

Notes of Sermon Preached by Mr Stanley Delves at Scaynes Hill
on Monday afternoon June 3, 1968

"For the grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men. Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world: looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Titus 2:11-13.

What great esteem the apostle Paul had for the grace of God and what a gracious ability he had to set it forth. I could say that the apostle Paul was the greatest expounder of the grace of God that has ever been, or ever will be, and it in from his teaching, as we have it in the Scriptures, that all the great and powerful ministers of the gospel all down the ages from his day have drawn their instruction and set it forth. The Apostle's teaching of the grace of God has been the foundation teaching in the gospel dispensation. Of course there are ministers who have their different lines of preaching the truths on which they have had more particular light, or by reason of their personal experience have been able to open up some branches of truth more than others. And we may observe that in the different apostles who wrote the epistles that they had particular emphasis which they laid on particular branches of divine truth. Paul on grace, Peter on humility, John on love, and James on practice. The Apostle Paul's ministry was filled with this theme - and it is a blessed theme to fill the ministry with. To the elders of this Church at Ephesus he said, "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus." And what was that ministry? It was to testify of the grace of God. The apostle's whole ministry was to testify to the grace of God.

Therefore we commence with this word this afternoon upon the essential and blessed principle which the grace of God is to hear and, what is more, to experience. For the grace of God is not a mere doctrine, it is not a theological system it is a vital gracious, and blessed truth to be known and felt in our hearts. And there are two distinct reasons why the apostle's great theme was grace. One was because he always considered he was, in his own case, an outstanding example of it. He always felt in no one instance, was the grace of God so wonderfully manifested as in himself. And of course it was in many respects so. Indeed I think we may trace every feature of the grace of God very distinctly in the apostle's own case, for instance, mark the sovereignty of it. Whoever would have thought that Saul of Tarsus would ever be a vessel of mercy, and that God's mind and will and purpose had passed on him of all men! That persecutor, that injurious man, that man the mention of whose name was terror to the disciples - that the Lord should single him out! Here is sovereignty indeed. And it you refer to the occasion when the Lord called Saul of Tarsus in such a marked way, there was sovereignty there. There were others with him on the way to Damascus but there is no indication that the grace of God went to their hearts. It struck down Paul, but not the others. The grace of God affects one here one there, and others who come under the same sound of the word are unaffected by it. The work of God is sovereign and the apostle thought his own case was an outstanding example of the sovereignty of grace. Every child of God is. But the apostle felt with his unbelief and hardness of heart the grace of God was outstandingly manifest in his salvation. And you consider it for a moment how the power of grace was manifest in Paul's case. And no one can be

saved apart from the power of grace. If the grace of God had not that power it could not save anybody. But the greater the opposition the greater is, not the power of it, but the manifestation of that power. 'Oh' says Paul, 'I was such an enemy, such a persecutor, so exceedingly mad against the people of God, I would have erased every one of them if I could.' But such was the grace of God it made me, even me, a preacher of the gospel. It is a great thing to know what the power of the grace of God is in our experience of it. And these things can only be really known, at least they can only be known to purpose by the experience of them. Every instance of the power and grace of God would not be such an outstanding example, but it is an example. The same grace that brought the apostle's enmity down, brought mine down too; and yours if it has.

Another thing with regard to the grace of God which the apostle said caused him to esteem the grace of God so highly was that he felt it had such an abundance to him. 'The grace of God was exceeding abundant.' Exceeding abundant! Not only abundant, and to be abundant means to exceed, to overflow something which in the nature of it puts a bound to it - like trying to put a bound to a river. Presently it overflows the bounds you set against it. If you could contain water in a reservoir and the water kept flowing into it, presently it overflows. Said the apostle, 'This was the grace of God to me. If any heart could have it a bound to the grace of God, my heart would have done. But the grace of God was exceeding abundant, nothing could stop it; not all my determination could stop it. "The grace of God was exceeding abundant." It warms my heart to present the grace of God, The apostle said it was exceeding abundant. Not only abundant, not only that it abounded but it was exceeding abundant.

