

SERMON

PREACHED BY MR. L.S.B.HYDE

at

PROVIDENCE CHAPEL, WEST STREET, CROYDON

Hymns: 1, 499, 832

Reading: Eccl. ch. 3 & 8

Text: Eccl. ch.8 v.12

New Year's morning
1st January 1987

As the Lord may help me this morning I would draw your attention to the 8th chapter in the book of Ecclesiastes, and a few words in the 12th verse

It shall be well with them that fear God

Usually as the New Year approaches and eventually begins, that which is uppermost in the minds of many people would be couched in a simple sentence "what are the prospects?" All business people must consult together to consider what are the prospects that their business may be advanced, that profits may be made and so on. All these prospects may be marred eventually because of contingencies arising which are quite unexpected, and so however sound the counsel of men may be and however apparently secure the prospects of men may appear, yet there is always the danger that the unexpected will arise and those prospects will not be achieved and the desires left unfulfilled.

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We have in the Word of God, in our text this morning, the prospect that "It shall be well with them that fear God". We can then look this morning throughout the year with this prospect. We have not set before you that which may have any shattering consequences: it will not have any disappointments in it but "It shall be well with them that fear God". Many have proved this over the preceding years, throughout the centuries past, it has been well proved that this word of the Almighty is true.

"It shall be well with them that fear God". God's statements are invariably simple: they are not surrounded or impeded by certain conditions, they are never hindered by such little words as "if" or "but" or "maybe" or "perhaps". "Whatsoever God doeth is done for ever: nothing can be added to it and nothing can be taken from it."

Now this certain prospect, this comfortable word, this word which will never be a disappointment to those who are able to stay upon such a word, is not just wishful thinking but it is a word that is couched in the eternal purposes of God. Nature, fallen nature, is very rarely concerned about the eternal purposes of God but if we fear God and the grace of God is great upon us, - and we may well long for that day that is spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles "And great grace was upon them all "(Acts 4 v.33)- then though those days were days of persecution, though they were days of distress, though they were days of trouble in many respects, yet this was most certainly true "It shall be well with them that fear God".

If you look to the testimonies of the saints of God as recorded in the Scriptures, you will find without any exception that this was their testimony "It shall be well with them that fear God". Why? Because in their own soul's experience they could endorse this.

We think of the well-known 23rd Psalm which ends on a note of humble confidence, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever".(v.6) Would some say that David was presumptuous?

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How did David know "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life", how did he know it ? He knew it because of what goes before: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" and so he goes on. All those past experiences, sanctified by the grace of God in his heart, gave him this humble confidence in God, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me": it cannot be otherwise.

Now if we fear God this should be our attitude to things, that it cannot be otherwise, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me". But some may say, you do not know, my sins are so great, my weaknesses are so many. Well, has that been so in the past ? It has ? Then all the more you should say "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me" since God is "In one mind and who can turn him ? And what his soul desireth even that he doeth".(Job 23 v.13) He is the same yesterday, today and for ever. So it cannot be otherwise that "Goodness and mercy shall continue to follow me all the days of my life". These words are, of course, consonant and agreeable to the words we have in the words of our text this morning, "It shall be well with them that fear God".

Now there are one or two points that we need to set before you in looking at these words. First of all, why it shall be well with them that fear God. This will be so because of the covenant relationship which exists between the Lord and His church, and these are the people that fear God.

It may be perhaps we ought to pause here for a moment to consider exactly what it means to fear God. Well those that fear God will live in such a way that they will be witnesses. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God".(Is.43 v.12)

We need to consider this word "witness" in a very careful way because there are diverse meanings to the word. However much we may attempt to convert others, yet if we are not living

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epistles known and read of all men, then all our efforts will be abortive. It has been well said that the best sermons have been preached by our feet and it does not matter how eloquent we may be, or how persistent we may be, or how dynamic we may be in our efforts to persuade sinners to come to Christ, we may be ever so powerful, yet if they look and see any fault at all, that will do more harm than all the good we have sought to do.

I was very struck this week in reading a short article, no dates given or who wrote it: it was just gathered fragments from here and there. In this article was a report of a christian man who had a friend concerning whom he says that he knew what was right faith and what was false faith yet he was not a believer: he knew certain things by reason of education but he was not a believer.

Anyway, this christian man thought he would take his friend along with him to a certain gathering of others who were christian people, and during the course of conversation various opportunities were given to express certain thoughts. Suddenly to this christian man two anecdotes came to his mind and each of these anecdotes referred to two different people and certain idiosyncrasies and actions and modes of expression in prayer. The man did not repeat the details, he said it was not necessary, but he said the company who were there could not help laughing at what he told them, all except one man and that man was the person he had taken along.

