

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner on Sunday evening
8th February 1948

"The Lord is with you, while ye be with Him; and if ye seek Him,
He will be found of you; but if ye forsake Him, he will forsake
you."
II Chronicles 15. 2

When we consider our appalling state by nature, our alienation from God, and the fact that we are the enemies of God by wicked works, that we are so utterly depraved in every part and faculty of our being, it is nothing short of a miracle of almighty grace that any of us should answer to these words, "The Lord is with you. while ye be with Him". The Lord said by the prophet to His people of old, "They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God", they will not do it, and that is the case with every one of us until almighty grace prevents us, and when grace comes the thing is done. It is all of His grace we were brought to obey, while others were suffered to go the road which by nature we chose as our way, which leads to the regions of woe. "The Lord is with you while ye be with Him".

Then the question may arise in our minds, What is it to be with Him? and again, Am I with Him? The question was asked, you remember, "Who is on the Lord's side?" Am I on the Lord's side? Are you on the Lord's side? If so, then we take sides with the Lord against His enemies. The world is the enemy of God, then we are on the Lord's side against the world, if so be we are on the Lord's side. And if we are on His side, we take sides with Him against ourselves, we say Amen to every word He has spoken against us. When in His word He testifies so much against us, our sinful state, our guilt, our folly, our rebellion; when His word searches the deeper recesses of our hearts, brings to light hidden evils and hypocrisies that are there; if we are with Him. we shall take sides with His word against ourselves. People who are with Him, when the ministry comes against them accusingly, searching, condemning, cutting them off according to their feelings, are constrained to take sides with the minister against themselves. I remember a godly woman who at one time was attending West Street Croydon many years ago, and the ministry in those days after her first conviction, cut her to pieces every time she went to hear. Whoever the minister might be, she was just cut to pieces and went from the place of worship feeling quite cut off and without hope. But one day she was in company with some people who were finding fault with the minister as having been too severe,

and she found herself taking the part of the minister though it was a severe word and she had felt it keenly. It had pierced her conscience and heart so painfully, yet she felt that it was a faithful word, and she had to take sides with God against herself. Have you ever done that? If you are on the Lord's side, if you are with Him, you will be no stranger to it. "The Lord is with you while ye be with Him". After all, it is a token in a person's favour to be taking sides with God against himself. It is good, as I think Erskine says, for a sinner to be setting himself down so low that the Word of God cannot set him down lower. You remember the woman of Canaan who came to the Lord Jesus with her trouble about her daughter possessed of a devil, and how the word of the Lord seemed to be wholly against her. The disciples said, "Send her away for she crieth after us", and Jesus said, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel". Up to that moment he had not said a word in response to her cry, he had answered her not a word, and when He did speak it seemed to be a word designed to cut her off completely, but then she came and worshipped Him saying. "Lord help me". And the Lord said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs". "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their Master's table". Oh, if she could only get a crumb that fell from the master's table she would be thankful for a dog's portion so long as she got something from the Lord. "O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt", You see, the woman took sides with the Lord against herself.

Then again, if we are with Him, there will be in our hearts a measure of godly fear. We shall, for instance, tremble at His word, we shall be afraid of displeasing Him, there will be a measure of tenderness in respect to sinning against Him, if we are with Him. O how terrible a thing it will be in our eyes to offend against the majesty of Heaven. "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil", and not merely to hate the incommmodity that it entails upon us, not merely to hate the punishment which is due to us on account of it, but to hate it because it is sin against God, because it is an offence against infinite purity, because it is so defiling and does so unfit us for God. Every sin we commit, (and we are committing sin continually as left to ourselves,) is a stepping away from God, yea, we are as sheep going astray.

But then there is another thing. If we are with Him we shall think upon His name. There is a very beautiful and tender description

of godly souls in Malachi's day, they feared the Lord and they thought upon His Name - they thought upon His name. One said, "My meditation of Him shall be sweet, I will be glad in the Lord". But all meditation upon His name is not sweet. "The prophet Habbakuk speaks of thinking awe-inspiring thoughts of Him. "When I heard", he said, "my belly trembledrotteness entered into my bones". Sometimes those who fear God have such thoughts of God and His Word as fill them with awe and trembling. The majesty of God is made so great to them, but they think upon it and they tremble before Him, they tremble at His Word. Here is a mark of those who are with Him, they tremble at His Word, they think upon His name, and "They shall be mine", saith the Lord, "in that day when I make up my jewels". "The Lord is with you while ye be with Him".

