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SERMON

PREACHED BY MR L S B HYDE

AT

'SALEM' CHAPEL, CARSHALTON

Text
Jeremiah 12, verse 3

Thursday evening
18th June 1981

But thou, O Lord, knowest me: thou hast
seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee.

Jeremiah was a man with a gracious experience; but nevertheless he was a man that came under much persecution. He had suffered from the hands of those who would have preferred him to have preached or prophesied unto them smooth things. This is clearly seen in the few verses that we read towards the end of the eleventh chapter; amongst them is this verse: 'Therefore thus saith the Lord of the men of Anathoth, that seek thy life, saying, Prophecy not in the name of the Lord, that thou die not by our hand.' It seems an incredible thing that there should have been those who were so incensed, so incensed against Jeremiah, the prophet of the Lord, that they should have threatened him with such threatenings. But will not there be those that undergo the same kind of treatment because they endeavour to preach the truth of the everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ, the word which comes down from heaven into their souls?

We find that Jeremiah is graciously moved, though sometimes he is severely tempted. He acknowledges at the beginning of this chapter: 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments.' Coming to the words of our text: 'But thou, O Lord, knowest me;' we have here a persuasion. Could any of us say: But thou, O Lord, knowest me? David could say so. In the 139th Psalm he says: 'Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.'

But let us just take this step by step in regard to how Jeremiah could say: 'But thou, O Lord, knowest me.' The testimony of God gave him this assurance, and in the very first chapter we read: 'Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.' This speaks to us of the knowledge that God has of every one of His children.

When children are born, the parents cannot assuredly say that they are the children of God. But every child that is born into this world is known unto the great and glorious Jehovah; it is known unto Him if that child is chosen of God, loved of God, favoured of God, blessed of God at the beginning and will be throughout the whole of that person's life. Whilst we do not always realize it until we are called manifestedly by the grace of God, that we are the subjects of God's mercy, yet how often we can look back over the days of our unregeneracy and see that God had watched over us from the very moment that we were born; yea, from the very moment that we were conceived in the womb. God's eye was upon the whole election of grace right from eternity, and as one after another was born into this time state so the special and signal eye of God was upon those people. If we are numbered amongst them, then this is true of you and of me, that God's eye has been upon us from eternity. From that point of view we can truly say that God knows us.

But Jeremiah knew it. Do we know it? Can we say: "But thou, O Lord, knowest me. Thou hast ever known me, Thou hast known me in the days when I knew not Thee." Maybe some of us have stood and marvelled and were amazed when God opened our eyes to see some of those providences which we discarded at the time, but which we can now see were the evidences that God gave, and would reveal to us in due time, that He knew us altogether. He knew us as one whom He had chosen unto salvation; He knew us as one whom He would bring through this world quite safely and eventually take us to be with Him at last, where there will be no trouble, where there will be no sorrow, where there will be no sadness, where there will be no enemies, and where there will be no devil.

'But thou, O Lord, knowest me.' Jeremiah didn't know this truth himself as a babe, but God told him that He had known him all those years before. Now what can we say about that? Has God called us by His grace, and has He shown to us that it isn't just now that God has known us, but that He has known us all our lives; even though perhaps it is only just now that we have come to know Him? It is because He has known us that we have been watched over, and as the time approached so there was a working of things together; and when the time was ripe then that appointed time was manifested as a time of God's favour. However we may feel in our own souls about the beginning of the work of grace in our hearts, we shall always be able to look upon it, when our eyes are enlightened, as a time of God's favour. It is a favour from God to be called by grace; it is a favour from God to be called out of this present evil world and to be called to have fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ. That favour will be manifested by a separation. This favour, brought into the soul of Jeremiah, sometimes came under his own critical mind, by reason of the severity of the persecution. There was an occasion when Jeremiah suggested that

the Lord had been a liar unto him. Now of course, some people may very much condemn Jeremiah for uttering such words; but why are they written in the Scriptures? 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.'

'But thou, O Lord, knowest me.' If therefore, we should have this outburst that Jeremiah bursts forth with on this occasion: Thou hast been a liar unto me; by that we shall prove that God knows us altogether. He knows what is in our heart, knows the wickedness which is there. It is written in the New Testament that He knew what was in man, and had no need that any should tell Him. Sometimes we are shocked with what we discover to be in our old nature. We might have condemned others, only to find that the very thing that we have condemned in others is rampant in our own hearts.

