

Finding Life in the Lord

Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden, at Ebenezer Chapel, Clapham,
on Wednesday evening, 20th March 1974.

“Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.”

Proverbs 8:34-35

In this precious chapter the Lord declares, under the name of Wisdom, the eternity of His glorious Person, His eternal Sonship. Also, with majesty, He declares His divine sovereignty: “By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth” (v. 15-6). What a Person we have set before us here, so that the greatest word in the text is “Me.”

It is a mystery that this blessed, eternal Jehovah condescends to have anything to do with self-destroyed sinners; but He speaks. There are many voices in the world, and Mr Toplady brings to our notice some of them. He says,

Happiness, thou lovely name,
Where's thy seat, O tell me, where?
Learning, pleasure, wealth, and fame,
All cry out, 'It is not here!' (Gadsby's 988)

Oh, how that is related to what we were singing:

Emptied of earth I fain would be,
The world, myself, and all but thee;
Only reserved for Christ that died,
Surrendered to the crucified. (Gadsby's 991)

The fourth verse in this chapter is of great importance: “Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man.” That is because of the nature of the creation of man. Created differently from any other creature, the only creature that has reasoning powers, the only creature that is capable of receiving from God a revelation of Himself, and of His purposes and of His truth; a creature who alone is capable of such a transformation as to be brought into eternal, indissoluble union with God's eternal Son, to be brought into a blood relationship with Him and

destined to be with Him in eternal glory. What a creature! And this is the creature to whom He speaks: “Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man.” It is a solemn, although a blessed thing, to be a human being, created in the image of God. The purpose for which God sovereignly created man was for His own glory in the first place, and secondly His glory in the church, His glory in redemption, and this is the end for which His people were created. “This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise” (Isa. 43 v. 21). Oh my friends, we are either children of God, or children of the devil. We are hastening to an eternal fixed destiny, either to be with Him and behold His glory or to be forever banished from Him into eternal woe.

This great God has been pleased to speak, and one evidence of being a sheep of Christ is, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish” (John 10 v. 27-8). Oh, if we are brought to pause in the midst of all our affairs and the terrible excitement in the nation, and to consider this glorious God, the purpose of His grace, His eternal immutable love, His covenant of grace, which is “ordered in all things and sure” (2 Sam. v. 23), and with respect to His people is ordered in life’s minutest circumstance!

“Unto you, O men, I call.” He calls to all men in a general way. The effect of the Scriptures and the circulation of the Scriptures is a general call; but here the intention is that He calls with a special call unto His people.

“Blessed is the man that heareth me.” He speaks. It is very solemn if we never hear His voice. We have been instructed in the truth, some of us all our life, but have we ever heard His voice? You remember that when John pointed out the Lord Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1 v. 29), there were two disciples which heard Him speak it and it had this effect - we need to look for effects of the gospel - “They followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto Him, Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, Master) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see” (John 1 v. 37-9).

If the Lord will help us we will try and show where and how this glorious Man speaks.

He first speaks in creation itself; and if we had no other demonstration of the Being of God than creation, we should be without excuse for our ignorance of Him, “For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly

seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1 v. 20). He speaks in creation: “Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge” (Psa. 19 v. 2). His works praise Him.

We are surrounded with miracles: the revolving seasons, the bringing forth of the fruits of the earth; every blade of grass is a miracle; all our factories that produce what seem to be such wonderful inventions and machines could not produce a daisy or a blade of grass. He speaks: He declares His infinite wisdom - a man can invent but he cannot create - and there is a wonderful analogy between His works in creation and His works in redemption. In the beginning of creation there were these five words: “In the beginning God created.” In grace the work is the same - in the beginning God creates. His voice has been in creation, and it has been heard as a comfort to poor people. There are no poor, no destitute people now, but it does just bring to my mind the case of a dear man, now in heaven. He had a family, he was poor, and he travelled for business all day long, until at last his nerves and weakness got the better of him, and he felt there was only one way of escape as he walked over London Bridge, and that was to cast himself over. He could not face his family - he told me himself. But the Lord keeps the feet of all His saints. He spoke this word to him:

He that has made my heaven secure
Will here all good provide;
While Christ is rich, I can't be poor;
What can I want beside? (Gadsby's 247)

So creation is one way in which the Lord speaks.

