

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven on Sunday evening 30th. April, 1950

"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul". Hebrews 10.38,39

These words, as you would have noticed in reading, follow some of the most solemn and searching sentences we have in the Word of God, words which try the honest-hearted people of God to the quick, words which tend to make the godly tremble as one has said, and to make the penitent yet more penitent, to set the people of God upon their watch tower. "Watch and pray", said the Lord Jesus, "that ye enter not into temptation", and I think one mark of the true fear of God being in the heart is a gracious disposition to take heed to such portions, a willingness to be searched by them, a willingness to come to the test. "Is my religion right or wrong?" "Am I a false or a true character? Am I a child of God or a religious bastard? Which am I?" The honest-hearted soul will come to the word of God desiring that under the influence of the Holy Spirit he may have these and similar questions decided for him. We sometimes sing,

"Lord, decide the doubtful case,
Thou who art thy people's Sun,
Shine upon the work of grace,
If it be indeed begun".

I feel that it is a serious fault in some professors that they do not seem to know what it is to be searched by the Word of God, or to be searched by the ministry. They talk of their hearing times and they are always having good hearing times as they think, comfortable hearing times, in which they see themselves set down on the right side of the line, and you never hear them speak about being searched and being able to welcome the searching word and to fall under the word of reproof and rebuke; they know nothing of that. I say, such a disposition is a serious mark against people. When one hears people only using the language of unassaulted confidence, one would be thankful to hear a different tale from them. I remember a godly old woman I used to visit many years ago, and her conversation was very refreshing, but always I found her able to testify of her enjoyment of the things of God, but one day I went to see her and found her in a most dejected condition. "O", said she, "He is gone and I cannot get at Him. I feel I did have Him in my arms loving Him, but now I cannot get at Him". The poor soul was very disconsolate, but you know I was very glad to hear her, it seemed to throw into relief the reality

of the other. Well, the Apostle here says, "Now the just shall live by faith". These just people, to begin with, are justified by faith, that is to say, they enter into the state of justification experimentally by faith in Jesus, a faith that is of the operation of God the Holy Spirit. They believe through grace, as we read in the book of the Acts, and so they enter experimentally into justification. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God". There is no other way of being just but by faith in Jesus. People are made just by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to them and by an interest in His death. He died, "the just for the unjust", and by His atoning death and His gloriously finished work these unjust people for whom He died, are made just, and so are led by the Spirit into a state of justification experimentally. A wonderful thing it is to be enabled to say in humble faith, "I'm clean, great God, I'm clean".

Well, "The just shall live by faith". The soul that is destitute of faith is destitute of life. The hymn writer says,

"True faith's the life of God,
Deep in the heart it lies;
It lives and labours under load,
Though damped it never dies".

These just persons live by faith, faith that is the gift of God, faith that they have not naturally in their hearts, it comes from heaven and the proper object, the ultimate object of faith is God in Christ. True faith lives upon Christ.

"To live upon His precious death
Is faith's divine repast.
The language of His dying breath,
See how she holds it fast."

"The just shall live by faith". We read in the following chapter a good deal about faith, and about people who lived by faith and who walked by faith. We read there, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Now, faith believes the Word of God. We read of some that the "word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it", but where the Lord has implanted life divine in the soul, where He has given the principle of living faith, that faith embraces the Word of God, believes that all is true that is in this sacred Word, these divinely inspired Scriptures. Faith believes the testimony that we have in the book of Genesis, faith goes through the Scriptures and believes and embraces what God has revealed. Another thing we may say about faith is that it believes in the testimony of God concerning the fall. If we have true faith we believe

that we are fallen sinners, that we fell in Adam, and that we are totally ruined by sin and in a bankrupt condition, that we are woefully responsible and inexcusable before God, yea, and utterly helpless; faith believes that. We are told of Noah that he was warned of God. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house", and he believed the warning. Now in the Scriptures the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Faith believes it, and it is as men believe this that they tremble at the Word of God. "But when the Spirit of truth is come, a sinner trembles at his doom". He feels the truth of the testimony, and the justice of it. Yes,

"If my soul were sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well".

It is faith that embraces these solemn truths, it is by faith that the soul falls under them, believes the testimony of God though it be so much against him, though it condemns him and cuts him off from any help or hope in self.

Then again, faith believes the record that God has given concerning His Son. As faith believes that God is a sin-hating God, that He will by no means clear the guilty, that He must punish sin, so faith believes, as the Spirit reveals it, that there is forgiveness with God that He may be feared, that "With the Lord there is mercy and with Him is plenteous redemption". O how does the sinner's heart go out believingly to the Lord in such Scriptures, how sweet they are made sometimes, how strengthening, how encouraging, how hope-inspiring! Thus faith believes the record that God has given concerning His Son, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood". Faith views the incarnate Son of God, faith will go to Bethlehem and there adore the Holy Infant that is called the Son of God; faith will adore, faith will say,

"I love the incarnate mystery
And there is all my trust".