But to come to this: 'But thou, O Lord, knowest me.' 'Thou knowest' - what Jeremiah further said in another chapter: 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.' Not only does the prophet say: Thou knowest me, but he also says: Thou hast seen me; and he further says: Thou hast tried mine heart toward thee. Now there is one thing that I do not wish to escape our notice, and that is that in each of these three phrases of the text there is an acknowledgment of God. It isn't just one-sided. You see, if we should confess that our heart is deceitful above all things, then can we at the same time confess that God knows it, 'God sees it, and God has tried my heart to prove that it is true'? Then we honour God and we acknowledge that nothing can be hidden from Him. The words in the Epistle to the Hebrews are very powerful words, and they speak to us of the omniscience of God: 'For 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. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' But the Apostle Paul, in writing to the Hebrews does not stop there; and we shall not be able to stop at this point either, because if we do then we must be a shattered and a demoralized people. He goes on to say: 'Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.'

'But thou, O Lord, knowest me.' Now if God knows us, and we are His people, we shall also know Him. If God sees us, and we are aware of it, then we

in our turn will also have seen Him by the eye of living faith; and if God has tried our heart toward Him and He toward us, then we shall be aware of that. The whole work of salvation and the work of grace is not one-sided; the Lord and His Own people are involved. The people of God are not ignorant of the greatness and the glory of God in saving them. What we have in our text is the preparation, that we may see and feel that we have a need which we cannot ourselves satisfy. Now if the Spirit of God has made us know the evil of our hearts - and only He can - then we shall not be satisfied until there is revealed to us One that is a great High Priest who is able to deal with our sin. Where there is a right conviction of sin, it cannot be left; it cannot be cast to one side; it cannot be pushed off the shoulder. It becomes a burden and cannot be put down because God has placed it on your back; do whatever you may, you will never be able to remove it. But God can, and God alone is able to remove it. If God does remove it, then be assured that you will be able to say, like Jeremiah: 'But thou, O Lord, knowest me. My downsitting,' as I have already mentioned. "My downsitting because of my sin, my weakness, my frailty, my unbelief, my infidelity."

I have often looked at those words in the 73rd Psalm, where the Psalmist says: 'If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.' Maybe some of you have felt that you dare not say what you feel and what you believe that God has seen to be in your heart, in your lustful desires, in your malicious thinkings, in your evil thinkings, in your wrong conclusions, because you cannot imagine that anyone else has such thoughts, or is bothered by such lusts, or is troubled by such evil thoughts. 'But thou, O Lord, knowest me.' And then what happens? Does the Lord turn away? What would happen if people knew you and me as we know ourselves? Do you think they would be happy to shake hands with you, as they do? Do you think they would be willing to be friendly with you, as they are? Well, God knows exactly what we are; He sees us inside. And what is our testimony? Is He friendly disposed towards us, is He still willing to condescend to us in our low estate? Do we not have to confess that His mercy endureth for ever, and in consequence, that He is gracious? In the natural mind, though that natural mind is depraved, yet if we should look at another falling under some temptation, immediately there would rise up a despising of that person; but the Lord does not despise His people. They may despise Him, and have despised Him. This is part of the revelation which God gives to them, and it is very vividly described to us in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, where we find the words of the prophet: 'For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.' Would you honestly

like to say that to other people - 'There is no beauty in him, that we should desire him'? Now the Lord knows that. You see, to a large extent we like to at least preserve an outward decorum in the House of God. We sit here, people sit in the congregations, but who knows what the thoughts are of the people that are listening? Maybe some of us, if not now, but we can go back over the years when we should have to say, when Christ was being preached, that there was no beauty in Him that we should desire Him, no attraction at all. But God knows. Should we therefore not have to say, in respect of this word: Thou, O Lord, knowest me; "Thou knowest that I am so bad that I can hear about Christ and think upon Christ, and find no beauty in Him and no attraction to Him." We may have some respect for Him as an outstanding Man in the history of the world, but as regards One that came down to be a Man and die, One that came to save people from their sins, well, that is altogether another matter; we are not interested.

Now, do you know that is your heart, or is there some self-righteous veil which prevents you seeing it and a hardness which prevents you from feeling it? Well, Jeremiah passed through some bitter experiences, and here and there you can see what he felt. He was made to be ever so honest before God, and God recorded it in the Scriptures; all to this point: But Thou, O Lord, knowest me. "There is nothing that I can hide from Thee." Maybe you have thought to hide something from God. Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, when the Fall came, they thought to hide themselves. But the voice of God spoke in the Garden and said: Adam, where art thou? Adam gave himself away, and so will you. 'Adam,' the Lord said, 'where art thou?' When Adam eventually came forward, God put to him one or two questions, pointed questions, questions which only God can put forward. Adam said: 'I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?' You see, he gave himself away. 'Thine own mouth hath condemned thee.' And if we try to make excuses to God, be assured that we shall give ourselves away. "Hast thou eaten of the tree, hast thou done that which was forbidden? Otherwise you could not have answered as you have done. You have sinned." As Moses wrote some years after: Be sure your sin will find you out before God.

