

1517
La R 197

1517

Sermon preached by Mr.J.Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill, on Sunday evening July 2nd. 1950

"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ". Ephesians 2.13

One cannot but be impressed by the number of times we have in this epistle such expressions as "in Him", "of Him", "through Him" and so on, in reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, and I have thought how essential it is for us that the Lord Jesus Christ should have that place in our religion, in our faith, in our affections, that He has in this epistle, that He had in the religion, the faith and the affections of His servant the Apostle. The Apostle declared, "Christ is all and in all", and all the blessedness that the people of God are ever to know is theirs in Christ Jesus and Him alone. Everything connected with their salvation is secured to them in Jesus Christ and only in Him, and so here the Apostle says, "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

The Apostle has just referred to the solemn state that these Ephesians were in before Christ came to them. They were dead in trespasses and sins. I do not know whether we can fully appreciate all that that means, "dead in trespasses and sins". Dead to God, dead to everything that is holy and spiritual and heavenly, dead in trespasses and sins, bound hand and foot by the cords of our sins, immersed in the pollution of sin, the enemies of God by wicked works. The Apostle goes on, "wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others", and there is not one in this little assembly of whom these words are not true. As in a state of nature, as unregenerate, these words are true of us. Then, in the words preceding our text, he says "At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world". Peter says, "Ye were as sheep going astray". What a hopeless, helpless thing a straying sheep is! It cannot of itself find its way back to the fold and

to the shepherd, it must be sought after and found. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way"; without Christ. How very solemn a thing it is when one is brought to feel that this is one's case, "without Christ", to be faced with this as one's condition, "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world". I remember how this was impressed upon my heart and conscience as being my own state, "without Christ", alien, "having no hope and without God in the world". What a condition to be in! A condition in itself hopeless, a far-off condition, a helpless condition. O how utterly helpless one feels when this condition is made a reality, unable to do a single thing to rectify it, far off from God, unable to take one step towards Him. Then the Apostle says, "But God who is rich in mercy". O, is not this attractive to some of us? "God who 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;)" "Behold what manner of love!" Oh, the wonder of it, that God should have such love to sinners, to ungodly wretches! As Rutherford said, "O that such lumps of sin should get such love for nothing!" We are by nature hateful and hating one another, full of enmity to God, and if the enmity does not burst out into open hostility it is there; it takes the form sometimes of sheer indifference. I remember a young woman coming before the Church where her own father was the pastor, and in giving in her experience she said how that often she had heard her father speak of sinners in a state of unregeneracy being filled with rage and enmity against God. "But", she said, "that was not the case with me. I was too indifferent even to feel rage and enmity", and I think it taught her good father a lesson. I believe it is often true of many people in these days that they are too indifferent even to manifest enmity. The attitude of some people is just a good-natured sort of indifference to the things of God and to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but it is enmity; it is enmity in a very subtle form.

Then the Apostle says, "But 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;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus". It pleased God to give His people an interest in Christ. He blessed them in Christ, and blessed them in His own divine purpose before the worlds were made. All these blessings are secured to them in

the person of Jesus, and when Christ was manifest in the flesh His people were virtually in Him as their covenant Head and Representative. All He did in His obedience to the law and in His suffering even to the death of the cross, was for their sakes as their Surety and their Representative. "He bare", said Peter, "our sins in his own body on the tree". Well, this was the love of God and His rich mercy flowing towards His people. He Himself provided this precious channel of mercy, His dear incarnate Son, that mercy might flow down to sinners in a rich and copious stream, God "who is rich in mercy for His great love wherewith he loved us even when we were dead in sins". O think of it! While "we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly", "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us", said the Apostle in Romans 5. Even when we were dead in sins, He pitied us, when enemies He pitied us, when following ungodly courses, when fighting against Him, when we hated His truth. Oh, if we are His, He loved us then and "hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus". Thus, when Jesus died, His people died in Him, but He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, and they rose in Him. Such is the union between Christ and His people; when He took His seat in heaven they took their seat there in Him virtually, "and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God". You see, it is entirely of His grace, and grace in the very nature of things excludes all idea of human worth and human merit. If human merit had a hand in it, it would be no more grace; if the works of the creature had some hand in the matter it could not be of grace, but "by grace are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves".

