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A PSALMIST'S DESIRE

SERMON preached at Union Chapel, Bethersden, by Mr. H.
Dawson, on the evening of August 17th. 1965.

Psalm 27:4.

“One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.”

This is a word which welled up in the breast of godly David long ago when he was the subject of deep exercise of mind, and he was at a very great pass in the dealing of God with him. It might be helpful to look, first of all, at the setting of the subject, and this Psalm, as to the experience set forth therein, was entered into by the Psalmist at the time of Absalom's rebellion, which was a very painful, lacerating experience for godly David to endure from the viewpoint of being Absalom's father, and also Israel's king. Such was the nature of that rebellion that for the time being David stepped down from the throne, and fled into the wilderness of Judea to await there how matters would fall out, and how God would appear on his behalf. One thing I want you to keep in mind, as you read the Psalms of David—I have told you this before, but you do need to be reminded—that, as you read the headings of the Psalms, you will find it sometimes tells you whereabouts the Psalmist was, and what he was in the midst of, when he was inspired of God to pen the Psalm which is recorded, but you will find in every Psalm of David that you read, whatever the trouble was that is referred to in the heading of the Psalm, he makes no reference to it in the Psalm itself. Other people, in collating the Word of God have put the headings in, but the great thing to remember is that in the Psalm before us David does not go into any details whatever regarding Absalom, makes no mention of his name, and it is so evident that his great concern was to get in touch with God. And he was helped to do it, and, in being helped to do it, he was inspired with a wondrous confidence in God that matters ultimately would work out well, and he pens the opening word of the Psalm. You would be glad to echo this word, and out of the abundance of the heart for the mouth to speak: “The Lord is my Light and my Salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid.” Then, coming down to our subject, he makes it plain

that his great concern was to have matters right between his soul and God; as he says in another Psalm: "Let my soul live, and it shall praise Thee; let Thy judgments"—(Which is to say "Let thy dealings with me, even at this time")—"let Thy judgments help me." Grant that I might be able, ultimately, to declare: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes. The law of Thy mouth is more unto me than thousands of gold and silver." Such is the setting of the subject.

I want, as the Lord shall help me, to look at it from three viewpoints: First of all, there is **The Psalmist's Desire**: "One thing have I desired of the Lord;" then the second viewpoint will be **The Psalmist's Determination** — having this desire welling up in his breast he longs to have it granted, and realise it in his soul's experience, so he is very definite and clear-cut: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, **that will I seek after**; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple." The third viewpoint is **The Psalmist's Delight**, and there is no greater delight (O that you and I might know more of it) than to "behold the beauty of the Lord," and to see in Him "All our salvation, and all our desire."

In opening up the subject, as grace is given, I do like how this is worded; all my life long, since I have been born again I have ever admired and loved decision for the truth: "Let your yea be yea, and your nay be nay, lest ye fall into condemnation," and the Psalmist has his mind made up, and when a sinner is born again—think about it—many of you are born again, and I hope before you die that every one hearing the preacher's voice will have the mercy to be born again. If you are not born again already, I do desire that blessing of the Lord to be upon you. When a sinner is born again he finds in his mind there is a little of this wondrous feeling—the things of God begin to take the first place in that sinner's life, and in a right mind a sinner born again desires the things of God ever to be first and foremost. Alas! that sometimes they do not seem to be so, but it is a wonderful mercy when they are; when you can be "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit;" when the concern of your soul's eternal welfare is first and foremost; when in your life, as you live it, you want "In the beginning, God." Here the dear Psalmist says: "One thing," and that one thing contains all other things subordinate to it, but this one thing is essential. The dear Saviour said: "But one thing is needful, and Mary has chosen that good part that shall not be taken away from her." Some of you have sung one of our hymns, and I am going to ask you if, when you have sung it,

have you found in your heart an 'Amen' to the hymnwriter's language?

"Jesus, engrave it on my heart,
That Thou the one thing needful art;
I could from all things parted be,
But never, never Lord from Thee."

It needs great grace to say an 'Amen' to that petition. I turn it into a petition, for the hymnwriter says "I could;" I have not always felt like that, neither have you, I say "I would;" as grace is given, "I would from all things parted be, But never, never Lord, from Thee." One thing—the thing that is outstanding in our soul's esteem—to have matters right between our soul and God; to be assured we are indeed pilgrims to Canaan bound; and to have that religion God is the Author of that we might live right, and at the last, die right, and feel:

"This prayer, and this ambition mine,
Living and dying, to be Thine."