So what an acknowledgement of the words before us: But thou, O Lord, knowest me. "There is nothing that I can hide from Thee. Thou hast seen me." Though the Lord said: Adam, where art thou; by reason of His omniscience He knew where Adam was, and He knows where you are, particularly if you are amongst the election of grace; He knows where you are this evening. Each of us may be in very different situations. We may be thirsting for God. 'But thou, O Lord,

knowest me.' We will take this point: Thou knowest me, thirsting for God. Now Jeremiah in his present circumstances was thirsting for God. There were those that rose up against him, and there was only One that could defend him, there was only One that could deliver him, there was only One that could save him out of his distresses. "But Thou, O Lord, knowest me, and knowest that I thirst for God, thirst for Thine appearing, thirst to see Thee and Thy power lifted up and set forth on my behalf." This is the work of God. You will never thirst after God without God puts that thirst there. A thirst for God is that which goes forth from that which is spiritual, a nature which is new, a nature which is divine; and that is the only nature which can thirst for God. Everyone has a thirst of some sort. The poet says: I thirst, but not as once I did. Now that will be something for you to be able to say that. Was there a time when you thirsted after things which would bring satisfaction to yourselves? We can put it in those broad terms and say those things which brought satisfaction to yourselves. "I thirst for wealth, I thirst for ambitions to be satisfied." In some cases: "I thirst for the pleasures of the world, I thirst"- maybe for what we might call refined amusements and those things which by many are considered lawful and allowable. But the time comes when the children of God have to say: I thirst, but not as once I did. What does this really mean, thirsting? It means this, that we are thirsting after that which will give us complete satisfaction. Everyone is seeking after something that will give them complete satisfaction.

Now, if we have come a little way along the road to heaven, we shall look back at this and we shall be amazed that God was so patient with us over all those years when we were thirsting to satisfy ourselves, thirsting to bring advancement to ourselves at the expense of anything that God had said; that was cast to one side. Now God brings His people into certain trials to establish what their thirst really is, and this is seen in the third point of this verse: 'And tried mine heart toward thee.' Many natural faculties may well be introduced when God tries the heart. The heart can be affected by the things we see, and the things that we hear, and the things that we smell, and the things that we taste, and the things that we feel. God may try us in all those five sensible aspects. Jeremiah proved this in his own life, and this word, of course, is in respect of Jeremiah's own confession. We leave that, to a large extent, this evening, in order to bring the matter personally to us.

'And tried mine heart toward thee.' Now what will we see? Seeing can have an effect upon the rest of our faculties and create desires in our hearts that otherwise would not be there. Thirsting will have its association with covetousness. The Apostle says: 'I had not known lust, except the law had said

Thou shalt not covet.' Now we cannot covet until we see. Does God display to us the trying of our hearts in this way, that there is something we see, then we desire it, and then we have a lustful feeling towards it? This can become so overpowering that there is a striving for it and we forget all in regard to what God has said. Now our unregenerate life is just this kind of life. We see, and we want, and we covet. They are all things of this life and they all perish with the using. It doesn't matter how legitimate they are; and how many may make excuse in regard to their lawfulness! But the fact is that we are seeing things which are drawing us away from Jesus Christ. So if we have a thirst and a desire after Jesus Christ, we are bound to say: Now what has happened? Surely something has happened. We have seen something that we did not see before, and that has affected the rest of our faculties, because we are now listening to something that we have never heard before and we are smelling something that we have never smelt before, we are tasting something that we have never tasted before, and we are feeling something that we have never felt before.

Well now, this is the work of God. But in order that we may not settle down short and be satisfied by that which is counterfeit, God will try the righteous. Just to make the point as to how important it is to have a change of heart, a change of taste, a change of sight, a change of hearing, a change of feeling, and a change of smelling, we refer you to the distinctive and sad feature of Moab. His taste was not changed and he was not emptied from vessel to vessel. Now if your taste is not changed, you are not born again; and if you are not emptied from vessel to vessel, that is, by God Himself, then you lack the evidence of being born again. The Lord said to His disciples: 'But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.' Now what can we say, because our own heart must testify concerning this. Has God shown us the beauties of His grace, the beauties of His Person, so that we have seen the Lord; by faith, that is.

