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A Cheering
Prospect

SERMON preached by Mr. H. Dawson,
at Union Chapel, Bethersden,
on Thursday, 7th February, 1963.

A CHEERING PROSPECT

Psalm 102. 13 and 14.

"Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.

For Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof."

As you contemplate this word and the truth it contains, some of you, it may be, have some thoughts arising: "Oh, how glad I should be if the set time was come for He, Who is the sinners' Friend, to make known His mercy to me, that I might feel that matters were right between my soul and God". If that is the concern that you are the subject of, although it may not be at this evening hour, in the Gospel of the grace of God it is made plain that there is a set time in God's purposes when He will have mercy upon you; when you shall feel as you desire to feel; when you shall be assured beyond all questioning that you are a pilgrim to Canaan bound. The Word of God says: "Blessed are all they that wait for Him":

"A time He has set to heal up thy woes,

A season most fit His love to disclose;

Until He is ready to accomplish His will,

Be patient, and steady, and wait on Him still."

Waiting grace is very scarce, and I have thought many times on what the Psalmist said in the opening word of Psalm 40: "I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined His ear unto me and heard my cry"; the margin reading is: "In waiting, I waited". I have had this subject laid on my mind with some special weight, and I am taking it not only to preach in the hope that you might get some help, but that in my own mind I might be confirmed in what I believe that there is a **better day to dawn for Zion** as the future shall unfold; a good day for the inhabitants of Zion, when they shall live nearer to God than they often do in these days; when the Gospel shall be proclaimed with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven in a fulness of power, which, alas, we know but very little about in preaching the Gospel nowadays. This word, in

the setting of the subject is very striking. You might say (I hope you do): "I should like to live to see these days dawning in Zion when the Church of Christ is experiencing a time of prosperity, when the blest inhabitants of Zion can feel their hearts overflowing as they enter into the reality of the things of God".

I will look into the setting of the subject, and then open it up as the Lord shall help me. It is not known who the Psalmist was that penned the Psalm where the subject is found. It is not a matter of unspeakable importance; whoever the Psalmist was, the Spirit of God inspired him to record the psalm, and it outlines what, in the reading of it, may seem to be strange reading, setting forth what is an unusual experience. I am bound to tell you, dear friends, young and old, that as you are led into the truth in journeying on through life, you will find the Spirit of God will lead you up and down in this psalm before us. When you look round Zion nowadays—Zion setting forth the Church of Christ—whichever way you look, believing Zion to be the Church of Christ professing, there is very much to make the inhabitants of Zion sad-hearted and cast down. You will find they are described in the Word of God in such characters as: "They that mourn in Zion", and to a great extent that is the prepondering experience of the inhabitants of Zion nowadays. They know much more about mourning over things that ought not to be in Zion, and over their own cases—that they are what they are, and where they are, in things divine, than they do of rejoicing in the Lord Who dwells in the midst of Zion. Very little is known of that word in Isaiah: "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee". This psalm, whoever penned it, was penned just before the Israelites had that miracle wrought whereby they were brought back, many of them, from that long Babylonish captivity. Keep that thought in your mind as being the background of the subject; and if you think of those Israelites indeed, who were in that Babylonish captivity, saying, as you read in one psalm: "By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion"; and they said this: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy". Although they were by the rivers of Babylon as captives, their hearts were still in Jerusalem. There is a word that was said to them by He, Who dwells in Zion: "Let Jerusalem come into your mind," and then that great day dawned, when God raised up Cyrus and wrought a miracle by putting it in his heart to make it possible for those who were Israelites indeed, and had