Let us look at this viewpoint of the subject: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after." It is a wonderful mercy, and I hope that most of you realise it (If not that you will before you die, as a sinner born again); it is a wonderful mercy, I say, that the religion that God is the Author of—do listen—mostly consists of desires. You can look up the Psalms of David, and see how the dear man sets forth his desires when he was at his very lowest level, sometimes—

"When trouble like a gloomy cloud,
Gathered thick and thundered loud,"

then he says: "All my desires are before Thee, and my groaning is not hid from Thee," and again he says: "I mourn in my complaint, I make a noise unto the Lord"—a noise—not words well put together to please the ears of other folks listening to them in public prayer. I am not making any reflections on any of you who speak in public prayer, remember that; I am just telling you the truth that sometimes our attempts to pray will just be the equivalent of making a noise unto the Lord; there will be something deep down in our hearts that is bottled up, and you will want to give vent, but you cannot find words to express what you feel, but there are your desires, and you will say: "O Lord, Thou knowest." Go back to good Hezekiah, you will not have forgotten it yet: "Like a swallow, or a crane, so did I chatter; I did mourn as a dove; mine eyes fail with looking upwards." and this is prayer. God interprets it, "I the Lord search the heart." What a favour it is God has conferred on His dear

people down through the ages that: "It is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what a man hath not." What do you sing?

"The soul that with sincere desires,
Seeks after Jesu's love,
That soul the Holy Ghost inspires,
With breathings from above,"

Yes, this religion which is of God is set forth wonderfully in desire, and there is a beautiful word in Haggai which I like to look at from time to time, and the Word of the Lord tells us: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts." Haggai prophesied concerning the building of the second temple that took the place of the one which Solomon built, that was destroyed after standing for a while in all its great glory. "I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts," and the dear Saviour was brought into it as a Babe. Godly Simeon held Him in his old withered arms; yes, and rejoiced that the desire of all nations was come; the promise down through the ages of Old Testament times was now brought to fruition: "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given," and He is the Desire of all nations. What that really means is what you sing about:

"People of every realm and tongue,
Dwell on His Name with sweetest song;"

whatever their nationality is it matters not, but as they are sinners born again they will realise: "Unto you, therefore, which believe, He is precious;" and Jesus Christ will be the sum and substance of their soul's desires, and they will all realise: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." This should encourage some of you dear young people, who do know what it is to ask the way to Zion, with your faces thitherward. If you tell the truth, you are glad when sometimes you can sing hymns that come down where you are—a hymn like this:

"Eternal Source of joys divine,
To Thee my soul aspires;
O, could I say "The Lord is mine"
'Tis all my soul desires,"

If that is the truth of the matter then the root of the matter is found in you, poor sinner, what-

ever your age, young or old; but it will be well for you to follow on in the steps of godly David long ago: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after;" it means "I will ask for it," and every sinner taught of God is the subject of that same desire. How good is the argument of another hymnwriter:

"Whene'er to call the Saviour mine,
My soul with ardent wish aspires,
Can it be less than power divine
That animates these strong desires?"

These desires are said in the Book of Proverbs to be "The desire of the righteous," and it says: "The desire of the righteous shall be granted;" yes, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after." This is a beautiful line of things that the Psalmist has outlined in this subject, and, looking at it a little further along the same line of thought, do you feel—(let your consciences tell you)—do you feel that there is an attraction in God for you? "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." Is it the truth that when you are under your own roof, and when within the walls of your bedroom at night, and you lie awake on your bed, that there is an attraction in God that, as grace is given, you sigh, and cry, and beg if so be you might be remembered with the favour that He bears unto His people; and to see Jesus, and so see Him by living faith that you might be able to declare: "My Lord and my God?" The Lord bless you. He has blessed you already, and He will bless you much more ere long, as you are helped to wait upon Him, for I have often admired how the Psalmist concludes this Psalm before us. Think of this subject that I am trying to preach from: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple." And now you might ponder this in your heart, and begin to think your own thoughts about it, and say: "O it is so high, I shall never attain to it; shall I ever see the beauty of the Lord, and realise that He is my God, my Father, and my Friend?" It will seem too good to be true that you will ever know what that wondrous mercy is, and now listen how the Psalmist concludes: "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart, wait, I say, on the Lord." You are not to say that this experience is too much for you to expect that God would make known to you:

"Jesus will not your cry forget,
You shall obtain the blessing yet."

