christ, and God, and God alone, fully knows how precious is that blood, how efficacious, how satisfying to the justice of God is that atoning sacrifice and that righteousness.

"The Father dearly loves the Son,
And rates His merits high
For no mean cause He sent Him down
To suffer, grieve, and die."

His satisfaction in His dear Son, His high esteem of the Person and work of His dear Son is clearly demonstrated by the fact that God raised Him from the dead, that God the Father exalted Him at His right hand to sit with Him upon His throne above all principalities and powers and above every name that is named. O with what satisfaction and delight the Father thus exalted His dear Son. He humbled Himself even to the death of the cross, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth: And that every

tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father". The Father has highly exalted Him and looks with pleasure and satisfaction upon the Lord Jesus Christ who is now glorified with Him, glorified by Him, and He hath made the whole church, the whole body of the elect, hath He made accepted in His dear Son. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". If we are in some measure led into these truths and enabled to feed upon them, enabled to draw water out of these wells, it will move us to say with Peter, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". Have you ever felt a spring of praise bubbling up in your heart under the influence of these truths, some realisation of the grace that the Father hath bestowed in the Person of His own dear Son?

"According to His abundant mercy". Is there not something attractive to some of us in the expression His abundant mercy? How the apostles laboured to heap together words in endeavouring to express that which is beyond all expression. I was reading in a letter of Newton to a clergyman and one day he was reading in a Greek New Testament and in the epistle to the Ephesians he read these words, "the unsearchable riches of Christ" and he looked at that word unsearchable in the Greek and as he looked at it he thought the apostle saw something in Christ he had never seen, and he began to realise the feeling lack in his own religion, lack of acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ and the Lord blessed his soul under this consideration and made him a good minister of Jesus Christ and most fruitful in his labours in that district henceforth. Well, the apostle and his brethren laboured to heap together words to show the greatness, sufficiency, glory of the things of Christ, the grace of Christ, the love of God, the mercy of God. "God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us", says the apostle in writing to the Ephesians, and here Peter says, "according to his abundant mercy". This sets before us something that is beyond all imagination and we may well be thankful that it is so. As high as the heaven is above the earth so great is His mercy to all them that fear Him. O the infinite heights of divine mercy; His abundant mercy. Look at this word mercy. Mercy is not something that is due to us as a matter of justice. Mercy is not something that we have earned, that we have deserved.

Mercy is undeserved, it flows freely toward the objects of it and we are told that the Lord delighteth in mercy. I must confess my mind becomes completely lost when I try to consider such expressions as these and try to think of the import of them. In that there can be a sweetness because if the mercy of the Lord was not vast, beyond all conception, it would not be sufficient for a sinner like me. I was speaking today of a woman who for the first time in her life had been to see the sea and when she returned home all she could talk about was this wonderful sea, stretching right out of sight, yet always flowing towards her, like the mercy of God, abundant mercy, everlasting mercy, tender mercy, mercy flowing through atoning blood. When God bestows mercy upon a sinner the sinner has to feel and confess how unworthy he is of the least of the Lord's mercies. He has to wonder and be astonished at the freeness of it when it comes to him without money and without price. Think of the wonderful way God has taken to manifest this mercy that it might flow out to sinners, for He sent His own dear Son to suffer, bleed and die that His atoning death might open the gates, that mercy might flow down and be effectual in sinners' hearts.

"According to His abundant mercy". "God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)." I spoke just now of the union that is between Christ and the church, that mysterious, blessed union. When Christ was raised from the dead He was said to be the first-begotten from the dead. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming". We read in Psalm 2.7 "Thou art my Son this day have I begotten thee", that refers, not to the eternal generation, but to the receiving of Jesus Christ from the dead, His being begotten from the dead when He was raised from the dead. All His people are so united to Him that they in Him were raised from the dead and by the Father's act of grace made to sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that the whole church is virtually there

in the covenant.

"Hath begotten us again unto a lively hope". The hope that is raised up in the hearts of God's people is not based upon a dead Saviour, upon Jesus Christ and Him crucified, but Jesus Christ risen from the dead. "Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept." All faith looks to Christ, looks to the lifted up Son of man. Faith views the dear Son of God seated at the right hand of the Father. Faith believes He is there. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." "Which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead". A lively hope is a living hope, a hope of which those to whom it is given will never be ashamed, "Hath begotten us again unto a lively hope". Sometimes people have stumbled at that word 'lively' for they feel anything but lively in their souls, their hope seems anything but a lively one as we understand the word but the word really means a living hope. It may not be so bright as a poor soul could wish, it may be a very trembling sort of hope, but if this hope fixes on Jesus it is a living hope. What a mercy to have a hope of the right kind, though it be a trembling one, though it be attended with many exercises, much painful examination as to how matters are with us, still to have a good hope through grace amidst all the objections the believer feels, to have a hope that is fixed upon Christ alone. A living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on thee"

O when Christ rose from the dead that was a clear token of the sufficiency of His work, that justice had received at His hands all that it could demand, that the curse had spent its force, that it had fallen upon Him. God, the Father, is well pleased with His dear Son, therefore the people of God are said to be begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

See what is bound up with this hope, "To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you". What a wonderful thing for a poor sinner in this world concerning whom John's words are true, "It doth

not yet appear what we shall be", that a poor sinner should have hope of this "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled" something to look forward to beyond this poor, perishing world, beyond these scenes of sadness in which there is so much of the defilement of sin and so much of the active working of the devil; beyond all this "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled"; to have an inheritance in Jesus Christ's perfect holiness;

"This inheritance believer
Faith alone makes thy own,
Safe and sure for ever."

There is the everlasting substance of being in the presence of God, being with Christ, seeing Him and being made like unto Him, "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off". To a child of God there is "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice". Part of the inheritance they enter into here below is that there is something secret that sweetens their bitterest cup. As I said in the lesson, sorrow and joy dwell in the same heart. In "Heaviness through manifold temptations" but "greatly rejoicing" - it is a mystery that none but the people of God can know anything about.

Here I must leave it. May the Lord command His blessing.

Amen

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