O how delightful a thing it is when faith is enabled thus to go to Bethlehem, thus to view the Son of God incarnate! to see how the Ancient of Days became an Infant of Days, and He who knew no beginning "here on earth a life began". As Hart says, "My God, contracted to a span"! It is by faith that poor sinners, taught and led by the Holy Spirit, trace the footsteps of Christ through His earthly pilgrimage, and O how they watch His steps! As the poet says, "they glory in Him whom proud sinners abhorred". They watch His steps, they ponder the things that He said and did, they behold His glory "as of the only-begotten of the Father". Sometimes they see His glory shining in His doctrine, shining in the miracles that He wrought and in the words of mercy and grace that fell from His lips. And again, faith views the Lord Jesus Christ in all His perfect

obedience to His Father's Will, His magnifying the law and making it honourable. O what a precious view of Christ this is! The Law Fulfiller taking the place of His people under the law and doing what they utterly failed to do, obeying the law in every precept and every jot and tittle, leaving nothing undone. "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered", and thus He always did the things that were pleasing to His Father; and that obedience of His, that righteousness of His, is imputed to the believer, imputed to His people, this robe is the covering of the church. "Not my righteousness", a poor sinner taught of the Spirit will say, "not my righteousness is the ground of my confidence, but the righteousness of another, even the Christ of God".

"I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' Name".

Then again, faith looks upon Christ in the temptations He endured, and sees Him to be a suffering Elder Brother. "He suffered being tempted"; the Captain of their salvation gained the victory over the tempter, utterly defeated him, and sometimes faith will say,

"My captain stood the fiery test,
And I shall stand through Him".

Faith goes to the Garden of Gethsemane and sees the dear Redeemer there in His agony, when He sweat as it were great drops of blood as He wrestled in prayer with His Father.

"Backwards and forwards thrice He ran,
As if He sought some help from man",

but that help was denied Him. Thrice He besought His Father saying, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt". How little we understand that awful scene and the meaning of it, what it means to the Church of God; and it does mean a very great deal, more than we can ever tell. Faith views Him in that olive press as Hart beautifully puts it,

"View Him in that olive press
Squeezed and wrung till 'whelmed in blood,
View thy Maker's deep distress!
Hear the sighs and groans of God!
Then reflect what sin must be,
Gazing on Gethsemane."

And faith goes to Calvary and sees the dear Christ of God offering Himself a perfect Sacrifice upon the accursed tree. He died, "the just for the unjust", bearing "our sins in His own body on the tree" says the Apostle Peter. Faith views the slaughtered Lamb of God there, giving Himself a ransom for the Church; He "loved the church, and gave Himself for it", He purchased the church with His own blood, precious blood, invaluable blood! Nothing will purge the conscience, nothing will bring peace into a sinner's heart but the application of the precious blood of Christ. Well, faith will look to Calvary; as the

Spirit of God unveils these things of Christ faith gazes upon Him, and O the wonder of it when faith is given to look upon the slaughtered Redeemer!

"I hear the words of love,
I gaze upon the blood,
I view the mighty sacrifice,
And I have peace with God".

"The just shall live by faith". And faith does not stop at the cross, it goes to the tomb, it sees the Lord laid there, and then also it sees the tomb empty, the grave spoiled of its prey. "He is not here, but is risen". How faith rejoices in that! "Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept". And not only so, but faith views Christ as ascended to the Father in all the fulness and immortal validity of His atoning sacrifice. Toplady beautifully says,

"His love intense, His merit fresh,
As though but newly slain".

and faith, seeing Him at the right hand of the Father, looks to Him, views the offices He fills, the characters He bears, the glorious work of salvation that He has accomplished, and receives virtue out of Him. "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Christ is faith's proper Object. "Now the just shall live by faith", he shall live by faith, and in that following chapter we have a record of a number of worthies who lived by faith, who walked by faith, and acted in faith, enduring "as seeing Him who is invisible". Their faith was "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen".

"Now the just shall live by faith". How is it when a sinner is convinced of his sin by the Holy Ghost, and has his eyes opened to see his state and condition, his great need? Why, the Holy Ghost presents Christ before that sinner's eyes, the eyes of his faith, reveals somewhat of Christ in his heart. There is the sinner's need and over against the need as it is discovered to him, the Holy Spirit will ultimately reveal to him that it is Christ who is so divinely suited to meet that need. For instance, the sinner is made to see and feel his need of righteousness. "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags", and the Holy Spirit opens to him that it is Christ who is his righteousness in heaven. "This is the name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness". How that answers his need, how it fills that awful void that he feels in his soul, "Jesus, my righteousness, is in heaven". "Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, today and for ever". The man has some discovery of his guiltiness in the sight of God, he is loaded with guilt, his iniquities are gone over his head, "as an heavy burden they are too heavy for him", but the Holy Ghost reveals Christ to him, "whom God hath set forth to be a

propitiation through faith in his blood", and on the ground of what Christ has done the Holy Spirit whispers such sentences as these into his heart, where in the 3rd. Romans we read, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus". O how admirably and blessedly that answers to the sinner's need! "The forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace". "Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses". All this brings sweet peace into the conscience, the forgiveness of sins. I remember my old pastor saying that he wanted to live on the forgiveness of sins. Well, faith goes out to Christ as He is thus revealed, goes out to His atoning sacrifice, to His precious blood, to that one offering that He made for sin, and faith finds, as it is revealed, sweet satisfaction in it at times.