"One thing have I desired of the

Lord, that will I seek after." This then is just a little outline of the Psalmist's desire. The Psalmist was in want of God, and you dear people, young and old, let your consciences tell you each: Is there anything in God that you desire? Remember that the man in the street, a worldling, if he thinks of God, he has got only one line of thought: "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thee, or Thy ways." "We will not have this Man to reign over us;" Oh, but you, poor sinner, how glad you would be if you could be sure He would reign in your heart, and reign over your life, and acknowledge you as one for whom He came down into the world to save, when He came to save sinners. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after." I have referred to the Psalmist to emphasize one viewpoint of truth which is very evident: Here he is, Israel's king, ordained to be on Israel's throne by God, but he is now in the wilderness of Judea with all those who are loyal to him at that time, and what the Psalmist is concerned about is the miss of the worship of God. He felt the miss of it; do you? There are times when you cannot be in your usual place in the House of Prayer, maybe affliction is laid on you, or duties detain you, but does it leave something which is a blank within your breast? Can you understand at such a time the hymnwriter's language:

"O Zion, when I think on thee,
I long for pinions like the dove,
And mourn that I should ever be,
So distant from the place I love?"

It is a great thing to feel the miss of worship, to miss not being found in the House of Prayer among the people who you desire to be numbered with in time and eternity, too, and it helps you to stand with the Psalmist: "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after." I want to look here at the Psalmist's Determination, and what he desired in it: "That I may dwell in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life." What does that mean? There is a deep that coucheth beneath. The Psalmist does not mean that he desired always to be found round about the Tabernacle, because he had his life to live, and duties to do devolving upon him as Israel's king; and not only so, in his home life, as a godly father; what he means is this: the house of the Lord, that the Psalmist is referring to, is the Church of Christ down through the ages, that is the House of the Lord; and he wanted not to just come and go in the attitude of worship, but to dwell in the house of the Lord in his soul's experience. He wanted his life to be regulated by his attitude to the House of the Lord, so that when the House of the Lord was open, the things of this life must take second place. "Seek

ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Can you remember, some of you—you dear greyheads go back, call to remembrance the former days, and how you felt about the House of the Lord. I can remember in my early ministry, when I was away from home, sometimes down in the Wiltshire area, preaching night after night, perhaps nine or ten times, Sabbath day and week eves, seeing the same people in the pews every time, some of the same faces every time, and the engagements were miles apart. It was a great test to one who was only a young Pastor, a young Minister of Jesus Christ, as I hope I was, and still am; but some of those people who were doing that were in what is called the days of their first love, and they got all their work done in the day time, and there they were in the attitude of worship at evening time, because they desired to dwell in the house of the Lord. So do you, you know as well as I do, dear Union Chapel people, you have lived your life with Union Chapel as the centre of it, and not just the Chapel itself, but the business that is carried on there, **business that you have sought to do in heaven's own marketplace, and gain by trading there, and all springing from this:**

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

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Then the dear Psalmist had something else on his mind, not only to be found in the attitude of worship when it was possible, and to see the beauty of the Lord, as he was engaged therein—I said there was a deep that coucheth beneath: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life"; sometimes when you have been to the house of the Lord you have been helped to be like Ruth, when she had been gleaning: "She beat out that which she had gleaned," at evening time, "and it was about an ephah of barley;" it is said of Mary that: "She pondered these things in her heart;" and when you are once again in your family circle, under your own home roof, you can still be dwelling in your thoughts, as you weigh matters up to do with the worship of God as you have been engaged therein, as you are exercised unto godliness, and that is what the Psalmist means. He does not mean just to come and hear this preacher and that, and be a sermon-taster; and then go on your way and turn Memory's page over, and look no more at what is recorded on it. No, it means that the worship of God to you is a reality, and you desire your soul to be engaged in it that you might be able to say: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my

feet, a light unto my path." I will show you, as the Lord shall help me, what is the deep that coucheth beneath: "That I may dwell"—not just a visitor, one who comes and goes; dwell, the meaning is, as I view it, that you are at home in the House of the Lord. Are you? Let your consciences tell you. Have you found to your soul's joy sometimes:

"Here would I find a settled rest,
While others go or come;
No more a stranger or a guest,
But like a child, at home;"

and that is just what it means to dwell in the House of the Lord. You do not want to live your life apart from it, but you desire always to be in some sphere wherein you labour to earn the bread which perisheth that you can be linked up to the House of the Lord, and be amongst people taught of God, and helped in the worship of God to say: "It is good for me to draw near unto God." "That I may dwell in the House of the Lord," it means—I give you some thoughts to think of later on—that I may realise an abiding sense of an interest in the things of God, and how glad you would be to have that interest; sometimes you wonder if you possess an interest in the things of God because you feel as you do; you look within, and you cannot see the evidences which have sometimes gladdened your heart in other days, then wells up this desire that you might have a deeper establishment in the truth, an abiding interest, an enriching sense of the love of God. O, how good that is! "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God," and how delightful that is; "God is love," and it is said: "He that loveth dwelleth in God," an amazing statement, but it is the Word of the Lord. "That I may dwell in the house of the Lord"; it means that I may dwell in the light of His countenance, and, in His light, see light on the way I am going along, and feel it is the right way I am in, and heaven awaits me at the end of it; and it means this: "That I may dwell in the house of the Lord," dwell in His protection—and how beautiful that experience is when you can say feelingly: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear," whatever the future holds in store, we know God is our Refuge, and to dwell in the sense of His protection you can believe "It shall be well with them that fear God." Not only so, when it may be that the dealings of God with you seem hard to be understood, then to dwell in His care, and to remember: "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you;" and to dwell in Him as God only wise, remembering: "If any lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." One other thought is this: "That I may dwell in the house of the Lord." Dear friends, I do hope you do

know a little of it, quite a few of you, it means to dwell in oneness with the people of God: "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." "That I may dwell in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life." Such was the Psalmist's determination, but I must look at the third viewpoint, and I said that was the Psalmist's Delight: "To behold the beauty (the margin reading is 'delight') of the Lord;" how wonderful it is when by living faith poor sinners are favoured to behold it, and remember the Psalmist was well aware when he put this petition of his down in black and white, "to behold the beauty of the Lord," that he needed his eyes to be opened by a divine hand to do it.

"Lord I am blind, be Thou my sight,"

"Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." "To behold the beauty of the Lord." What is the beauty of the Lord? O, dear friends, all I can tell you about it is equivalent to taking a thimbleful out of the ocean depths, because when all is said and done, if you and I get to heaven, to dwell for ever with the Lord, we shall gaze on His beauty, and delight in doing it, eternally. I said "For ever with the Lord," but on earth there is here a little, there a little, a glimpse of His beauty given to poor sinners, who desire to dwell in the house of the Lord, in whose souls are desires rising up: "To behold the beauty of the Lord." First of all the beauty of the Lord is wherein He is seen by a poor sinner as a just God and a Saviour too; when a poor sinner is made aware that God can be just, and justify the ungodly too, and that he has devised means whereby it is possible. Then you feel like what one hymnwriter says:

"What wisdom and what mysteries,
In this appointment shine
My breaches of the law are His,
And His obedience, mine."

"The beauty of the Lord," that will help you to understand just a little a word in Solomon's Song: "I am black," and that is the truth about every one of us, "but comely;" I would that was the truth about every one of us, too: "I am black, but comely;" "Thou art comely with the comeliness that I have put upon thee," and that is the beauty of the Lord; "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." "To behold the beauty of the Lord;" what a beauty there is in Calvary's Cross when you see it in a Gospel light: when you are found before it, and can see Jesus, and realise that He died in your stead; yea, died for you. O to have that experience is amazing, and you can never put into words what it really is, for your heart is full, and overflows as you realise His love to you, then you can understand what one hymnwriter says:

"The Lord in the day of His anger (mark that word)
in the day of His anger did lay,
Our sins on the Lamb, and He bore them away;
He died to atone for sins not His own,
The Father has punished for us, His dear Son."

Here is the beauty of the Lord:
"For He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin,
that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." "To
behold the beauty of the Lord." I will just give you a thought or
two to ponder in your hearts when you get home: What a beauty
of the Lord is to be seen in **The Covenant of grace**, when you get
some evidence that you are shut up in it; and when you look on
the dealings of God with you, and, whatever your thoughts have
been about those dealings sometimes—not always God-
honouring thoughts have they been—you have said like Jacob:
"All these things are against me," and then your eyes are
reanointed, and you see the beauty of the Lord in the Covenant
of grace, and you can see: "Whoso is wise, and will observe
these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of
the Lord." "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him,
and He will show them His covenant," and He shows them the
beauty of the Lord in it. He shows them: "The steps of a good
man are ordered by the Lord, and He delighteth in his way." "To
behold the beauty of the Lord." Think too of the beauty of the
Lord in His own righteousness, which is said to be, and is "**The
righteousness of God, which is by faith in Jesus Christ;**" if God
should clothe you in it you will feel it is indeed the beauty of the
Lord as you enter into such a wondrous experience:

"And lest the shadow of a spot,
Should on my soul be found;
He took the robe my Saviour wrought
And spread it all around."