“Blessed is the man that heareth Me.” There is no voice like it. A minister's voice is nothing unless it is attended by the power of the Holy Ghost, and you will know if the Lord speaks because there is this difference. A minister may have spoken to some of you for years, yet you have never heard the voice of God; but if the voice of God speaks to you, this is the difference: He will speak the thing itself in your heart, which nobody else can do.

He speaks too in providence. He speaks in circumstances. He brings “the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known” (Isa. 42 v. 16). There are some who have been exceedingly tried for fear that the Lord has not had to do with them graciously but only providentially. Well, the

point is this: what has been the effect of providential dealings, because they are intimately connected with prayer. Some of you may be acquainted with the 812th hymn.

Whene'er I make some sudden stop -
For many such I make -
And cannot see the cloud cleared up
Nor know which path to take,

I to my Saviour speed my way,
To tell my dubious state;
Then listen to what the Lord will say,
And hope to follow that. (Gadsby's 812)

Cannot some of you trace that you have heard His voice in His leadings, some of you perhaps forty or fifty years in the wilderness? Some have heard His voice in that wonderful Isaiah 30 v. 21: "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." There are times when the Lord speaks by His silence: "Therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you; for the Lord is a God of judgment" (Isa. 30 v. 18), of method, of wisdom. He does not give His people and answer immediately. He keeps them waiting, and in that waiting there is an exercise because He is a God of judgment, and "blessed are all they that wait for Him" (ibid.). There is a waiting God for a waiting people. You have heard His voice in your waiting; it has had this response: it has given you to say, "Now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee" (Ps. 39 v. 7).

"Blessed is the man that heareth me," but particularly, and for the most part, the Lord speaks to His people through His word. This is His mouth, His blessed mouth: "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth" (Song 1 v. 2). Has the Lord ever spoken to you through the Scriptures? It is a simple question, but so important; and these close questions may cause much heart searching. You may have talked about religion a lot, heard thousands of sermons; but has the Lord ever spoken to you through His word? Is it not a solemn question, but so simple? I shall soon be gone, and I must be faithful. What a solemn thing it is after all our profession, when you look at yourself and ask yourself before God that penetrating question, as to whether He has ever spoken to you through His word - very solemn!

“Blessed is the man that heareth me.” I ought not to leave it there, because there will be some tender, broken hearted sinners. What would be a right thing to say about this? The Psalmist said, “Be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit” (Ps. 28 v. 1). Can you say that you have spoken to the Lord through the Scriptures - the Psalms perhaps in particular? Have there not been some prayers in the Psalms that express your deep needs and desires and confessions? Have you never spoken to the Lord out of the Scriptures as did Job? Have you never said, “Oh that I knew where I might find Him” (Job 23 v. 3), from your very heart, and have been prepared to lose everything if you could find Him? My friends, if God seems to be silent to you, be thankful if you are not silent to Him. If there is silence both ways it is fatal - and there is this (I do want to be right). If you are not silent to Him, there is this: He will be first; if you have spoken to Him, He has first spoken to you. The point is, what have you said to Him? In the 11th of Hebrews the pilgrims said certain things, and “They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country” (Heb. 11 v. 14) Now what were the “such things” that they said? See whether you have said the same. They said this: ‘We are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (v. 13).’ Now if you have ever spoken to God from your heart like that, He has spoken first. ‘But,’ you say, ‘I want some assurance of that. How am I to be assured that if I speak these things He has spoken first?’ You think of what they said; it is according to our opening hymn. We are strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Emptied of earth I fain would be,
The world, myself, and all but thee;
Only reserved for Christ that died,
Surrendered to the Crucified.

He has wrought in your heart, and that is His voice in your soul. “Blessed is the man that heareth me” in His word. Happy the soul that hears and follows Jesus. Paul and Cephas and Apollos, all are His through Christ the Lord.

That brings us to say how His voice is heard through the ministry of the Gospel. You will know by the response of faith, and that will be evidence that you possess faith. By this you will be “working out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2 v. 12). If you hear His voice in the ministry, you will find that faith will join your soul unto the Lord Jesus in all the declarations. The Gospel is His voice. We read in Jeremiah, “They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward,

saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten” (Jer. 50 v. 5). There will be that union and contact with the Lord in heaven when the Holy Ghost is in the ministry, and there will be a response to the declaration of the Gospel so that it will come into your heart, not in word only but in power, and “in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance” (1 Thess. 1 v. 5). Has it ever come like that? That is the mighty voice of God, and you prove that His voice is with power, as in the 29th Psalm: “The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness” (Ps. 29 v. 8). It will shake your wilderness. “The voice of the Lord is full of majesty” (Ps. 29 v. 4). It is great to hear the voice of the Lord in the preaching of the Gospel.

“Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates.” There are two main gates which faith watches. One we have already mentioned, the gate of the word of God. The other is the gate of the throne of grace. Those two blessed gates are where faith watches. It is very precious when you are watching at the gate of the holy Scriptures. I do believe - I would not say much about myself, but these last two or three days in the morning, since there has been so much political excitement (and oh, the state of affairs is bewildering!), as I opened the Word of God it has been just like opening His mouth; and as He prepares the earth each morning, although we have seen the morning all the days of our life, each morning is fresh; even the night produces a freshness in the morning. I have felt in opening the Word of God such a heavenly atmosphere, and He has said in substance, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18 v. 36) ... nothing to do with it. His sovereignty controls the universe, and it is a mercy that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, but in the midst of the confusion of this world the Lord is carrying on His undisturbed affairs. He is laughing at the heathen: “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.” They are casting the word of God from them, but “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh” (Ps. 2 v. 1-4). In opening His Word, He says, “My kingdom is not of this world.” “Let not your heart be troubled” (John 14 v. 1). So He speaks comfort. He speaks the promises. God’s promises are unconditional. The promises of men are conditional; they may not be able to keep them; they may not live to keep them. But here we have this glorious One. Immutability and faithfulness are two foundations upon which we can rest our faith, so that the promises are reinforced

by the shalls and wills of Jehovah, His omnipotence, immutability, divine sovereignty, faithfulness and power, as you open the word of God and breathe that heavenly atmosphere. It is the true light; it is the only true light in the world.

The written and the incarnate Word

In all things are the same

(Gadsby's 878)

The same yesterday, and today, and forever was His precious Word.

“Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates.” Watching - some of you are looking for Him in the Scriptures. You open the word of God with exercise of soul; you want something. My friends, we shall have to dig deep in the Word of God. The Holy Ghost will help us to dig deep; He will give us reason to dig deep. We shall have to dig deeper than sentiment, deeper than tradition, deeper than emotions, to hear His voice. Oh, to hear that voice, “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love”! ‘How am I going to know?’ “Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31 v. 3). When He draws thee, it is His voice in the Scriptures, in the invitations - “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. 55 v. 1). “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live” (Isa. 55 v. 3). Do these Scriptures have a place in your experience? This is the Lord’s voice, His invitations; “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mat. 11 v. 28). Has He ever said that to you? You might say, ‘I wish He did.’ Do you really? If you do, He has put it there. It is His voice in your desire to know Him. Oh, I wish I could hear His voice more often! Have you ever asked Him, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation” (Ps. 35 v. 3)?

“Watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.” That brings us to the sovereignty of God. In the last chapter of Isaiah that point is very sweetly touched, at least I feel so: “Waiting at the posts of my doors” - coming to the services. Some of you perhaps cannot say the Lord is yours; you wish you could; you would not presume. It has a word of encouragement as you wait at the posts of His doors: “Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her” (Isa. 66 v. 10). He does not say ‘all ye that know you are going to heaven, all ye that know your sins are forgiven.’ But is there one that loves her? If so, there is a word for you. If you love her, you will mourn for her. Do you love Zion enough to mourn for her, mourn over the denomination, the day of small things, the closing

of chapels? Then it goes on to say, “That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations” (v. 11).

“Waiting at the posts of my doors:” I can remember the time when I was favoured to sit in the pew, get to the services ten minutes before time with a real hunger and thirst, watching for the first hymn. You suck - try and get as much out of it as you can: ‘Come, Lord, and give me something this evening.’ You begin to suck at the first hymn; you want to get all the nourishment you can out of the gospel, suck at the breasts of Zion’s consolations - and you wait. You may depend upon it, such an exercised soul has been a praying soul before the service. I should quite hope that all of you prayed before the service; it may be the last one that we shall attend. Heaven is glorious, hell is solemn. Oh, my friends, there is nothing here that can satisfy; it is all passing away. Paul says, “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark” (Phil. 3 v. 13-4), and this pressing toward this mark is exercise in attending upon the means of grace. If I might make an illustration (I would not make a frivolous illustration if I could help it), we are not passing through life as we drive a motor car; we are passing through life as we ride in a railway train. When we drive a car we can see ahead; when we are in a railway carriage we can only see things that are passed:

That we can never say “They’re here,
But only say, ‘They’re past.’ (Gadsby’s
498)

In the exercise of the shortness of life and the relentless passage of time, “Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.”

