

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill,
on Sunday evening, September 28th, 1952

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 5.v 20, 21

How important it is that we should, by the teaching of the Spirit of God, be well grounded in first principles! The apostle writing to the Hebrews said, "Ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God", and it is necessary, very necessary, that we ministers should be constantly bringing before our hearers the solemn fact of our sinnership, and that we should lift up Jesus Christ as the only Saviour. Sin and salvation should be the predominating themes of the ministry. It is so in the Scriptures, and here in this epistle we have very emphatically stated our utter ruin as fallen in Adam, and Jesus Christ as the only Redeemer, redemption by Jesus Christ through His finished work, through His blood and righteousness. One of our hymn writers, John Kent, in a hymn we sang at Smallfield earlier in the day, begins like this,

"Who but the soul that's led to know
How just and holy is the law,
Will to the cross of Christ repair,
And seek salvation only there?"

You will never fly to Jesus Christ and trust in Him for salvation unless you have been brought in guilty under the law, unless by the Holy Ghost you have been convinced of your sin and your unbelief, and have been made to feel the truth of those words of the apostle "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart". The Spirit of God makes the Scriptures to be very powerful, very piercing; He brings the Scriptures into a sinner's heart and conscience, and by the light of them reveals things that are hidden there, the secret abominations of the heart. He shows too, how utterly worthless are all a man's fairest pretensions. The apostle Paul himself thought himself bidding fair for heaven and for the favour of God. Who could please Him if not Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee? But when the Spirit of God came, when God, "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness", shined into his heart so as to give him the knowledge of sin, all his structure of righteousness crumbled to pieces; what he thought to be solid gold he proved to be nothing but dung; that which he thought

to be gain to him he counted but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. He became a poor sinner with nothing to depend upon, nothing to hope in, but a crucified Redeemer. "This is a faithful saying", said he, "and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief". There was his only hope, and if you and I are saved it must be in the same way, it must be under the same teaching. The same Holy Spirit must quicken us and teach us and lead us into the truth, bring us to Christ. Nothing else will avail.

"Perish every human story,
Every system taught or tried;
God forbid that I should glory,
Save in Jesus crucified."

The apostle was speaking out of the depths of his heart's conviction when he said, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified". Nothing but Christ would do for the apostle Paul; he knew nothing short of Christ could avail anything to poor sinners round about him.

Well, here we read, "Moreover the law entered that the offence might abound". Paul says, "I was alive without the law once". He thought himself in a good case, he thought himself flourishing, a right godly man, as a Pharisee "touching the law blameless", but "when the commandment came", said he, "sin revived and I died". Sin that seemed to be sleeping in his bosom before, was stirred up to activity. I have sometimes compared it to a river that is flowing placidly along, but some one puts a dam across the river, or there is some obstruction there, and then the river begins to rise and swell and burst its banks, flooding all the countryside. So it is with sin - When the law comes, sin revives and the poor sinner dies to all his former carnal hopes. Berridge in his quaint language says of the structure of his self righteousness,

"It trembled and shook, and fell with a shock,
And out I fled naked, and crept to a Rock".

"Moreover the law entered that the offence might abound". A man, in the light of the Spirit's teaching him out of God's law, sees himself to be a sinner in everything; nothing that he does is good, nothing that he does is spotless, he is a sinner in his best things.

"My best is stained and dyed with sin,
My all is nothing worth",

but the word of God is living and powerful, "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart". A man may make no conscience of his thoughts,

but when the law enters it deals with him as to his thoughts, his sinful thoughts, his idle thoughts, his foolish thoughts, his envious thoughts, his malicious thoughts, his thoughts of self-will, his thoughts in which God is not, O what a sinner he finds himself in his thoughts! Then he is a sinner in his words. "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment". What a sinner he sees himself to be in his own words! How many idle words escape his lips, and though he may charge his lips to be silent, while he may endeavour to watch closely what goes from his lips, he finds himself utterly failing, for the tongue no man can tame. Some foolish word, some wrong word comes out, some unwary expression, something hypocritical creeps out. Then also, the man is a sinner in his actions. All he does is mixed with sin and in every power and faculty of his being he is a sinner.