"The Beauty of the Lord;"
"Jehovah Tzidkenu, The Lord our righteousness." You see the
beauty of the Lord in **The Gospel**, as those God ordains to preach
it are helped to do it, realising Divine aid. The Gospel has got a
wondrous beauty in it: it was framed by God, and is called the
everlasting Gospel, and it is a great honour for poor sinners,
like some of us feel to be, to have spent our life in trying to
preach it. O, that we could have preached the Gospel more to
purpose and profit, but still we prize the privilege to be engaged
in such a work, and when you get help from God you behold the
beauty of the Lord in the Gospel in its simplicity, and suitability,
and its sufficiency for poor sinners' needs, who desire to dwell
in the house of the Lord. Just another thought: "To behold the
beauty of the Lord;" have you noticed this—dear young people,

listen—have you noticed sometimes that in the **worship of God**
there is to be seen the beauty of the Lord? Have you sometimes
had a consciousness: "This is none other than the house of God,
it is even the gate of heaven." There is the beauty of the Lord
when the unity of the spirit is known and felt, when there is one
heart, one way, and you enter into that oft-quoted Scripture:
"God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him
in spirit and in truth," and at such a time you can breathe the
equivalent of the atmosphere of heaven itself. Much might be
said under that heading. "To behold the beauty of the Lord."
Then ere you die I hope you will see the beauty of the Lord in
His providence. Dear friends, you and I have not always behaved
well, preacher and people alike must all plead guilty here,—you
and I have not always behaved well regarding the providence of
God; we have thought we should like this rearranged, and that,
but, tell the truth about it, it was because the flesh disliked the
way, and you wanted things made a little more easy going. No,
no, this is not the way, and you must not walk in it. To behold
the beauty of the Lord the way that you must walk in is where
you, like Manoah and his wife, look on, and see the Angel of the
Lord doing wondrously for you, though much of it may be hard
to be understood, and to remember that He is:

"Too wise to err,
Too good to be unkind",—

there you see the beauty of
the Lord in His providence. I have seen some people on their
dying beds, a Pastor does that, and not only as a Pastor, but
when sometimes he is elsewhere away from home, he is by dying
beds, and hears dying testimonies. I have heard some people,
soon to enter into eternity, say something like this: "I have been
looking back over my life, and the varied troubles I have come
through, and some things wherein I have erred and strayed like
a lost sheep, and the Lord appeared for me and brought me back
again, and delivered me; and, as I look at my life now and the
providence of God and His dealings with me, I would not have
one thing altered in it, for He hath done all things well."
In other words:

"Thy ways, O Lord, with wise design,
Are framed upon Thy throne above,
And every dark and bending line
Meets in the centre of Thy love."

O, it is good to see the beauty of
the Lord in His providential dealings with you, and see Him
as Jehovah Jireh, the Lord will provide. "One thing have I
desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in
the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the

beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple." You will remember the queen of Sheba came a long distance to visit Solomon, to see his earthly glory. Have you ever noticed what is said: "to prove him with hard questions concerning the Name of the Lord"—things that were of a spiritual nature; beside other matters the queen of Sheba wanted to get some light upon, and Solomon answered her hard questions, and a greater than Solomon is here. What does He say regarding you, and your enquiries, that you desire to make before Him as the Sinners' Friend: "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God; And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall possess your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus, I shall have to keep you a minute, for I must say this: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord;" and now, have you thought about it? Some of you have thought about it, and not yet reduced what you have thought to practice. The beauty of the Lord is to be seen when you do what one hymnwriter says:

"Jesus says to each believer,
'Be baptized in My Name';
He himself in Jordan's river
Was immersed beneath the stream";

and you, poor sinner as you are, with a hope in God, and with desires welling up that you might "Follow on to know the the Lord," and have matters made right between your soul and God; and that you might be numbered with His dear people, living and dying, yet you are still outside the professing Church of Christ, which is what the house of the Lord stands for. There is just one word to say to you, whoever you are wherever you are: "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without?"

Amen.