their hearts stirred up to do it, to return from that long Babylonish captivity and once more be found in the land of promise. You get a little outline in the Psalm of what their experiences were while they were in captivity. "When the Lord shall build up Zion"—and that is when this set time comes, and He will show them mercy, restoring mercy, and gather them again in the land of promise—"When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer . . . 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." Now that describes these Israelites indeed, as they were in that Babylonish captivity: they are set forth as prisoners groaning, and described as those in their souls' feelings "appointed to death"; but, in the midst of it all, they found something in their hearts living and moving after God, and that was the prayer of the destitute. I feel that is what you and I need wrought in our hearts in a greater fulness—the spirit of prayer, to be like that woman in the Gospel: "Falling down at Jesus' feet, she told Him all the truth". When you appear before God and plead that He will appear on behalf of Zion, and pray "Revive Thy work, O Lord, in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy", remember that you must be like you read in Nehemiah: "Every man repaired over against his house" in the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, a very striking, significant illustration. It means this: "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord". I want to emphasise this viewpoint of the subject, as just before these Babylonish captives were favoured to return to the land of promise, there were many amongst them—and remember Daniel was one—who were the subjects of a special exercise of mind that the Lord would appear on their behalf, and have mercy upon Zion. The Word of the Lord says: "I will be enquired of by you, O house of Israel, to do these things", and you read in Daniel: "In the first year of Darius, the son of Ahazuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by books the number of the years whereof the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem"—and I judge, as near as can be told, that was the seventieth year, and says Daniel, "I set my face towards the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fastings, and sackcloth, and ashes". Now, that is the posture that all the inhabitants of Zion need to be found in at the present time, waiting on God, waiting for God, that He will, in His infinite condescension

arise, and have mercy upon Zion. One more thought is in my mind, and then I must open the subject up as grace is given; when the Israelites, who were Israelites indeed, returned at length to the land of promise, what a sight they saw when they looked upon Jerusalem in all its ruins, and the cities of Judah, likewise. This word tells us: "For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof". Those who were old Israelites indeed with a remembrance, it maybe, of Solomon's temple in all its glory, when at length they were found in Jerusalem again and saw the desolations round about, they did not fall a prey to an utterly cast-down feeling, and yield to hopelessness that it could be otherwise than it appeared to be; they remembered that the stones lying about had once been in that beautiful temple that Solomon was ordained to build, and there were still many, many stones that could be utilised in rebuilding the walls, and they took pleasure in her stones when Jerusalem was in ruins. There is a great tendency (I'm not fitting any caps on), I say, there is a great tendency in our denominational life to almost hopelessly look on declining causes of truth where the worshippers become fewer and yet fewer still, and in many an instance are dying out altogether. I went back in my mind during the day over fifty years, and I left off counting when I arrived at just on seventy causes of truth that used to be fifty years ago, but no longer exist. Now, that will make you feel cast down, and give you just a hopeless outlook if you look at it as it appears to be. What are you to do? Look on it, and then remember the Word of the Lord: "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?"; is He not "Able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we can ask, or even think?" Is there not a very striking word that seems to me to be made very little use of nowadays even by the godly: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it". Seek divine aid not to fall a prey to your own thoughts as to what the future may be, if you look on causes of truth where the worshippers are so few, but think like this, and then you will think what is God-honouring: "For who hath despised the day of small things"; "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them". Do not be critical, as you survey causes of truth that seem to be dead or dying, but seek divine aid to wait on God, and remind Him of such a word as this: "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. For Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof". You may say: "How do you suggest that

nowadays our people should do that?" I suggest that you should do what is in your power to help to keep a cause of truth alive that seems to be dying, and wait on God regarding it, and plead with His Holy Majesty that, if He will be pleased to do so, He will have mercy on that cause of truth, and maintain His truth therein, and raise up others to be true worshippers. **Do not accept it with a fatalistic outlook.** There is help in God, there is hope in God. Why are our men, whom God has ordained to preach, going up and down as they are in our denominational life and preaching often to less than double figures in their congregations? God owns their preaching, and it is worth while to be in a cause of truth and preach the Gospel if only one poor sinner gets help in God, **for that is building for eternity**; do remember that! "The remedy lies before thee, pray!"