As time went on the christian man noticed that this man was very solemn when the rest were laughing. When they went on their way home it was very noticeable that the man who had been taken to this gathering had something on his mind. After a short time the man turned to the christian man and said "Why did you say that. The emphasis was on the word YOU and it conveyed much; he said nothing more. This christian man who had made so much effort to talk to this man in regard to the

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necessity of his soul being saved, saw it all fall to the ground in a moment.

The christian man went home but not to sleep. He was brought in guilty before God and he had to beg for forgiveness that God would pardon him, and also preserve him from falling in such a way on another occasion. He also had to seek forgiveness of the man he had taken along, that he should have been responsible by his inconsistency of bringing a question into that man's mind: he still exhorted him to seek the Lord while He may be found.

Now that is a very simple thing and you may say, why have you introduced that into the subject this morning on those who fear God. Well I did not expect to do so, friends, but I will just say this - the fear of God, his love to his Lord, made that man guilty and sad and sorrowful that by reason of his weakness he had undone that which he had tried to do.

The fear of the Lord. What is it ? What does it mean to fear God ? It means that we have that principle within, the life of God in the soul, that soon reacts to unusual conditions, soon reacts if we should be overcome and if we should fall, as we may well do. No wonder the Apostle Peter says "Kept by the power of God": no wonder the Psalmist says "Hold thou me up and I shall be safe". The fear of God will recognise God's mighty power to save, God's mighty love to overcome the vilest sins. We might say, was that a vile sin ? It is what God makes it to you. Some of us can feel very vile over very simple statements or very simple actions, that if we were to tell people they would say, well that is nothing - but by the conviction of the Spirit of God it can be exceedingly vile.

Those who fear God will therefore be immediately touched. When Peter denied his Lord, he was immediately touched when the Lord turned and looked upon him, because he had been so vile as to deny Him. And the man I have just referred to, he felt that he was like Peter because he had been in the same sin, he had denied his Lord, he had made fun of some of the people of God. He was in the same spot as Peter was. Do you ever find in the

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Scriptures it recorded that the Lord Jesus made fun of some of His poor people because of their weaknesses ? Has He ever made fun of you ? Then let us ever remember that we are followers of Jesus Christ and, if we are, we shall have the fear of God. Though sometimes we may be overcome by our weaknesses, yet it will bring guilt upon our conscience. Why ? Because of the consequences or because we fear that God will bring solemn judgments upon us ? Oh No ! Something far deeper than that. Because we feel that we have sinned against His love. It can all take place within a few seconds or a few minutes but we sin against His love, and it may be that some of us - may be all of us - look back over the past week and have to say this morning, yes, I have sinned against His love. How do you discover this ? You discover this because God's fear has been in your heart and that fear has been love to God, love to your Father, love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and what an effect this has ! But "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared".

"It shall be well with them that fear God". So then we may come into a situation that brings us down and all we can see is that we need God to forgive us, and we feel that God is angry with us. But how wonderful to be able to say this morning - if we can - "It shall be well with them that fear God" because His anger is turned away. The Father's anger and wrath has been centred on the Lord Jesus Christ. A look from Jesus Christ will have a great effect on your spirit this morning, or at any time: it is a look from the Lord Jesus Christ that separates the godly from the ungodly, from those who fear God and those who do not fear God.

"It shall be well with them that fear God" because they are indwelt by the Spirit of God and therefore they love God. Now do you love God ? Many people say they love God but by their works they deny Him. Do you love God ? In that case we can say to you that you have a good prospect that it shall be well with you.

Some may say I feel so confused sometimes, I wonder whether I really do love God. Well, we shall not love God while we

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love ourselves, and one of the works of the Spirit of God is to bring us where Job came when he said "Wherefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes". That was certainly a moment in his life when he did not love himself: he could not stand the sight of himself. But, Oh, may we not say that he loved God because of the divine compassion that God had shown to him in sparing him in that bitter trial that came upon Job. I know there was a lot that Job saw that he had never seen before, and it may be that in the year ahead of us we shall discover many things about ourselves that we have never discovered before but, at the same time, we shall also discover, consequent upon it, many things about the love of God that we never realised before.

How little we know, and in one of the chapters this morning we read about the limitation of knowledge. When you come to consider the things that are to be known in the world, how little we know. We take up our various professions and to some extent some may be able to claim themselves as experts in that profession, but how little the experts know. They know their subject well but sometimes I feel absolutely dwarfed when I think about such things as our bodies. In Eccl.ch.11 v.5 it says "Thou knowest not how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child"; who knows it? Oh, some may say we have all that under control now, we have scanning machines that can plot the progress. Yes, but who knows how the bones grow? God reserves much wisdom to Himself.