There is a fulness, a richness, a depth, a power in the grace of God that exceeds all our thoughts and feelings and expressions. It really does. If I could set before you today the grace of God, and had more time, then I would never be able to - it exceeds all I could say about it. And if the grace of God was made known to you today, much more in your experience than ever before, if the Holy Spirit gave you clearer views of the grace of God than you ever had, the grace of God would exceed all that. Now that is the theme; the grace of God.

There was another reason why the apostle put so much emphasis, and wrote so much about the grace of God. That is, he was always conscious of the grace of God in his labours and in his ministry. The apostle laboured more abundantly than the others and he suffered persecution of all sorts and conditions; he lived more by necessity than we do. He gives an account in the second epistle to the Corinthians. If we knew all that the apostle Paul endured in his ministry we should be amazed that anyone could endure it but he did. He said "Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." He was conscious that the grace of God kept him, upheld him in those unparalleled labours and sufferings. No wonder the apostle was always writing about the grace of God, he was so conscious of it.

Yet there was another reason I must set before you why the grace of God was so much the theme of the apostle Paul. That was because under the teaching of the Holy Spirit he had such a clear conception of the fundamental nature of that grace in the gospel. Salvation rests firmly and squarely on the principles of grace, and he saw the foundation could not be laid too deeply in his ministry; nor too deeply in the hearts of God's people because it was so vital.

My friends, there has always been differences with regard to matters even among the people of God. It would seem to us very desirable that they could all see eye to eye in everything but they do not, they never have, and possibly never will. Yet whatever their views about other matters, that does not necessarily endanger their views on the gospel. There are different views on baptism but a wrong view of the grace of God undermines our hope of salvation. He saw that anything taken from or added to, took away the foundation. That was one reason why the apostle Paul took such a strong position with regard to the weakness of the Galatian church. He said 'What has drawn you away from the grace of the Lord Jesus to another gospel? Why, whatever gospel it is, if it is not stand firm and square on the, grace of God it is another gospel.' And so it is with the personal foundation of our own heart and our own hope, if we rest on anything other than the grace of God, if we should be left to make anything else our foundation, or take anything, from it, we endanger the foundation of our hope, and of our soul. So that everything considered, and this to as much as I can say with regard to the particularly limited consideration of the subject, you can see how vital it is, the gospel of the grace of God.

And there are three things in this subject concerning the grace of God, which, if the Lord gives me ability and utterance, it is on my mind to set before you:

First, that it brings salvation. 'The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men.' That is the first essential; the grace of God must bring salvation to us.

Secondly, the grace of God teaches those to whom it brings salvation how they should live as saved sinners should do. First it brings salvation, then it teaches us that, 'denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present evil world.'

Thirdly the grace of God shows us what we should be looking for in the future 'looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.'

Here then are the three considerations in this word concerning the grace of God. It brings salvation, it teaches those to whom it effectually brings salvation how to live, what to avoid and what to practice; and then it directs their hearts and hope to the future; it teaches them what to look for.

First then, the grace of God bringeth salvation. And here we need to touch upon this, nothing can do us any good if it does not bring salvation to us. Whatever leaves us short of salvation will leave us in our sins and lead us at last helpless and hopeless into an eternal hell. And that is solemn plain and scriptural truth. Salvation is the first need we feel when the Holy Spirit awakens our heart to the consciousness of the condition we are in, and those solemn things, and convinces us of the sinfulness or sin, not in general but personal. If men did but know it, their greatest need is salvation. Alas for the most part they will know when it is too late. If only they knew it, the greatest need is salvation. For the Word God is the teacher in these matters, we are not left in ignorance of the truth, it teaches man his utter helplessness in his condition; he cannot do anything to deliver himself from it; but if he is not saved he will sink to rise no more, with all its dreadful consequences. Yet no man will ever realise his deep need and personal need of salvation unless the Holy Spirit convinces him of it. It takes the Holy Spirit to teach a man his need of salvation effectually. I mean in such a way that he is conscious of it; conscious of it like a man who is very ill and is conscious of his sickness and his pain. When the Holy Spirit does awaken the soul, anybody who is conscious of his condition and the Word of God speaks solemnly into his conscience then this word salvation has a different appearance to his mind. O how thankful he would be then if the grace of God would bring salvation unto him! And it is for this reason that so many despise the grace of God. They are not convinced of