"No more, my God, I boast no more
Of all the duties I have done;
I quit the hopes I held before,
To trust the merits of thy Son".

Then again, as the Holy Spirit teaches His people, they have to prove how unholy they are, O most unholy. "Turn again, son of man, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these". There is evil that I never knew before within my breast. Well, as the child of God is pained and perplexed and cast down by the views that he gets of his own sinful heart, the corruption that is within him, the perpetual proneness to evil, the "secret inclinations to Adam the first" as Bunyan calls it, he has to cry, "Can ever God dwell here"?

"Can such besetting evils dwell
In one that is born of God?
Could black corruption rise and swell
Where Christ applies His blood?"

Thus the Holy Spirit not only brings in the precious cleansing blood of Christ, but He reveals Christ as his sanctification, Christ as able to sanctify even such an unholy sinner as the man feels himself to be, "Who of God is made unto us sanctification"; faith goes out to Christ in that particular. Sometimes faith will embrace Christ as sanctification, as did the Apostle when he was so deeply tried by reason of the sin that dwelt within him, which made him cry, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But he was enabled to look to Christ and say, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord". Yes,

"Christ has perfect holiness
For every sin-sick soul".

"Now the just shall live by faith", and the child of God will realise again and again his own emptiness of every thing that is good and spiritual. Worse

than emptiness he finds within and mourns over it. Well, what does the Spirit of God do as He shows the sinner his worse than emptiness? Why, He reveals the fulness that is in Christ Jesus. "It hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell". One good man said, "Lord, here is my emptiness, now where is Thy fulness?" and faith looks to Christ's fulness and receives out of His fulness grace for grace. Poor people are made rich by feeding upon the poverty of Christ and receiving out of His fulness grace for grace. Then again, the Holy Spirit convinces people of their utter weakness. O how weak a poor believer often feels, without strength to do good, without strength to do anything that is spiritual, powerless to believe, repent or pray, unable to keep himself.

"Myself I cannot save,
Myself I cannot keep".

The Holy Spirit reveals Christ as strength. Paul found it so when the Lord answered his cry for deliverance from his thorn in the flesh, "My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness". The Lord takes occasion by the felt weakness of His people to make known His power in their hearts.

"Glory to God for strength withheld,
For want and weakness known,
For fear that drives me to Himself
For what is most my own".

The child of God is made to feel his own poverty, he is poor in every respect, poor of grace, poor in everything that is good, but O it is that he may value the riches of Christ, that he may look to Christ for supplies out of His riches, the unsearchable riches of Christ, rich food for faith. O do you know what it is ever to rejoice in the fulness of Jesus Christ? He is made "Head over all things to the church", He is the fulness of His people; poor sinners are made to value a rich and bountiful Lord Jesus. They are made to feel their need of all these things and as the answer to their need is discovered to them in Jesus Christ, so they go to Him by faith. "Now the just shall live by faith". Faith has many errands to Jesus Christ. Faith comes sick to Jesus Christ the good Physician; it comes with empty hands to receive from Christ all needful grace and all supplies. Faith runs to Christ as being ignorant, seeking from Him heavenly wisdom, and the life of a believer is a life more or less of flying out of self to Jesus Christ. Do you desire that you may live this life? that you may know what it is to walk in this new and living way? I have sometimes, I hope, tried to pray,

"Foolish and impotent and blind,
Lead me the way thy saints have known;
Bring me where I my heaven may find,
The heaven of loving thee alone".

"Now the just shall live by faith, but if any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him". Very solemn is this! There is such a thing as professing to believe, as having a kind of faith, a faith that is spurious, a faith that is counterfeit. "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up", says Christ, and counterfeit faith will be exposed sooner or later. "From him that hath not shall be taken away that which he seemeth to have". "If any man draw back". Now, if you have a spark of living faith in your heart, that faith can never perish out of your heart, and when people draw back from Christ, when they turn their backs upon Him and upon His ways, it is because they have never possessed a grain of living faith, it is because they have never known the true Christ. They may have talked about Christ, they may have had a kind of thought about Christ, but they have never really known Him. Had they really known Him, had they really learned to love and trust and know Him, they could never get their hearts away from Him. Prone to wander they will be still, but

"Though we hardly of Him deem,
He will never, never leave us,
Nor will let us quite leave Him".

"If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him". A grievous thing it is for a minister, as John Berridge tells us, to see people who professed to be converted under his ministry, and of whom he had great hopes, drawing back. The Apostle says, "Of whom I tell you, even weeping that they are enemies of the cross of Christ". "If any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him". Then he says, "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul". There are one or two things may be said in this connection about true faith. Where there is true faith it is always joined with love. Faith is a grace that ever dwells with love in the heart; as I sometimes say, "What faith believes, love embraces". If you truly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ then you must surely love Him, and not only is faith joined with love, but is joined with humility too. The true believer will be a humble soul, he will be willing to sit at Jesu's feet and to be nothing there. May the Lord grant us this mercy, to be "of them that believe to the saving of the soul". Amen