Then, have we this second important matter, and that is, to have heard His voice? 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.' Then, have we tasted that the Lord is gracious; and have we smelt, as we have it in the Song of Solomon: 'His name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love thee.' And have we felt? As we read in the Acts of the Apostles: They felt after him. That is: feeling after Him with the hand of faith stretched out. Maybe we can take up the words of Job: 'Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!'

But Jeremiah's testimony is this: 'And tried mine heart toward thee.' One of the evidences of divine life in any person's soul is the lusting of the flesh against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. God uses all sorts of circumstances in His providence to bring about divine knowledge. When people speak about providence, how many have just one view of it; and that is: Wonderful answers to prayer, wonderful interpositions, remarkable provision. What does God say about providence? We turn to Deuteronomy, chapter 8. 'And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness.' This is what God says about providence: 'To humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.' Is that your view of providence? Is that your testimony concerning providence? "The way that God has led me about and instructed me, and kept me as the apple of His eye." What has it brought forth? This: "How He humbled me! He has proved me, He has tried me, He has made me know what was in my heart." We may look at these words: 'But thou, O Lord, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee;' as being all in the pathway of providence; but a pathway so different from what many people describe as the pathway of providence. This is the pathway of providence that is fruitful; this is that which will bring us into closer union with God, into felt communion with Him; where we desire that the Lord will give us His Word. I will not say a word, as much as His word.

Now we have Jeremiah's testimony about this. He said: 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.' This is how Jeremiah went along, and that is how the saints of God go along in the present day. They are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. They are not without hope, because they believe in God. A new nature has been given to them; they walk by faith and not by sight. Their eyes are open - that is, the eyes of the new man - to see and to watch as to whether God will appear. Their ears are attent as to whether God will have something to say to them; and your pathway in providence is such this evening that you want to know whether God is in it. Maybe you have come this evening to know whether there might be some word that the Lord may speak to you, to assure you that God is in it and that He is leading you forth by the right way, one that will bring you to a city of habitation at last. The pathway to heaven is a pathway of prayer, it is a pathway of affliction, it is a pathway of trial. Sometimes it is a pathway of

bitterness; sometimes it is a pathway of sorrow, distresses, and losses.

Just read the 11th chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. You will find what the Apostle Paul meant by his pathway of providence. It wasn't just waiting for God to send a remarkable provision. Now in saying that, dear friends, don't mistake me. I am not under any circumstances casting a slur on God's wonderful provision. What I am saying is this: that there is much more in the pathway of providence than what a good many people think. We may just read from this chapter, in which the Apostle narrates so descriptively these principal points. He was not talking of what he had read from other people, but he was speaking out of his own heart; and as he spoke out of his own heart, he knew that what he said was true. He could say with Jeremiah: 'But thou, O Lord, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee.' O, the Apostle was speaking of when he was troubled with false brethren, when he was in the depth, when he suffered persecution, when he was several times smitten with forty stripes; all bitter experiences, but all driving him to God, all enabling him to say: But thou, O Lord, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee. "Thou knowest that because Thy sword is within I have cried out unto Thee in the times of my trouble: O Lord, undertake for me, I am oppressed; save me from mine enemies, plead my cause, leave me not to my enemies, save me from those that rise up against me." 'Thou hast tried me.'

Now you see, if we have faith, then that faith will be tried. We shall not know we have faith unless it is tried. In a sense, faith can lie dormant, so to speak, and not be moving at all until we suddenly come into the depth of trouble. Then God says: Have faith in God, have faith in God; or, hope in God. Do we have to be reminded of it, that God has tried us to show us where the source of that faith comes from? 'But thou, O Lord, knowest me; thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee.' If God has done it, He has done it for this purpose, that you should not be wanting in the end. However painful the pathway you may be called to tread in, if Christ is revealed in it, if your hope is maintained, if your faith, though it labours under load, though damped, it never dies; if your love to Christ will enable you sometimes to say with Job: Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him; then you have something that God has given which will outlast all your fears and bring you eventually to that holy habitation where the wicked cease from troubling and where the weary are at rest; there to engage in worship, worship continually 'where congregations ne'er break up, and Sabbaths have no end.' 'O may I live to reach the place where God unveils His lovely face.' May the Lord grant it to us, and pardon all that has been amiss. For Christ's sake.

Amen.