their need of the grace of God. If the grace of God brought health, wealth, and prosperity and advantage to men in this life, everybody would be eager to know about the grace of God and how could they come by it. We should have no lack of hearers if the grace of God brought prosperity to men. On the other hand those who are convinced of their condition, it is the grace of God they desire to know for this reason- it brings salvation.

Now I desire that I might be helped to speak of this salvation. 'The grace of God that bringeth salvation.' First of all, the grace of God. There is no need for me, I am sure, to explain the terminology of this word. It is well known that the grace of God means the free or unmerited favour of God. It is a comprehensive word; if you say 'What is the grace of God?' It is His mercy; it is His love; it is His wisdom; it is His tenderness; it is His power. I should say that it is all that. The grace of God is His mercy and His compassion and His love. It is all that.

But we may consider, profitably I hope, the grace of God in this way. You remember of course the vision that Ezekiel had of the water that flowed from the sanctuary, from the altar. He saw living waters going from the sanctuary flowing from the altar, and as the living waters flowed in their channels they became to the prophet's experience, as he was called to pass through them, deeper and deeper and deeper, until the living waters were a river which could not be passed over. That is like the grace of God, the more experience we have of it the deeper we feel it to be. Perhaps at first it seems not much more than a doctrine we can understand a little; then we come to know it is much more than a doctrine, there is a preciousness, a sweetness and a life in it. And that is good for us to feel. Then the teaching and work of the Spirit of God goes on in our heart, and we feel more and more of our emptiness, our lost and ruined condition; it deepens to us, till we come to see the grace of God is deeper, deeper; it is too deep for us to pass over. That is like the living waters that flowed from the sanctuary. The grace of God is not deeper in itself but it seems so to us. At least I hope it does! It is good to preach of the grace of God. I remember many years ago when I began to experience these things, I went to hear dear Mr Midmer; I was so warmed up, and met him outside the chapel and quite involuntarily said 'Mr Midmer I do love the grace of God.' Just like that. He looked at me with surprise and said 'That is a great thing to say.' Well, it was; I just felt it, the grace of God was so good to me. I ask myself has it got less deep, less good, less pure? I hope not.

Where did those living waters that flowed from the sanctuary flow to? They flowed down into the desert and into the Dead Sea where all was desolation, where there was no fruit, no! just barrenness and death. The living waters flowed down there. And what do we read? A beautiful word that everything shall live whithersoever the waters come. The river flowed into those barren places but everything lived where the waters came. Brethren every heart lives where the grace of God comes - it comes into deep places, comes into barrenness, comes into fruitlessness, comes into desert-like hearts in us. But everything lives where the river of life comes. It brings life to us. Everything shall live where the river comes.

Another, very solemn thought strikes my mind – "The miry places thereof and the marishes shall be given to salt." Those who sit under sound of the gospel of the grace of God, and yet are never affected by it, and are never concerned to be affected by it; they just hear it, there is no longing for a blessing, no longing for the grace of God; whose heart never prays like this, 'O Lord, let that grace come into my soul.' They just hear it in their mind, they are like the miry places; they are given to

salt. Now may the Lord help us to lay these things to heart and consider whether the grace of God has ever come to us savingly.