Have you ever had a transformation? I remember one occasion in Hawkhurst Chapel, when dear old Mr Kemp of Biddenden was preaching. I went into the chapel surrounded with impossibilities and adversities and poverty, and staggered like a drunken man; I went out of the chapel singing,

Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given;
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heaven. (Gadsby’s 340)

“Waiting at the posts of my doors;” I wonder how many waiters there are here this evening. “They shall not be ashamed that wait for me” (Isa. 49 v. 23). There were some that were invited to the feast; and there is a general invitation - the chapel is open to any. But they with one accord began to make excuses. But the master of the house commanded, saying, “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in” (Luke 14 v. 23). Do you think they made excuses? Yes, they do. What excuses do they make? ‘I am unworthy to enter into the sanctuary - look at my rags!’ Compel them; tell them there is a change of raiment inside. ‘Oh, my sins are of such long standing!’ There is One inside who, because He is unchanging, has an unchanging priesthood, “is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him” (Heb. 7 v. 25). ‘I am poverty stricken.’ There are unsearchable riches inside, and a Surety there. Compel them to come in. Oh to get a chapel full of people waiting for a blessing, waiting to hear His voice, hanging upon the minister’s lips that there may come something from heaven! “Blessed be the man that heareth Me” - Me, nobody else. It was that with Job: “Oh that I knew where I might find Him” (Job 23 v. 3). He had lost his camels, his sons, his property, but he did not say a word about it. He did not say, ‘Oh that I knew where my camels were; oh that my houses had never been blown down; oh that the Chaldeans had not carried away my servants.’ “Oh that I knew where I might find Him” - Him only! Is that in our hearts? If we were put to the test, which would you rather have this evening? Could you really be content with a little cottage, and the presence of the Lord, and His blessing and grace in communion with your heart rather than find you are left a great estate? I really believe (I know I have a deceitful heart) - I believe I would rather dwell in a cottage with the Lord than in Buckingham Palace without Him.

Waiting for Him - He comes sometimes. There are times when He nearly comes. Some of you know that. He nearly comes; you put out the arms of your faith to grasp Him, but as in the Song of Solomon He withdraws Himself for a purpose. He draws a poor sinner after Him. These are the exercises of faith in the means of grace, and when He comes, my friends, then heaven is not wanting here. Oh, the communion when He speaks. Oh the savour of His name!

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

In a believer’s ear!

It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,

And drives away his fear.

(Gadsby’s 135)

“For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.” It is those that seek Him who find Him. As we said just now, He will be first. The only real way by which you will find the Lord is by Him finding you. In the 34th of Ezekiel, as you know, He calls His own sheep; and the Lord’s portion is His people. He found them in a “waste howling wilderness” (Deut. 32 v. 10); He finds them; He searches them out. There is no need for Him to search at all, but it is His method. He knows where they are and who they are. That great Scripture will be fulfilled and nothing can frustrate it: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6 v. 37). Oh the security of His people! They can be still in the midst of tempestuous motion. “I am the resurrection, and the life” (John 11 v. 25). “I give unto my sheep eternal life” (John 10 v. 27-8); and that is the only thing, my friends. If you have life, you have everything. If you have not got life and have everything else in religion, you are dead; there is no substitute for life. “Whoso findeth me findeth life” itself. Union with Christ is the secret - to be united with the living Vine.

“For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.” What is the favour of the Lord? It is His grace and all that He is. Earlier in the chapter He says, “Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness” (v. 18) - the unsearchable riches of Christ. I do need Him. Bad as I am, I do need Him. Nobody can take His place. I am thankful He is what He is; and I can tell you this, that if you are so humble that you are too humble to seek anything so high as He that is in the heavens, I do not want your humility. If you are brought right down to know what you are apart from Christ, in the completeness of your ruin, faith will direct you to the Highest, “For He hath looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death” (Ps. 102 v. 19-20). The lower you are brought, the higher you will look, and you will say this:

Though we tremble while we sing,
We would not wish it less. (Gadsby’s 854)

I shall never be able to preach Him as He ought to be preached, but look at the text, and may the text look at you and bring about a little exercise of soul, that you may watch daily at His gates, wait at the posts. If I had the choice, I could lay my head on a dying pillow if He would speak this - “Ye are complete in Him” (Col. 2 v. 10). Amen.