We may go into all sorts of fields of knowledge, the stars how great they are, the moon, and the sun itself: what hidden knowledge is contained in them, reserved unto God alone. And if we come to consider this in relation to the love of God, Oh, how little we know. But are we learning, shall we learn a little more in the year to come of the love of God to our souls, the love of God to sinners, the extent of that love, the depth of that love, the height of that love, the wonder of that love and the glory of that love?

If we love God one thing we shall want to know about God more than anything else is His love to us. We may occupy our

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minds with all sorts of doctrinal points or in discussions or disputations or debates, but when all is said and done, it comes to this point

O love, how great thou art.

"It shall be well with them that fear God" because there will be times when they will stand still and say

O love, how great thou art

Maybe there has been an occasion in the year past when you have said just that, not seeing love just as one of the aspects of God, but to see love as God Himself. The Word of God says "God is love" and when you get a glimpse of the love of God, you have seen God Himself.

"It shall be well with them that fear God", with them that love God. Why? How can we say that? We turn to the 1st Epistle of John where it says, "We love him because he first loved us" (ch.4 v.19) What love are we talking about? We are talking about eternal love, everlasting love, unchangeable love. If you fear God, be assured, dear friends, you have this witness that God loves you and you, in your measure, love God.

We do want to make the point here, because sometimes people get to that place where they feel that they do not love God at all. Why? What comparison are they making? Well, they say I ought to love God much more. Of course you ought to love God much more, but do you love God at all? If you love God at all, let us remember that "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ", (Phil. ch.1 v.6) and there will be an increase of that love. And as there is an increase of that love so there will be an increase of a hatred to yourselves.

I think it was Samuel Rutherford who said, "Oh that I had not a myself". Now that is only half the story. People may sometimes feel themselves so wretched because they have perhaps been foolish and unwise, but that was not what Rutherford said. Rutherford said this - Oh that I had not a myself but Jesus Christ. It is no use going halfway because if you only go halfway you may as well not have started.

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Oh that I had not a myself, but Jesus Christ. These are those who fear God, who have a longing for Jesus Christ. Are you now going to relate the whole matter to say, well my longings seem not very strong. We are not to judge by the quantity or the strength, but we are to judge the matter as to whether we have any longing after Jesus Christ. If we have, then we are amongst those who fear God.

Those who fear God will also, because they love God, be anxious to do that which will please God. In the book of Micah there is a very simple verse which is all-embracing. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God".(Micah 6 v.8) So we have three points here which epitomise the fear of God - they seek to do justly, they love mercy, and their desire is to walk humbly with their God.

Now if we walk humbly with our God we cannot walk in the pride of our hearts. If we are born again of the Spirit we have two natures, but our old nature is just the same as it always was and there will be a continual battle between the pride and independence of our heart, and the desire of the new man of grace which is to walk humbly with our God. People's eyes have sometimes been lifted too high when they have been looking for the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, the Lord Jesus Christ when He was here on earth was bypassed time and time again because people were looking too high. They had their own ideas of what Christ would be when He came, they expected Him to come as a great monarch riding majestically, putting down the Roman rule and so on. They did not observe the humble man, the humble God who walked amongst them: they did not observe Him. How often must it be said of us that in our independence and our high looking in our own imaginations of what we think Christ ought to be, as distinct from what He is, we do not see Him. But how good it is when the grace of God has brought us low in ourselves and we are most happy to be in the company of a lowly man, of one who when He went through this world, except to a few, was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

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"It shall be well with them that fear God" and those that fear God will want to walk with God. It is well to remember that Enoch was not an isolated case. He was an isolated case in this way that he did not die "for God took him", but he was not an isolated case when we come to the reason why God did this. "And Enoch walked with God, and he was not for God took him". We find that Noah also walked with God but these are only examples of those who feared God. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we have these words concerning Noah, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear"- that is moved with love to God - "prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith".(Heb.11 v.7)

It will surely be a profitable exercise for us to look into the Word of God and consider these people who feared God, who walked with God, who loved God, who were willing to suffer for His sake. And the people who feared God were also willing to part with all. Just think of those wonderful words of the Apostle's confession when he said, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ". (Phil. 3 v.8)

Those who fear God count the things they have lost as nothing at all. A celebrated preacher of this century gave up a very lucrative medical practice for the gospel, and he records that people said to him: what you have given up, what you have lost. His reply was: I have lost nothing, I have gained everything.

Let us not think that following the Lord Jesus Christ is a balancing out of what we have lost and what we have gained. I am sure that that man's testimony was right: he had lost nothing because all he had lost was nothing anyway, but what he had gained could not be computed.