What is the source of the living water of the grace of God? From whence comes the grace of God which bringeth salvation to men? We know where it comes from the deep, mysterious, and until revealed, entirely hidden source of the grace of God that is the heart of God Himself. God is a gracious God. And He is the God of all grace. As Peter says, "The God of all grace who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after ye have suffered a while make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." All grace comes from the God of all grace. And because it is infinite in its very nature, and everything of God is infinite in the nature of it, the source of grace is infinite; it is inexpressible. That which is human may come to an end; all earthly systems may dry up but the grace of God flows from an inexpressible source. I cannot say more than that. Perhaps the poet has a word for us,

*I stood amazed, and wondered when,
Or why, this ocean rose,
That wafts salvation down to men,
His traitors and His foes.*

(Gadsby's 914)

And he traced that back to its source in God himself - it is the grace of God. It is the grace of His very heart. He is gracious. Gracious is the Lord, and merciful "Yea, our God is righteous." But the grace of God which bringeth salvation does not flow to us directly from its source and its fountain in the heart of God. How helpful to me just now is the vision of Ezekiel - the living waters flowed from the altar and the altar represents the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and not only the sacrifice but the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

But this grace has never come to me or to you, or to anyone else, or ever will come to anyone else, unless it comes to us from the altar. It glorifies God to show His grace, and it glorifies His Son, Jesus, and the grace of God in the heart is always to honour His blessed name. There are obstructions to the grace of God coming to us. The justice of God is the greatest obstruction.

The very need of salvation is an obstruction because of the justice of God, that solemn word, "The soul that sinneth it shall die," would seem to put an obstruction to the grace of God. But it was Jesus our Friend when he hung on the tree who opened the channel of his grace for us poor sinners - He removed the obstruction; He opened the channel so deeply, so solemnly, through his deep wounds and bleeding side. And it is not only so, the grace of God that bringeth salvation comes to us from Jesus Christ because it pleased the Father that it should be so. It pleased him that all fulness should dwell in the person of his Son, that is, in the Person of His dear Son Immanuel, God with us in our nature.

All fulness of grace with regard to the divinity of Jesus Christ must of necessity have for ever dwelt in him as the only begotten and eternal one of God. But it pleased the Father that His dear Son should become man, bone of bone and flesh of flesh of the chosen church of God. And it pleased the Father that in that blessed Person who is God and man in one person, truly God and truly man, one with the Father in His divinity, and one with us in our humanity, should dwell the fulness of grace. It could

dwell in Jesus Christ because of His divinity. The fulness of grace could never dwell in any man alone. Humanity in any person could never contain the infinite fulness of grace but Jesus could because of the fulness of His divine nature. Grace comes to us through Him who was a man like ourselves. Jesus! that blessed name was given to Him at His birth and for this very reason that he should save His people from their sins. The grace of God is rich grace, fragrant with grace, full of grace and it was given to some, a favoured few whose understanding was so far enlightened that they saw in Jesus Christ what others could not see in Him. They were given some glimpse of this "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Blessed Saviour! He is full of grace, full of saving grace. That grace comes to us in this way, so I hope it will come to you and to me more and more. It is the savour of His name and His love and it is the savour of Jesus Christ that makes it so. "His name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love Thee." His mercy and His love is the grace of God; it is poured forth from Him now. He makes His name to be fragrant. Wherever the grace of God comes the sweetness of Jesus comes, the sweetness of His name, the virtue of the altar, the sacrifice the precious blood comes. O my friends, it is very wonderful to know this. To know it, I mean in this sense that it has come to us and brought salvation to us. To be saved in any way is wonderful; more wonderful than we can really know. How wonderful it will be to be saved at last. To be saved by the grace of Him that suffered and died for the salvation of His people is wonderful. Living water flows from the altar, the grace of God the Father that flows from His infinite heart to the blessed Person and sacrifice of His dear Son. 'The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.'

There is nothing to preach about like the grace of God in all its comprehensiveness. There is nothing worth listening to but that which conveys the grace of God to our hearts. It enriches us in our poverty, and brings salvation into our souls. And the Lord blesses the preaching of the gospel of His grace even in these sad days. O that the grace of God would indeed bring salvation to men!

Amen.