Let us look at the subject, and, the godly psalmist, whoever he was, heads the Psalm: "A prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord". Dear Union Chapel people, you know I wish you well, and I seek your eternal good, and I desire to aim to keep back nothing that is profitable for you; now it may be that you have said sometimes one to another: "What a sad state Zion is in". You have heard in the news of the churches (a phrase I very much dislike) this cause has died out, and that one has been closed; some are being sold to be used for other purposes, and some of them not at all God-honouring, but God-dishonouring. Such tidings must not be just news of the churches to you; you must not fall a prey to: "Report, say they, and we will report it"; if you are **an inhabitant of Zion** you must be one of **them that mourn in Zion**, and mourn over her low estate. In doing it remember Daniel, who was about the most godly man of his age; ere this set time did arise for God to have mercy on Zion, what did Daniel say? "O Lord, to us belongeth shame and confusion of face, but to Thee belongeth mercy and forgiveness". **"To us"**, Daniel included; you cannot look upon this from a detached viewpoint. Preacher and people alike must all plead guilty here. There may have been much that preacher and people alike along the years could have done to help Zion to be more prosperous than she seems to be; and you know (I'm not fitting caps on) you have not always been prosperous in your soul in your private life, and when you have been like that for days or weeks at a stretch, that is inimical to Zion collectively being prospered in the things of God. Go back to what I quoted: "Every man repaired over against his own house". Dear friends, you and I have

got a lifework to do that, every day, all day, to examine ourselves, to—

“Let our lives and acts express,

The holy gospel we profess”.

But there is hope in God: “Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion”, and do remember that there is no other way that Zion can be revived. People with good intentions say: “Surely, we could be doing this, and we could be doing that, but when all is said and done Zion can only be built up from within, not from what you do with the best intentions without: “Not by might, nor by power, but My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts”. “Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion” And now let us look at some of these inhabitants of Zion (I can only give you hints); If you and I are indeed inhabitants of Zion, and mark that wording—an inhabitant, one who dwells there, one who is at home in Zion—not a visitor, not one who looks on what is being done in Zion, but one who has been born in Zion. “And of Zion it shall be said: This man, that man, was born there”. Many of you were born therein, and that means the earliest evidence you will have that you are an inhabitant of Zion is when “The eyes of the blind shall be opened”. You will be brought into a solemn awareness of your condition before God, with Whom you have to do: “When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He shall convince the world of sin”, so the earliest evidence of being an inhabitant of Zion will bring you to be what we will term “Convinced Zion”; when you feel your conscience loaded with your guiltiness before God; when you realise that you possess a never-dying soul, and you know not what will become of it as yet—whether to be lost or saved. Such an inhabitant of Zion will be saying with godly David: “The pains of hell gat hold upon me, I found trouble and sorrow. Then cried I, O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul”. “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation”. Can you remember that characteristic being stamped upon you? “Convinced Zion”? You will not remain with just that characteristic wrought in your soul’s feelings, but you will be taught to pray, and you will come into this category: “They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward”; and we might term such a character: “Seeking Zion”. I like to think that under Union Chapel roof there are quite a few who are seeking souls. Do you say, “I hope I am one”; the Lord bless you, and give you sure evidence that you are, and allay all your ifs and buts and hows and questioning about it. Remember: “Blessed are they which do

hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled”
Do think on this to encourage you:

“Blest soul that can say:

‘Christ only I seek’”.

You will seek Him for Who He is:

“Lord Jesus, make Thyself to me,

A living, bright, reality.”

“Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord”. “Seeking Zion”. “Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion”. You will be made manifest with yet another characteristic, you will be evidenced as being “Separated Zion”; you will be like Moses: “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season”; yes, you will want deep down in your soul to be set apart for God; you will understand what David said: “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness”. And I would add (you sometimes sing about it):

“O, Zion afflicted with wave upon wave”.

Do listen!

“Who no man can comfort, no man can save”

Yes, the inhabitants of Zion, sometimes, are made manifest as “Afflicted Zion”. I will read the heading again: “A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord”—but what was his affliction? It was not just a dire, fell disease that brought him to the gates of death—although there is such an affliction that does come on the inhabitants of Zion—but at this time the psalmist was afflicted because he was made more and more aware what a sinner he really was; he was having continual openings up:

“How sad our state by nature is”

and so you find he uses, as I said earlier on, some rather strange expressions: “My heart is smitten, and withered like grass”; mark the word “heart”—he repeats it: “I am withered like grass”. Go back to how those Babylonish captives were by the rivers of Babylon, and it says: “The groaning of the prisoner”, and that sorrowful feeling, indescrib-

able in words: "of those that are appointed to death"; and "The prayer of the destitute" ascending from their troubled breast. "Afflicted Zion". Is it an affliction to you that you cannot live the life of the righteous as you desire, but:

"Every day new straits attend";

and you get continual reminders: "From the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores", and you say with Job: "Behold, I am vile". Aye, but there is mercy laid up for such characters as you; you are interested in this great declaration: "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion". I might have said a word or two about "Fearful-hearted Zion", because in Isaiah you read: "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong"; yes, and you might know something about that fearful heart, wherein you find:

"Ifs, buts, and hows are hurled,

To sink you in the gloom,

Of all that's dismal in this world,

Or in the world to come";

and as you ponder what you are in such a plight you have this enquiry: "Can ever God dwell here?" Do I belong to the inhabitants of Zion, feeling as I do? Look through the sacred pages, and you will find that you have got brothers and sisters, too, who felt just like you do, who, of a truth, were inhabitants of Zion; whose redeemed spirits are in "The rest that remaineth for the people of God". When they dwelt on earth, as they were found in Zion below, they were the subject of a fearful heart, even as you, and they were on the stretch for the mercy of a "Fear not" often, to allay their fears.

"Christ has blessings to impart,

Grace to save thee from thy fears;

Oh, the love that fills His heart!

Sinner, wipe away thy tears."

I might say there is also "Tempted Zion", and that is one sure evidence of being an inhabitant of Zion, for, if the devil leaves your religion alone, then you will have TEKEL stamped upon it, and be: "Weighed in the balances, and found wanting". Do remember the Word of God says the devil is "the

accuser of the brethren"; and you will know the misery of his accusations from time to time; you will indeed be "Tempted Zion"; and yet, whatever temptations may afflict you, harass your mind, distress your soul, do remember that Jesus Christ can succour them that are tempted, whatever their temptations may be. He is a "Saviour of quick understanding", and He can make a way of escape in that temptation, whatever its nature, and enable you to see: "Out of the eater shall come forth meat, out of the strong shall come forth sweetness". You will be enabled then to "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"; remember, you are not allowed to "give place to the devil", for if you do that, you will credit his lies, as though they were something to do with truth, which is an utter impossibility.

"Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion". These inhabitants of Zion could be described as "Burdened Zion", for if you see them in their everyday life, they are burdened with cares and anxieties—burdened with life's responsibilities, and so burdened that all day long they are made aware of their need of divine aid to be what they have it in their hearts to be—real Christians. There is a needs be for such words as these: "Praying always"; "Continuing instant in prayer"; "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God". Much might be said along that line of thought. "Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion". There is just one other character ere I look at the subject from another viewpoint, and this is very needful to state, alas, nowadays; it can be said of too many of the inhabitants of Zion that they are "Backsliding Zion". Weigh that up before God with Whom you have to do, and if you can "Call to remembrance the former days" in the dealings of God with you as to what you felt then, and what you feel now, you will find often those whose names have been on a Church Roll long, alas, have become complacent and little exercised. There is a word I am very much afraid of: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion". It is not against you if into your life there comes some trial which is very sharp; and which says to you: "Awake! thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light". "Backsliding Zion". Do you live as near to God as you used to do? Do you hear the Gospel, that you listen to all the year round, with that power, and sweetness, and reality, so that you find it often to be a joyful sound like you used to do? Have you got that concern uppermost in your mind nowadays that you had when God began to deal with you:

"This prayer and this ambition mine;

Living and dying to be Thine?"

Are you as concerned deep down to heed this word: "As ye have therefore opportunity, do good unto all men, especially they that be of the household of faith"? Alas, for "Back-sliding Zion", but there is mercy, yes, blessed be God, there is—if you find in your heart what the prodigal found in his heart when he began to be in want: "I will arise, and go unto my Father, and say, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee"; you will find the Father is just the same as the Word of God says: "While he was yet a great way off, his Father saw him". As the prodigal was returning to his Father, so the Father was coming forth to meet him. What a mercy that is: "Only acknowledge thine iniquity", you read in Jeremiah; and in Job: "If any man say, I have sinned, and it profiteth me not, then He is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom". "I will have mercy upon him": restoring mercy. "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion", and, dear friends, if you speak the truth—and you ought to do that—do weigh this up when you get home, and do it before God (although you may not feel that matters are between your soul and God as you would like them to be); yet you can seek to reckon up the mercy that He has made known to you, and begin here: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, and because His compassions fail not". "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed". He has made known to us sparing mercy, providing mercy, protecting mercy, instructing mercy, supporting mercy, all sorts of mercy; yes, and He will yet have mercy upon you as an inhabitant of Zion; most of all, He will grant you that mercy of mercies, pardoning mercy, aye, when your heart overflows with the love of God, and you can say: "My beloved is mine, and I am His, and His desire is toward me". There is a set time for that unspeakable happiness to be made known to you:

"The time of love will come,
When each shall clearly see:
Not only that Christ shed His blood,
But each shall say 'For me'."

Do you say: "I wish I could believe it"; whatever you do, do not disbelieve it, and think it is a thing impossible for you to know in your soul's experience. "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion, for the time to favour her, yea, the set time

is come". And now to help you, think how this is worded, wherein you may be helped to take courage, and still hope in God: "For Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof". Think of the house of prayer, wherein you come week in, week out; and how do you come? Is there a feeling like this:

"We love the place, O God,
Wherein Thy honour dwells;
The joy of Thine abode,
All earthly joy excels"?

and: "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts"? Think, not so much of the stones with which the House of God is built up for you to worship therein, but think of the people, inhabitants of Zion, like this: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house"; and as you look on these people, whom you believe are lively stones, how do you feel?

"Let me among Thy saints be found";

"Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest to Thy people; O visit me with Thy salvation". Poor sinner, you possess this evidence, do prize it: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren". "For Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof". When you see something in Zion that bespeaks just a little prosperity—shall we say when we see the baptismal pool opened, and there are those going down therein to follow Jesus Christ, and acknowledge Him as their Lord, and their God, surely you look on and feel:

"With pleasure we behold,
Emmanuel's offspring come;
As sheep are gathered to the fold,
And left no more to roam".

There is just one other viewpoint I must touch on, and that is, if you see something in Zion, in a cause of truth, a church of Christ, that you know is more to do with what one is by nature, than what one is by grace, instead of feeling pleasure, you feel grief, but it is the same principle, arising from a new nature within, that makes you either glad or sad at what you see in Zion. Good it is to be like Barnabas, "Who, when he came to Antioch, and saw the grace of God, he was glad". "For Thy servants take pleasure in her stones"; and in taking that pleasure you do all you can to behave aright toward Zion, wherever you worship God, by your presence there whenever you can be within those walls where you feel at home, and

you support it, too; and when you cannot be there you will feel:

“My soul shall pray for Zion still,
While life or breath remains;
There my best friends, my kindred dwell,
There God, my Saviour, reigns.”

There is a peculiar pleasure, too, as a true worshipper looks around on the dear young people who gather among us in the house of prayer. Good it is to be exercised to see that: “Instead of the fathers, there shall come up the children, whom Thou mayest make princes in all the earth”. The Psalmist has a beautiful word picture in Psalm 144: “That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as cornerstones, polished after the similitude of a palace”. How it should humble us in our cause for the “mercy upon Zion” God has shewn Pastor and people, too, in constraining a number among us who are in life’s morning to be following on to know the Lord. How it should encourage us to plead, with Moses of old: “Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children”.

“Place in Thy house, as polished corner-stones,
The children of Thy children, in their youth;
Instead of fathers, Lord, raise up their sons,
And thus maintain the cause of God and truth.”

“For Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof”; there is also this thought, “the dust”. Sometimes you go and stand by the graves of the godly, and you see all that is mortal of them laid therein, and you hear the preacher say: “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection to the life everlasting”, and you feel a stirring up within as you look on, and say: “Be this religion mine”.

“Prepare me, gracious God,
To stand before Thy face;
Thy Spirit must the work perform,
For it is all of grace.”

Such a concern arises from you being made, by the grace of God, one of the blessed inhabitants of Zion, and in time to come, when God does arise, and have mercy upon you, you will not only feel that you are an inhabitant of Zion below, but you will be encouraged to sing:

“Jerusalem on high, my song, my city is;
My home whene’er I die, the centre of my bliss;
Oh happy place! When shall I be, My God, with Thee, to see
Thy Face.” Amen.