"Affections wild, by sin defiled,
Oft hurry me away".

His understanding is darkened, his will is perverse, his mind and conscience are defiled. "A ruined wretch condemned he stands". He can do nothing, and the more he is led to ponder his case the worse it appears, and the more helpless he finds himself to be - He can do nothing. He has a good many tries to do something.

"With sin and guilt poor Zion toils,
And labours hard for peace"

but all to no avail. "The law entered that the offence might abound". There is felt the abounding of the offence, the heaping up of sins upon sins, sins like mountains. "Mine iniquities are gone over my head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me".

Some might be ready to say, 'Well, this is very dull sort of preaching. We do not want to hear so much about sin'. I was told only the other day of a clergyman in a parish that I know, that someone enquired how he was and where he was. 'Oh', said one of the parishioners 'he has gone, and we are glad he has gone for he has told us that we were sinners'. His parishioners did not like to be told they were sinners, and there are lots of people like those parishioners who do not like to be told they are sinners. 'O do not let us hear so much about sin'. Some say, and I fear not sincerely, 'We have got so much sin in ourselves we do not want to hear about it from the pulpit', but I repeat it, I believe this is said not sincerely, because if people are really suffering from the plague of indwelling sin then they will be very thankful to hear the symptoms described from the pulpit, and for their disorders to be diagnosed sometimes by the minister. Then as he sets forth the malady in its dreadful aspects,

he is also led to set forth the remedy. Now that is what we have here. The apostle has gone very, very deeply into the matter of sin. I do not know that any gospel minister can ever go deeper into the matter of sin than the apostle Paul did in this epistle to the Romans, notably in the first and third chapters, and also in this fifth chapter. Then again he goes into the matter of indwelling sin in chapter seven and his triumph over it. But in setting forth sin, he also sets forth the remedy. A good woman once said to me, many years ago, 'Now I do not mind how black you paint us so long as you say that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.'

Now the apostle says, "Moreover the law entered that the offence might abound, but where sin abounded grace did much more abound". Oh the sweetness that has attended these words to the hearts and consciences of some poor people, broken-hearted because of the abounding of their sin. Oh, the sweetness of these words, "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound". Grace is made very attractive to those whom the Holy Ghost convinces of their sin. Grace truly is "a charming sound, harmonious to the ear". "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound", and if you know nothing at all of the aboundings of sin, those passages relating to the grace of God will mean nothing to you. You will see no beauty in it, nothing attractive; there will be nothing in it to meet a necessity. But if you are convinced of your sin by the Holy Ghost and are made to feel the aboundings of your iniquity, the unspeakable baseness of your wretched heart, then this will be attractive to you, "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound". When people are under this heavy sense of sin, O how gladly they look into and search the scriptures to find any words upon which their souls may hang, any word upon which God will cause them to hope. 'O, is there hope for a sinner like me? Is there hope for one so ignorant, so foolish, so base, so guilty as I am? One who has gone to such lengths of folly as I have done, one who has been so stubborn, so proud, so unbelieving, so self-righteous as I have been? Is there hope for one like me?' O how such will search the Scriptures if so be there may be hope, they "Would light on some sweet promise there, some sure support against despair".

In this fifth chapter we have very blessedly set forth the aboundings of grace in and through Jesus Christ our Lord. The apostle says, "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". Now the "we" here are a number of people whose state as sinners is described in the chapter we read together just now (chap.3), and

"Sinners, I read, are justified,
By faith in Jesus' blood;
But when to me that blood's applied,
'Tis then it does me good"