There is another thing one may mention, and I will refer you now to that tragic chapter, as it has been called, the 7th of Romans, in which the Apostle Paul discloses the fierce conflict that was waged within him between the flesh and the spirit, between grace and sin. Now if we are with the Lord there will be that strange mysterious strife between our souls and sin. We shall be no strangers to that wretchedness that the Apostle complained of, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And that very experience, that very pain of soul which is felt, that anguish of spirit, is due to the fact that the man is, by grace, with God, he is on God's side. And being with Him he sees a beauty and a blessedness in holiness, he pants for it, he would be holy, and he mourns because he finds so much that is unholy in himself. He would be near to God, he mourns because of his distance from God, because he feels so unable to get near. He feels there is a barrier between, mountains and hills of separation between him and his God, and he mourns and longs to be near to God. He would have fellowship with God, he would hold communion with Him, and he will say, "O that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat! I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments." Job is a man who was on God's side, and he wanted nearness, he wanted communion with God. O, if you are on God's side you will want to feel what the hymn-writer speaks of,

"With me sweet converse He maintains,
Great as He is, I dare be free:
I tell Him all my griefs and pains,
And He reveals His love to me"

You will see a beauty in that, something to be desired in it, something that your soul hungers for - intercourse with God.

Then again, if you are on God's side, you will justify God in what He does. Job feared God, indeed there was none like him in all the earth for godly fear, and when he was visited with such heavy calamities what did he say? He says, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord". "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" In that there was revealed the root of the matter in him; and so if we are on God's side, as His grace enables us, we shall justify Him in His dealings. If He lays affliction upon us, if He puts His hand upon our blessings, if He touches our home circle, whatever He may do that is afflictive and causes us grief and brings about a diminishing, we shall say, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities". If these trials that have come upon me are compared with what my sins deserve, how light they are! "It is of the Lord's mercies that I am not consumed because His compassions fail not". It is a wonderful thing to be on God's side by His grace, to be found taking sides with God against self, against the flesh, against the world, against Satan. "The Lord is with you while ye be with him".

If we are enabled thus to be with Him, in that there will be some tokens of His favour. "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him". "He also will hear their cry and will save them". In the previous chapter Asa showed himself to be a man with God. In the days of his trouble he sought the Lord, and he believed God, and committed his cause into the hand of God in that wonderful prayer that we noticed in reading (2 Chronicles 14. 11) and God was with him. And as I would emphasise, it is all of His grace. It is not a case of you do your part and God will do His, but God does it all. He works in, and He works for His people, and that is the meaning of the word here, "The Lord is with you while ye be with Him, and if ye seek Him he will be found of you". "If ye seek Him", What an unspeakable mercy it is to seek Him! It is all of His grace that we seek His face. "When thou saidst, seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face Lord will I seek". It is always the touch of His power that brings it about. Never does a sinner seek His face until the Almighty power of God reaches his heart, and then the response is, "Thy face Lord, will I seek". The man begins to be in such a case under God's dealing with his soul that he feels that he cannot do without God, he cannot

do without Christ, and he must seek, he must ask, he must knock, the necessities of his condition demand it of him. "If ye seek Him". O, but I am such an ungodly sinner, I have such a polluted heart, I am so cluttered up with unbelief, and I get no better but rather worse; I am in a worse case to-day than I was two years ago- I never thought two years ago that I should be as I am now, I get worse and worse. How this stands like a mountain in front of a man who would be seeking the Lord, who would be near, and yet there is his great sinfulness, there is his hardness of heart, his innate foolishness and all the evidences of his fallen condition. How to see, how to entertain any hope of success in seeking, he does not know. But what does the Lord say? "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God for He will abundantly pardon". What do we read of Manasseh, that wicked king who filled Jerusalem with blood, and who committed iniquity beyond all that were before him in Jerusalem? When the judgments of God came upon him and he was carried away captive into a strange land, we read that when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and God was found of him. He obtained mercy and was restored to his kingdom, and we find that there was a tremendous change in the man's conduct after that. Manasseh's case is left upon record that poor sinful, guilty wretches might not despair. We have been singing about Manasseh and his filthiness and of the mercies that were extended to him. "If ye seek Him He will be found of you". "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out", "though filthy as Mary, Manasseh or I".

If ye seek Him He will be found of you". But how seek Him? Seek Him with a stock of religion to bring to Him? You remember that in the Holy War, when the people of Mansoul were discussing how they should send their petition to Immanuel, it was suggested that Mr. Good Deed should carry the petition, but Mr. Godly Fear spake up against that, if I remember rightly, and said that if Mr. Good Deed took the petition then Immanuel would say, "What, is old Good Deed alive in Mansoul? Then let old Good Deed save you". O, in seeking the Lord, all pretensions to goodness, to righteousness, to faith, to wisdom, must be utterly renounced and the soul who is seeking the Lord has to come stripped of everything.

"Nothing in my hand I bring
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked come to Thee for dress,
Helpless look to Thee for grace,
Black I to the fountain fly,
Wash me Saviour, or I die".

