

**Sermon preached by Mr. L. R. Broome, Pastor,  
at Bethesda Chapel, Southampton,  
on Lord's Day morning, 10th June, 1984**

**Text:** *"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12. 1).*

As you know, we were speaking last Sabbath of all those things working in the church of God for the sake of His people, the co-ordination of so many different events for their sakes. "All things are for your sakes." They were a body controlled by one Head and the Spirit of Truth, their Teacher. And there was a bringing together of those things which looked unusual but in the end proved to be for their sakes, whether they were for ill or for good. Quoting several scriptures, we tried and I hope succeeded in proving this to be true.

Here we have a different angle upon this mighty work of God in the churches and among His people, and in the church – the one and only church, His redeemed people. Here Paul is looking backwards. He is not ashamed of past history; in fact, it was for him the foundation upon which he based his current gospel exhortations. He brings forth evidences and now proceeds to build upon them. Therefore seeing these things are so, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." But he does not omit this vast cloud of witnesses. Now, who are they? Witnesses are people who are reliable: they cannot be witnesses if they are not. A witness that is unreliable is worthless. And these witnesses, Paul is satisfied, are true characters. Not necessarily good ones, or gracious ones, but they are real characters, and if we ask ourselves the question the second time,

“Who are they — where are they to be found?” we only have to see what he says in the previous chapter where he refers to these. There is only a few of them, very few. I have not counted them up — I do not know whether you have — but there were very few. Just a sample, shall we say, from the highest to the lowest. There are such people as Noah (with whom he starts), and Rahab the harlot, and he puts them all in together as witnesses.

What do they witness? What is the subject? What have they to do with this great company to which he refers as a “cloud” of witnesses? A beautiful expression, most expressive of their number, although as I have said, just a few are mentioned in this eleventh chapter: there are many more. Why does he therefore select such as he does? Well, I will tell you: he did not select them himself; God selected them. Otherwise I very much doubt whether he, as Paul the Apostle, would have selected them, if he had put his own mind and wisdom to it. But be that as it may, here they are. And they are witnesses, and they are real people.

Now these he collects together: all the history of all these years in the Old Testament, and some of them hardly have a name; they are referred to in places as “a certain man,” or “a certain woman,” but they are recorded — that is the point. And they are there for a specific purpose. That purpose was not revealed then. Why should all this history be collected? Why? Well, because all countries collect their history, but all countries do not make such use of it as God makes use of the history of His people and those who have had to do with them. So that the beauty of the Old Testament can never be overstated, and it is a great mistake and a sinful error to minimise any of the work in the Old Testament and the beauty of it collated and then brought together and put into the hands and heart of such a man as Paul.

And the gospel with it gives us a true picture of this text. And then — and this is the point — he relates it to us. He relates it to the living church of God in his day and in the days to come. And when he says, “We,” it does not only mean himself, but those living with him at the time. He means the whole company of those who shall yet come. He refers to them later on in the twenty-third verse, calling them, “The general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.” That is his inspired word. “And to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.” I say, they are brought together and joined together by this one word: “We.” The beauty, therefore, of the old witnesses (having but a sample of them), we are all clear in our minds as to whom he refers, namely, all of us. Put this therefore with what we were speaking last Sunday, “All things are for your sakes,” that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.

There is therefore a beautiful union in the purpose and we are shown it. And it must have been to him a constant source of strength through all his sufferings, to have these things revealed to him, to see these things as he had never seen them before. This is what I like about the Word of God, and this is what I like about this text — the emphasis God places upon His Word as we grow older shows us things that we have not seen before. Not through ignorance, mark you; there are things that the Lord keeps hidden from His people for a time and then, when the time comes, He just turns the page and says to them, “Look at this.” It is a beautiful thing to look forward to, you younger ones! Your Bibles are never going to get stale! You are never going to look at your Bible and say, “I know it, I have read it, I read it every year.” Well, perhaps you may do, but the thing is to have it revealed to you. And these witnesses therefore are joined together and the purpose of joining them together is this: that we — that is *us* — lay

aside every sin, "Every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." This is the purpose. Are we going to see, in these witnesses then, those things that are sinful? Are they going to have a clean sheet, every one of them, a people that were sinless? Or are we going to see some people who were deep-dyed sinners? And are we going to see some saints there? Are we going to see some people that we could put our arms round? We are, we do! O, yes, they are a mighty cloud, indeed they are! There is an affection as well as an abhorrence; these go together in the purposes of God to teach His people, give them a union to these characters in the Old Testament and join them up with the gospel now in Christ Jesus and show them that which they need to do: and that is to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset them." And then to "run with patience the race that is set before them." Take Noah: look at that good man, running his race with patience! Instructed to build an ark, he was scoffed at, and yet he persisted. Have you ever looked at Noah, put yourself by his side and thought, "What a hopeless task"? And then the great question where to get the materials from, and all that; and the wisdom and the ability. Those questions do not have to be asked: the ark floated on the waters and it was a good job (if I may put it bluntly) and it lasted there all that time without a leakage, under God's instructions that it should be pitched inside and out with pitch. O yes, no question of last week's terrible disaster of a beautiful ship turned over on its side and sunk in less than a minute. Not so the ark. And so with the great faith he had, and the patience that he had, and that which he evidences, is brought forward as an example – he is part of the cloud of witnesses.