Well, the apostle goes on, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed: because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us". The wonderful and amazing love of God, the love of God to sinners, is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly". "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound". Oh, this is the flowing forth of the love of God to sinners. The apostle speaks of the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost and then he goes on to speak of what that love is in its acting. "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly". What an amazing thing it really is that the Father should so love a multitude of ungodly rebels as to send his own beloved Son into the world to suffer, bleed and die for them, and that the dear Son of God should so love these same ungodly rebels as to come willingly from heaven into this sin-ridden world and live the life He lived, and die the death He died, laying down His life a ransom price, redeeming His people by His own precious blood from the curse of the law and from all evil, and unto God. Oh, this is the love of God, this is how and where grace abounds. One of the our hymn-writers, Mr. Hart I think it is, in a hymn of petition, addresses the Holy Spirit, saying,

"Conduct, blest Guide, thy sinner train
To Calvary, where the Lamb was slain,
And with us there abide;

"Point out the place where grace abounds;
Direct us to the bleeding wounds
Of our incarnate God".

"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound". Then the apostle says, "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die, but God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". I can never get to the bottom of this word "commendeth" - there is something so deep in it, there is something so divinely gracious in it. "God commendeth". O the condescension of God in stooping thus to speak and thus to commend His love, to give us demonstration of His

love to sinners, "in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". Oh, this is the triumph of grace over sin! "We sinned, and Jesus died", says the poet, "He wrought the righteousness, and we are justified."

"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, that as sin hath reigned unto death" - O what a solemn truth is wrapped up in these words, that "sin hath reigned unto death"! "Sin hath reigned unto death". A man is tempted "when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death". "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord". "As sin hath reigned unto death" - One of the hymn writers speaks very forcibly and with solemn truth,

"Sin, like a raging fever, reigns
With fatal strength in every part."

I wonder how many of us are conscious of it! O how little young people for the most part, realise the peril they are in, how the hot blood of youth gives the devil fearful advantage. Rutherford speaks about the devil riding on horse-back after youth. He says that in youth, and in the hot blood of youth, in the fiery desires of youth, the devil has a hot hearthstone and dry tinder which easily catches fire at his sparks. Yes, it is true

"Sin, like a raging fever, reigns
With fatal strength in every part".

"Sin hath reigned unto death". What a dreadful picture, what a solemn declaration, that "sin hath reigned unto death", and if the Spirit of God should open your eyes to discern this truth, to feel the force of it, to know it to be a truth in your own case, O how your heart will sink, and how your dreams of profit and happiness in this world will be shattered! "That as sin hath reigned unto death"-"sin hath reigned" Oh, sin sits upon the throne in the human heart. It may not be always in those grosser forms; there are some of the more refined sort of sins; but sin reigns. Pride, covetousness, idolatry, self-love, lusts of various sorts, many, many other things more than one can name, are in the heart, enthroned there and reigning. "That as sin hath reigned unto death". Therefore the apostle writing to the Ephesians speaks of their having been "dead in trespasses and sins". "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord". "Even so might grace reign". O how wonderful this is, that there should be such a thing as reigning grace, the grace of God, His favour to sinners, the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor,

that ye through His poverty might be rich". He died the just for the unjust, He gave Himself for His people's sins, He bore the penalty, He died the death, He made an end of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Grace reigns in and through Christ's atoning death. Christ cancelled the sin of His people by His blood-shedding and death. "Even so might grace reign", and grace very sweetly reigns in sinners' consciences when the Holy Ghost brings in the things of Christ, brings in His precious blood, His glorious righteousness, His wondrous grace, reveals it in a sinner's heart.

"What stream is that which sweeps away
My sins just like a flood,
Nor lets one guilty blemish stay?
'Tis Jesus' precious blood".

There is the reigning of grace over the guilt of sin, over the terrors of God's holy law, over wrath and condemnation felt in the conscience. Grace reigns through righteousness. Oh, when a soul is brought to this boundless ocean of grace and loses all his sin and all his guilt, all his wretchedness in the ocean of grace, he drops "into that sea outright, loses himself in Jesus quite". "Even so might grace reign", pardoning grace, justifying grace. It is a wonderful thing for a sinner who has known the heavy weight of guilt to be consciously before God without a stain of guilt on his conscience, not a sin between him and God, all taken away, all the burden that he carried for perhaps a long period of time, as Bunyan's pilgrim carried his burden till he came to a place called Calvary. There his burden tumbled off and was lost to sight in the sepulchre. So when the atonement comes into a sinner's conscience his sin is taken away, he has peace with God, sweet peace, blood-bought peace. "Even so might grace reign". Reconciliation takes place, he tastes the sweetness of joying in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom he has now received the atonement.