O, "if ye seek Him He will be found of you". You need not be afraid of seeking Him in too destitute a condition, but you may well be afraid of presuming to pretend to seek Him with the thought that you can bring to Him some stock that will merit His goodwill and His pleasure. Any such seeking will only meet with failure. "Is old Good Deed still alive? Then let old Good Deed save you" Do you think to deal with God on legal grounds? Hear what the Lord says. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them". Then those that seek His face have to seek His face as sinners.

"Nothing but sin I Thee can give,
Nothing but love shall I receive"

and Berridge very beautifully puts it,

"All my burdens for Thy rest,
All my death for Thy life given,
All my rags for Thy rich vest,
All my hell for Thy sweet heaven."

"If ye seek Him He will be found of you", and in seeking the Lord how necessary it is to seek Him in His own appointed way, in the person of the Mediator.

"Worship God then in His Son,
There He's love and there alone,
Think not that He can or may,
Pardon any other way".

"I am the Way", said the Lord Jesus, "the Truth and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me". O then, mercy through blood is the plea of the coming sinner who is taught of the Spirit and is seeking the Lord. There is no other way to God then this, Christ Jesus. "If ye seek Him He will be found of you". "They that seek me early shall find Me", "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near". These seeking people are earnest people, although they are never earnest enough for their own satisfaction. Those who are seeking the Lord cannot look with any feeling of satisfaction upon their seeking. They will see themselves to be sinners in their seeking and they will see far too much sinfulness in their seeking, too much half-heartedness; but still they seek, and they seek because of their sense of need, and though they are not

satisfied with their seeking yet there is an earnestness about it. This seeking of the Lord is not a laggard's business. There are some people, you know, who profess to be seeking the Lord, but if you view their way of proceeding, if you weigh up their daily lives, there is no evidence there that they are really seeking the Lord. They are seeking the world and the things of it, they are seeking the path of ease, they are seeking some credit for themselves, they are seeking material things; that is their pursuit. Their seeking of the Lord is only a pretence, it is only a cloak of hypocrisy. But if we are truly seeking the Lord, our seeking of the Lord will be a daily business more or less; it will not be just a Sunday employment, but He will be sought in those ways in which He is to be found, at the throne of grace, in the means of grace, under the preached word. People who seek the Lord seek Him in these ways. O, how hunger for Christ, hunger for God, hunger for spiritual things, thirst for living water, will influence a man to use every endeavour to be where living bread is dispensed, where living water is to be had, that is, in the private reading of the Word, in secret prayer, and in the public means of grace. When people are stirred up by divine grace to seek the Lord, O how eager they will be to make their way to the place of worship. O with what earnest desires they will go, afraid lest they should miss anything. As a good man said to me in Leicester, speaking of his attendance upon the gospel there, "I am afraid lest I shall miss something". "If ye seek Him He will be found of you", and if you go to the place of worship with desires in your heart to behold the beauty of the Lord, to hear from Him, He will be found of you. You may have many disappointments, you may often "go where others go and find no comfort there", but ultimately He will be found of you.

"But if ye forsake Him He will forsake you". Very solemn is this concluding word, "If ye forsake Him", if ye turn away from those things wherein He manifests Himself to His people. There are some of whom we read in the Scriptures, "They shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables". "He will forsake you". We read of some that they were the enemies of the cross of Christ. There were some who walked amiss, whose end was destruction, over whom the Apostle Paul had to weep. They caused him grief and disappointment. "If ye forsake Him, He will forsake you". If ye forsake the throne of grace, leave off to watch and to pray; if ye

forsake His word and cease to search the Scriptures prayerfully; if ye neglect the word of God; if ye neglect the means of grace, O remember this word, "If ye forsake Him He will forsake you". Think what it means to be forsaken of God. Have you ever thought of it, to be forsaken of God? There are some who have made a religious profession in their early lives, but they have forsaken God, and when they come to a dying hour, they find themselves forsaken of God, Some have parted company with a good conscience; they have not been careful to keep a good conscience in things they have had to do with, and they find that their dying pillow is full of thorns, and thus find themselves forsaken of God. One professor was on his dying bed in Leicester, and his co-religionists gathered round him and said, "Hold fast, brother". "What to?", replied the dying man, "what to?". "If ye forsake Him He will forsake you". If ye forsake His truth, - O a serious matter that, to forsake His truth, - if you forsake truth you forsake life, as a godly man once said. "If ye forsake Him, He will forsake you", and there is a forsaking Him in the forsaking of His people. If you begin to feel a real distaste for the company of His people; if you would rather have the company of a worldly man than the company of one who fears God; if you would rather go down another street than meet one who fears God; then "If ye forsake Him, He will forsake you", and think what it means to be without God? It is too terrible to put into words to be without God, to be without hope, to be Christless, and to launch into eternity without any prospect other than the bottomless pit. "If ye forsake Him He will forsake you". You remember the Apostle said, "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition", (then there are those who draw back unto perdition) "but of them that believe to the saving of the soul". I must leave it, may the Lord add His blessing.

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