Well, what lessons are there in this? But not to dwell on each of these people here, such as Enoch who "walked with God," or as Abel who "offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain," we

could easily spend time asking "Why, how came it that he should offer a proper sacrifice – a blood sacrifice: how did he know? Who taught him?" We cannot ask questions like that when we have heard such confirmation as we have, but what of Cain? God soon started to divide between brothers. By faith Abel offered up a more acceptable sacrifice. "A cloud of witnesses." Do we see a solemn division between brothers today, and have we not seen it in history throughout the world? And the fact that Cain was so stirred to bitter anger that he killed him? He did not say, "I am going to leave you, Abel." No, he went to the absolute and slew his brother. God, I say, soon divided between brethren – a twin, even Jacob and Esau.

Now we are "compassed about" by this great cloud of witnesses and we are joined to them in this – that the great God who taught Abel to offer an acceptable sacrifice also taught Jacob to pray. And that same holy, righteous God who left Cain to the imagination of his own heart left Esau to the imagination of his. Going through then, just two or three of these, we come to Abraham, and see there that wonderful case of this man, chosen from Ur of the Chaldees, a town of some repute in those days, told to leave: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate" was the old call then, really, as it is in the gospel today. And did he come out? "He went out," we are told, "not knowing whither he went." Well, some may say that there was an air of adventure about that. There was not! There was the God-given faith: he knew not where he was going, but, seeing we are compassed about with such a man as Abraham, we are not going to say, "Well it was thousands of years ago and it is too old to be relied upon; it is only history." Far from that! It is as if he was alive today, and God called him out today, as He does sinners out of the world. And He says, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

and will be a Father unto you.” Yes. The same thing. The eye of faith. Abraham walked with God.

Moses, strangely hidden in the bulrushes, a mother’s love having been torn to the heart, she lays him there and his loving sister watches over him, and without any hesitation she goes up to the one whom she positively knew was the king of Egypt’s daughter. She says to her, “I’ll find a nurse for you.” And she did – no other than her own mother, and the child’s mother too, until Moses is found in the house of Pharaoh for forty years, learning all the wisdom of the Egyptians – that was no small task, was it? But what an opportunity! And what wisdom he had to have for the task which was before him! Now these things are associated with us by this word, “We” – “I,” says Paul, “Am compassed about.” And you Hebrews, “We are,” and the church of God – they are all about you. Or do we just read Old Testament history, read it to the children and say, “Moses laid in the bulrushes in the River Nile, and it was dangerous”? It will take the children’s attention all right, they will listen, but O, have *you* listened? Have you seen the mighty hand of God, now, in the present day, watching over you, naturally? O, He is still the same!

So that again we have this “Long cloud of witnesses.” Moses comes to the point where he has not to stop in Egypt long. He has to leave it; he has to make a decision: “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God.” O, how did he know? He didn’t! “Choosing rather to suffer affliction” – he did not know what that affliction was going to be! Here he was, leader of the whole of Israel, qualified and equipped by forty years in Pharaoh’s palace and then forty years in the backside of the desert; what a contrast! The marvellous teaching of God – do not despise it if things go hard with you in what you think you ought to know and do, and yours is a lonely, desert life. What think you Moses felt?

Forty years is a long time. And it was forty years he was in the desert. But he didn’t waste it, no, he had to learn first hand all the geography for that great day when he would lead the people of God to and from Mount Sinai.

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about.” Now, apply this: “All things for your sakes.” Do you believe it, that all these things that God was working out all those years ago were for your sakes? And to make a complete whole of the matter, He brings Paul to collate all these things and bring them before us. O, it is wonderful to see the hand of God working! And thus we have others here – and I did say that there were those in the Old Testament whom you could put your arms round with affection, not mentioned here. Hannah is not here; Ruth is not here, no. Why not? “Why can’t we have Ruth in it, Lord? Why can’t we have Hannah in it?” She is in it! “Well her name is not in it!” Ah, that is another matter. The only woman that is mentioned is Rahab the harlot. We are not going to find many companions with her – or are we? Do not make any mistake about that! She was one of the Lord’s dear women, a vile sinner, and yet sovereignly called by divine grace at a divine time. And thus were the children of Israel saved and Jericho conquered. O, yes! You must allow the utmost sovereignty to your God in working out these things! And seeing that these things are so, we have them, compassing us about. Now, do they? Are they profitable for us? Do we turn in faith sometimes to see this strange path that was inexplicable at the time: the hundred-and-twenty year path that was inexplicable until the ark floated on the waters and then was forever lost, but not the inhabitants. But nothing destroys the purpose of it, setting forth the great Antitype, Christ. And look further at Abraham and see the great Antitype of Christ there, Isaac, the model son, the only son, laid upon the altar of wood. You see, these things are so essential to faith because faith only

will credit them. The atheist laughs at them, he makes a mockery of it all and says, "Never; I don't believe a word of it!" He discounts the whole. The believer finds that to which he or she can cling – and that affectionately, and therefore holds fast to the whole, though there are but few mentioned here. David is mentioned, Gideon is mentioned. What about David – has he left any record? Do you ever read the Psalms? Do you ever find something so simple to you in the Psalms that has the absolute essence of true experience in it? Quite enough to go to bed on, quite enough to get up on – quite enough to praise Him. "I love the Lord because He heard my prayer at those dark hours." "Have mercy upon me, O God." One of the main words is "Mercy" isn't it? And then to see he is suffered to plunge into the depths of depravity and sin. You will need living faith to see why. But there are those who are so left of God. And for their sakes it is written.

I must leave you now to follow this up in your own minds – and please do so: time is running short. Eternity is before you. Do not let this powerful, evil world break you with its passions and all its calling. The day will come when it will be swept away like a flower that yesterday blossomed in all its beauty but today lies leafless on the ground. But the purpose of it: "Let us lay aside every weight." Did these people have weights? What kind of weights? Have you any weights? I will not ask you what kind – you know best. But what is a real weight to you? Those two beautiful hymns you started off with (Gadsby's 958 & 736) had some desires in them – "Show me a token for good," and so on, and that reality of a known weight in the soul – "Lord, lift it up, I am weighted down." What, lay it aside? How? Like you take your coat off, lay it aside, hang it up, or just say, "I have finished with that"? Not as easy as that, no, it is the weight of sin, of unbelief, a hard heart, many things, you know. What a weight it

is, these weights that come along. What a weight the children are! What a weight some of your relatives are, aren't they! What a weight you have at home! How can you lay it aside? How can you say, "I'll dispense with this"? No, this is not the way that Noah dispensed with his weight; this is not the way that Abraham dispensed with his weight; this is not the way that Moses dispensed with his weight. How did they do it, then? It was by obedience to God's Word. And that is the only way for the weight to be removed.

The dear Lord Jesus, under the weight of imputed sin, was obedient. And that crisis in His life (if we may use that word of Him), was obedience. That was the next step, and that step He took in spite of all that Noah, Moses, Abraham, Sarah, David, or any other, endured; the weight which was removed by obedience. Now this is the "Laying aside of every weight, and the sin." Where are you going to put it? After all, it has to be disposed of. It cannot be burnt. There is a Burden-bearer, a Friend on high. There is the One who is "a very present help in time of trouble." You may say, "Well, I knew that!" I expect you did, but that does not mean to say that you do it! This is your weight, that you cannot obey, you cannot roll, cast, your burden upon the Lord. This is the weight that He will bring to you, and then He will enable you to roll your burden upon the Lord in weakness, not in strength. This lovely lesson of weakness. You say, "Do not speak lightly of what, to me, is a heavy thing." I am not, I am not, God forbid! But your burden will be removed and laid aside when by faith you are enabled (and you must be enabled) to lay it – or roll it, as the margin says – upon the Lord. It is this that is the link we have here in the gospel. Why, the chapter goes on to show us how this great cloud of witnesses laid aside their weights, their sin which did so easily beset them. You try and manage your sins! These words are not here for nothing and Paul does not use them

needlessly. There you may say, as you look back over your life, "Oh dear, how easily my sins have beset me!" or, "That particular sin, that particular weakness – am I to lay it aside? Do I want to lay it aside as once I did?" That is the question!

"Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and His Word?"

(Gadsby's 958)

Now, in obedience there is a freedom, and that freedom is to run. The more a runner is covered with clothes, the more he is hindered. "Let us run with patience." These sins, these propensities and indwelling evils, we cannot just cut off in a moment. But we are brought low and the Lord gradually weakens our strength in the way, and then it comes to a willingness to run with patience. One of the highest points of a Christian's experience. "Run with patience." This is just what a runner does! You do not see him start off like a flash (you might in a hundred-yard race, but you would not in a long distance marathon). No, the man that knows his strength knows how to run; he is trained to run and knows how to conserve his strength, and he runs with patience. Things will not work out as you thought, but there is One who will give you patience. You will ask Him for patience. Look how He did these men here: look at poor Moses, why, in such a moment of impatience when Israel had sinned and the Lord had said He would cut them off, he pleads, "And if not, blot I pray Thee, my name out of the book which Thou hast written." You see these tests bring extreme words, but they come to this wonderful place of patience.

Now this race is, of course, the race of the life of faith. And we know nothing of it until we begin to run it, do we? And then one thing unfolds after another. Those of you who are young are at the beginning of your race, naturally speaking, and those of you who have come to the meridian of your days, you have come a good way in the race; you have learnt a few lessons, haven't you? You have looked back to some of these old patriarchs and said, "Yes, that is what they had, that is what I need." And then there are some of us who have nearly finished, yes, "And if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow." Have you anything to look back upon during fourscore years that runs parallel with such a gracious scripture as this? You see this cloud of witnesses about you and you see how they endured, "As seeing Him who was invisible." Or has your life been just one sad, sad path, without hope, without God in the world? Which of the two? The Lord help us to answer the question.

Amen.