Then there is something more in this reign of grace. "Even so might grace reign through righteousness" - it is through righteousness. The grace of God does not flow down to sinners and communicate its benefits at the expense of justice, in violence of the righteousness of God, but it of necessity flows in the way of righteousness and justice. A poor sinner is given to realise that his forgiveness is just, that his salvation is a righteous salvation, a salvation in which God is honoured and appears most glorious. And this makes salvation to be very sweet to those who are blessed with the knowledge of it, that God is so glorified in it. His glory is great in their salvation, to see, as Bunyan phrases it, the banners of Emmanuel displayed, half of them on Mount Justice, and half of them on Mount Gracious; to see that God is

just and the justifier of them that believe in Jesus. O it is most beautiful, there is a glory in it, there is a heart-warming and attractive glory in it, in this wondrous scheme of grace whereby God shows Himself to be a just God and a Saviour, "a God of truth without iniquity", and yet pardoning sinners and receiving poor sinners and cleansing them "through righteousness". "Even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord". There is the reign of grace within the soul, and the Lord sets up the kingdom of this grace in a poor sinner's heart. The Lord does not pardon a sinner and then leave him where he was before under the dominion of sin and Satan. No, He spoils Satan, He casts Satan from his throne in the sinner's heart, and He sets up His own throne in the heart of the sinner, He comes as King to reign.

".....His word of grace shall prove,
A peaceful sceptre in their hearts
To rule His saints by love"

When He enters He so sheds abroad His love in the heart that His love is a constraining power, and sweet it is to be constrained by love to God, by love to Christ, to a willing obedience. The Psalmist says, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little". There is a blessedness in this; "kiss the Son" means submit yourselves to the Son, to be ruled by Him. We read in the 45th Psalm, "Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty, for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him." So Christ takes the throne in the heart, and He rules there by His Spirit and His Word, He brings the soul under His sweet and easy yoke, as He says, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy, and My burden is light". Oh, the precepts of the gospel become very attractive and very sweet then. Gospel precepts are not addressed to the worldling, they are not addressed to unbelieving people, to mere religious professors; they are addressed to the people of God, and the people of God are, under the influence of His grace, enabled to receive them and to delight in them. "I delight in the law of God after the inward man", said the apostle.

"Make me to walk in thy commands,
'Tis a delightful road,
Nor let my head, or heart, or hands,
Offend against my God".

says the hymn-writer, and how attractive are right ways to one who knows something of the sweet influence of the mercies of God to him. How attractive a right way is! Yes,

"Make me to walk in thy commands.
'Tis a delightful road".

And this word has sometimes been somewhat attractive to me, "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord". I have thought often of my hands and feet, of my tongue and my eyes and my ears, how I have yielded them in the past as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, served the devil with them, served self with them, used them for base ends. They have not been under the dominion of godly fear, and I have thought of this with grief of heart, with sorrow, with shame and self-loathing, but I have found in my heart an earnest desire that these hands, these feet, this tongue, these eyes and these ears might be yielded as instruments of righteousness unto God, that, constrained by love to Christ, moved by the mercies of God, I might present my body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is my reasonable service.

"That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord". And where these things are known and felt, where this work of grace is begun, it will have this issue, in eternal life. Grace in the heart is eternal life begun. "He that believeth hath everlasting life"- he hath it.

Yet, while in the body, that everlasting life is immature, but at death when the soul passes over to the other side, it will enter into a fulness of life beyond all its conception here below. "It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know", says John, "that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." That will be everlasting life and everlasting felicity.

May the Lord add His blessing, Amen.