I have been glad of this word, "and that not of yourselves" because had I been told that faith was something which I must produce, that I must work myself up to a kind of believing, this was what I could not do. I found in my heart nothing but black unbelief, infidelity and atheism, but faith is the gift of God, His precious gift. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast". And it is remarkable how the doctrine here so clearly stated has stirred up the enmity of the human heart, how proud men, self-righteous men, hate to hear it. I have had it said to me, "I cannot believe it and I will not believe it". But when men have said and done all, the truth still stands. "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not

of yourselves, it is the gift of God", and grace saved the Apostle Paul, (and his, humanly speaking, was an impossible case - who could have saved that proud pharisee but the God of all grace?) Ah, the Apostle had reason to exult in the word that he wrote, "But 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". How he declares emphatically, "By the grace of God I am what I am". "The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus". "Not of works lest any man should boast". The Apostle renounced all his own works. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us". "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them". And this is true of every true believer, "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them". "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ".

"But now in Christ Jesus". We would look a little at the person here. "In Christ Jesus", the God-man, Immanuel - God with us, the Man who is the fellow of the Lord of Hosts. "But now in Christ Jesus". As I said, in the purpose of the Father all His people were in Him, given an interest in Him before the foundation of the world. He was appointed the Surety of the everlasting covenant and the great Head of the Church, and all His people are in Him by covenant union. "But now in Christ Jesus", in "Christ Jesus", in Him as He walked upon the earth, magnifying the law and making it honourable, as He did always the things that pleased His Father, they were in Him, and all that He did in His obedience to His Father's law, was on their account. "But now in Christ Jesus". And then again, in all that He suffered, they were in Him. What He suffered, He suffered for their sakes, when He humbled Himself even to the death of the cross, they were in Him, and He suffered as their covenant Head, as their Surety and Representative. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree", and when the Christ of God offered Himself

thus without spot unto God, how satisfying, how delightful to His Father was that great offering. It may be said God smelled a sweet savour when His dear Son offered Himself thus upon the accursed tree. What an acceptable offering! Ah, the Father, as a God of justice, "Viewed with perfect approbation all the Saviour did and bore". So Christ made an end of sin by the sacrifice of Himself, He brought in everlasting righteousness, He overcame the sharpness of death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, and in Him His people are made nigh unto God. They, who by nature were far off, the enemies of God by wicked works, in Him were brought nigh, in Him reconciled. "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ," and that which was done virtually in Christ, as they are interested in Him, is done in their own hearts and consciences. "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off."

Well, these people I believe, were brought to realise the solemnity of their condition as being 'far-off'. How unspeakably solemn and awful a thing it is to be far-off from God, to be so to speak, at the ends of the earth, to be destitute of everything spiritual. These people in their far-off condition are made to hear the voice of sovereign grace and mercy, and what does mercy say? Oh, mercy says, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else". The blessed Spirit of God who opens the sinner's eyes to see his own sad and evil case, reveals to him somewhat of Jesus Christ, of what He is and what He has done. The Spirit of God will take such a word as that in Romans 5, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly"; the Spirit of God whispers such a word as this, "Christ is the friend of sinners", "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them". "O", says the Spirit of God, "come to Me poor sinner, come to me just as thou art, with all thy heavy burden of sin and inward pollution, with thy far-off condition, with all thy ignorance, with everything that witnesses to thy lost state, come to Me with it." And so a poor sinner is enabled in the desires of his heart, in his confessions and petitions, in the hungerings and thirstings of his soul, to come to Jesus. Oh, do you know what it is to be drawn to Christ? to come to the Christ of God as a poor lost sinner, with this cry in your heart, 'Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean'?

"If thou, dear Lord, so base a wretch wilt save,
Then all the glory shall redound to thee;
While here, and when I reach beyond the grave,
My soul shall sing salvation full and free".