"It shall be well with them that fear God". When you regard this point of it being well from this view, that the Lord in causing these words to be written was bringing to our attention that these things were not new but were things that were recorded

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in eternity, things that had been recorded when the earth and the heavens were made, in that council of old when the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit gathered together and, as Isaiah heard the conversation when he was caught up in the heavens, "Whom shall I send and who shall go for us ?" The Father speaking in that short sentence said, "Who shall go for us ?" the whole of the Trinity, and One, the Lord Jesus, the second Person in the Trinity, says "Send me".(Is.6 v.8) And the words which follow make it very clear, in the context - they are often taken out of context - but the context leaves us in no doubt that these words have a particular reference to the Lord Jesus Christ himself. "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and convert and be healed".(Is.6 v.9 & 10) If you follow it carefully through you will see that these words were mentioned by the Lord himself as being fulfilled in His day.

"It shall be well with them that fear God" because the whole matter of redemption, of salvation, was settled in heaven.

All is settled,
And my soul approves it well. (582)

Let us look briefly at the foundation of the salvation of the church. It is not left to the hand of man but it is settled in the hand of God. God "who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think",(Eph.3 v.20): God who is able to turn the vilest wretch to the Lord Jesus Christ, which all the efforts of man can never do.

"God who is rich in mercy". Oh, how wonderfully does the Apostle excel himself, under the power of the Spirit, in his Epistle to the Ephesians as he breaks forth and develops the riches and the glory of God. "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins" and so he goes on, "Among whom 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

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by nature the children of wrath even as others. 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: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus".(Eph.2 v.3-7)

I would have you look at everywhere in the Scriptures where the word "exceeding" is used, because it begins to bring you into the right focus of the greatness and glory of God. "The exceeding sinfulness of sin": when you read that and when you feel it to be so true, and then you turn to the Epistle of Paul to Timothy where Paul speaks about his own experience and says "The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief".(1 Tim.1 v.14 & 15) Now if that is true - and it is - then "It is well with them that fear God" because they are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: there is no question of their falling finally. The Lord Jesus Christ has paid the price, the price of redemption, his own heart's blood.

We can say to you, if you fear God - and you will have to measure it up for yourself - that it will be well with you as you go forth into this year. There may be things which will bring you low but, remember, the Word of God says this, "All things" whatever kind of things they are, small things, large things, hard things, uncomfortable things, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose".(Rom.8 v 28) All things. Yes, "It shall be well with them that fear God", by the mercy of God. Though sometimes the Lord may say to you and to me, as he said to Peter, "What I do thou knowest not now but thou shalt know hereafter", yet eventually we shall certainly be able to say that this is true, God has proved it to be true, God

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was in it all and it was true "It shall be well with them that fear God". Those who fear God have faith in God, they believe God's Word: "For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him".

"Have faith in God". Can we venture ? Do you think you can venture on this word, do you think it is a ray of hope - more than a ray of hope ?

Sweet in the confidence of faith,
To trust his firm decrees. (472)

To credit what my Saviour saith
Whose word can never fail. (247)

"It shall be well with them that fear God".

He lends an unseen hand,
And gives a secret prop. (749)

Has God ever failed in the past ? Our friends may have let us down sometimes: I say that in a very guarded way but sometimes our friends may have the best intentions and then find they have their limitations and they are not able to do that which they thought they could do. You will never find that with God. He is always able to do what He says, always. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint".(Is.40 v.29-31)

"It shall be well" - no question about this. You will find that everything dovetails in because, you see, it shall be well. What do you think will be the interpretation of this in your mind if you were suddenly given lots of money so that you could fold your arms and take your ease and say: I have no more worries in the world ? Well, there have been billionaires who have suddenly died; they have had to leave all the support and comfort they had. But what a blessing if you possess the fear of God and you have Christ in your heart, the Hope of

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Glory. When you die you will not lose that treasure. If there are losses to be sustained in this year, how comfortable and applicable are the words of one of our hymns

He never takes away our all,
Himself he gives us still. (132)

If the Lord was to take away Himself, if He was to leave you to get on as best you can, if He was to leave you in your distress, I would not be able to say to you this morning "It shall be well with them that fear God". But the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, the testimony of the experience of God's people, is this - "It shall be well with them that fear God".

Coming to midnight last night and looking back, what could you say? "Oh, I can remember a day when it was not well". Is that the spirit of those who fear God? Those who fear God will say as the Shulamite woman did when her son had died: she went to the prophet and he said, "Is it well?" And she said, "It is well": on every account she said "It is well". May it be ours to manifest that we are amongst those who fear God by saying "It shall be well". The temptation may come that this is presumption. Not if you fear God because if you fear God it will be because you love God, it will be because you believe God. God has said, "It shall be well with them that fear God". May we prove it to the honour and glory of His Name and for our personal strength and blessing.

Amen