Do you know what it is to look upon your sinful life and inward pollution perhaps upon your bed at midnight, with the burden of your wretched, sinful case lying upon your heart? Is there an endeavouring to lay it before Him, and is there a striving to get to His feet? Do you seek to make your confession and tell Him what a sinner you are, how lost you are, how helpless you are, how wretched, and how you are the prey of innumerable evils, and beseech Him to have mercy upon you?

"Depth of mercy can there be?

Mercy still reserved for me?"

And the Lord Jesus has said, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out". Well, this poor sinner, for all his far-off feelings, is really in the experience of being made nigh. The Spirit of God is bringing him near; the blessed Spirit is leading him to Jesus' feet, leading him to the Father through the Son, and "now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ". It is a great matter to be made willing to be saved by Him, willing to be saved entirely of grace, free, sovereign grace, willing for the Lord Jesus Christ to do everything for you. This is a great point - why, it speaks of reconciliation. It reveals something of the enmity of the natural heart being broken down when you are willing to be saved by grace, when you are hungering and thirsting for the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. There is reconciliation in that.

"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh". But there is something further. There is a sweet experience of being made nigh to the Father by the blood of Christ. As I speak there comes before my mind an occasion you have so often heard me refer to when one night I retired to rest in a friend's house, and was just about to pray for the forgiveness of sins. I was stopped, something within me said, "I have it", and instead of asking for forgiveness I could only thank the Lord for His mercy, and I remember saying to Him very simply, 'Lord, do let me love Thee and serve Thee and be near to Thee; and not wander from Thee as I have done'. And as I laid my head upon the pillow that night I had these words singing within me,

"I lay me down and sweetly sleep,

For I have peace with God"

"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood

of Christ", "by the blood of Christ". O how precious to a believing heart is Christ and His blood! There are numbers of people who profess the Christian name, who would eliminate all reference to the blood of Christ. They expunge from their hymn books every reference to the blood of Christ, they will have none of it, but the true believer could not endure the thought of being without it, it is to him precious blood, invaluable blood. And when He fills the believer's heart and conscience with the power of it, O how it fills his heart with love and gratitude. "Made nigh by the blood of Christ", for that blood of Christ is that which washes away their sin and the sins of the whole church of God. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins." "Their sins a) their iniquities will I remember no more". When Jesus died, all the sins of His people were cast into the depths of the sea, the sea of total and everlasting forgetfulness, and therefore the great barrier between the sinner and God is broken down, sin is taken out of the way, and not only is the guilt of sin taken out of the way, but this blood of Christ cleanses. The Lord does not merely deliver His people from the guilt of sin by the blood of Christ, but from the reigning power of sin. "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law but under grace", and the effect of a sight of His redeeming work would cause love to spring up in the heart and flow out to Him. And when you get some inkling of what Christ has done in putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, it will cause you to love Him, you cannot help loving Him. Oh, how your soul will adore Him for the riches of His grace, the greatness of His mercy and of His compassion. "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh", made nigh unto God, favoured with access to the Father, every barrier broken down, everything that hinders the sinner's approach is taken out of the way. "Having therefore brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God, let us draw near", and when the power of this is upon the heart there is a drawing near. I remember Bunyan said, "I know of nothing goodlier than to be before God with Christ in my arms". It is a wonderful point to be brought to, for a sinner to be enabled to plead the atoning blood, to plead the infinite merits, the perfect righteousness of Jesus, to lay claim to His high-priestly intercession for his acceptance with God, to realise union with the Father

in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ through His blood and His righteousness. "But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh", "nigh", yes

"....so very near to God
Nearer I cannot be,
For in the person of His Son,
I am as near as He"

"Made nigh by the blood of Christ". May we be helped, then, to draw near; may the blessed Spirit so impress these things upon our hearts concerning Jesus Christ as that we shall be emboldened to come to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. And the Apostle goes on, "for He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;" (There was in the Temple, you know, a partition beyond which a Gentile might not go) "having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain (of elect Jews and elect Gentiles) "to make in himself of twain" one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." You remember the Lord Jesus said, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring,..... and there shall be one flock, and one shepherd". "And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father". O, I would that we might not rest short of a living experience of this reconciliation in our hearts. O, see what these people are brought to! I have noticed what they were brought from, what a dreadful condition they were brought from, "Now therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit".