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Sermon preached by Mr. Jesse Delves at The Aged Pilgrim's Home, Brighton,
on Monday Evening 20th June, 1932.

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." 1 Peter 5:10-11.

We can never realise, while in this time state, the honour conferred by God upon some poor sinners, to rescue them from nature's quarry, and to impart in their souls the grace of life to be with them to sustain them in their sufferings, to fit and prepare them to be with Him in heaven, and to give to them the undeserved, free, and sovereign, and everlasting joy of dwelling in His immediate presence. We can never comprehend here the greatness of His love in the institution of the wondrous plan of redemption, of the perfection of that work accomplished by the Son of God upon the cross. We can never realize here the infinite heights and depths of the love of Christ, the price that He paid to ransom sinners from hell, the depth of His sufferings that He endured in Gethsemane and upon the cross. We live so distant from Him, for the most part, that we enter but little, into either the joy or the sorrow of real vital religion. At least, I feel it so in my own case. And yet there are times in the experience of our life when the Lord shows Himself through the lattice, and sinners behold a little of His beauty, when He draws them by the cords of His love, and manifestly unites them to Himself, and blesses them with the blessings of His grace, and finally takes them to be with Him in glory. And we get a view of this sometimes in this our suffering state.

I have been speaking a little here previously upon the former part of this verse, but I desire to speak a little this evening upon the last part of these words: "Make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." But there is one point before passing on to it which I might mention with respect to suffering. It is said that it is to be "for a while," that is, for an appointed season, a time appointed by God. The Lord will never forget you in a trial. We might know a person in some particular trouble, and feel sympathy toward them, and be so taken up with other things as to lose sight of the thing for the time being, being absorbed in other matters that demand our immediate attention. But that is due to creature-ship, to limitation of our faculties. But there is nothing of this with God. He holds the reins of providence in His hands, and He may permit for our profit and the furtherance of His gospel in us, a trial for an appointed season, to effect a particular purpose; and when that purpose is effected, He brings one out of that particular trial. The suffering is to be a while. And, moreover, He gives grace to sustain His people in their trials and in their sufferings, and sometimes favours them in the path of tribulation by giving them to realize the Spirit of adoption in it, by which they are brought to feel that the chastening is the chastening of a Father to His child.

I have sometimes felt this, that the Lord does evidence this fact, that He only chastens in a gracious sense His own people. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," and if we be without chastisement then we have no evidence of sonship. We may have trouble in common with all men. Trouble comes to all, more or less. There is a general suffering. But chastening is a peculiar act of God to discipline His child, and to purge his dross, and to bring him to His feet, and to manifest His love to him, to bring him into conformity to His suffering image. And this is suffering; it is for a while. It may

be for a particular season according to the will of God, a short time or a long time. He knows best. Some trials seem to be of such length that it seems there will never be a bringing out of them. And yet, when the Lord has accomplished His purpose, He will bring you out of your trouble, and sanctify that trouble to you. When we read of the refining work, we read that "He shall sit as a Refiner and Purifier of silver;" and the Eastern refiner sits and watches the metal until he sees his own likeness in the metal. So I believe it is in grace. The Lord may purpose some dispensation to discipline and teach His beloved children, to bring them into a holy conformity to Him; and when you are brought submissive to His blessed feet, and can say, "Thy will be done," you have conformity, and you have the likeness of Christ in you.

But there is suffering in some cases through the fear of death. This besetting fear sometimes has great power in the hearts of some of the Lord's people, even where they may have a hope of heaven in their hearts. Death is an enemy – a great enemy – and it is the fruit of sin. There is ignominy in it. There is in itself God's anger; and though in the case of His people the curse is removed, and the sting of death itself is removed by the atonement of Christ, yet in a child of God there may be a terror of the article of death. They look forward, know it must come, and sometimes tremble at the prospect of it, wondering how it will be with them when they come to the swellings of Jordan; and this is a cause of suffering.

And some of the Lord's people suffer because they fear they have committed the unpardonable sin, and that they have sinned against God, so that there is no pardon for them. But many a poor trembling vessel of mercy has feared that, when there has not been the least ground for his fear. If the Lord brings one into a gracious concern, and the enemy of souls tempts him that he has sinned against life and love, and that wilfully and deliberately, and with persistence sinned against the Holy Ghost – I say, if the enemy tempts a child of God to this, it sometimes causes great suffering in their heart and mind. But the Lord's people sin after they have received tokens of His love to them. They do; and they suffer for it too, painfully. I think I might say that sin felt, its guilt and filth felt, its power felt in the heart and conscience of one who has tasted the goodness of God in redeeming him, is more painful than any sin felt before he may have had a sense of pardon. And yet we do sin against His love and blood. But this is not the unpardonable sin. Though the being and power of sin is in us, yet there is a resistance to that thing in our hearts. We struggle against its power, though we often stumble. But the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost, appears to have been attributing that which the Lord Jesus had done Himself to the work of the devil. And therefore they wilfully, and deliberately, and persistently blasphemed His holy Name. They sinned against light and knowledge with a high hand. But you have not done that, have you? And yet you may sometimes fear that you have sinned beyond the reach of His mercy; and that will cause suffering.

But this suffering is for a time, according to the Lord's appointment. And after this there is a prayer offered for them by the Apostle, a desire that they might be perfected, and established, and strengthened, and settled. "Make you perfect." I would like, if I might have grace, to bring out the need of this perfection. It does not mean a perfection in the flesh. It does not mean that, by trial and suffering, the power of sin is greatly reduced, until it ceases to exist in the child of God. There is no such thing as fleshly perfection. And this I believe everyone taught of God will realize and feel. It does not mean progressive sanctification. We do not believe in that doctrine, that the child of God gradually becomes more and more holy, until he loses sin entirely. No, there is no gradual

improvement of the old man in us until we become holy and without sin. We shall feel the plague and power and the evil of sin all the time we are in this world. We shall never be free from it until we are among the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven. Sin will attend us down to the grave. When the Lord pardons a sinner, He does not remove the being of sin from him. He will make him grieve for sin all the more. And the more you may rejoice in pardoning mercy, the more you will feel the bitterness of sin, and hate that accursed thing that brought the Son of God to the cross to remove it. And yet, believers are made perfect by suffering, and suffering is for the accomplishment of this in them, according to the purpose of God.

While thinking of this matter this morning, it came to me like this, that the Lord will make His people perfect by perfectly accomplishing His will in them. There is a perfection that one may be brought to in this particular, when the will of God is perfected in them. But how does the Lord do this? He does it by suffering. That is to say, it is to be by the path of suffering for a season through which you must pass in order for the Lord to accomplish His will in you, and bring His dispensations to light. "Make you perfect," that is, bring you into conformity to Him. In the Epistle of James, it is said that believers are to count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations. It does not mean into sin; but when they are called upon to pass through trial and suffering for the Lord's sake, knowing that tribulation worketh patience in them. And he says: "Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." That is to say, until the Lord's will is perfectly accomplished in you.

Now, if I could bring it out like this: if the Lord, by His discipline and teaching in your heart, brings you, gradually it may be, like a piece of clay in His hand, willing to be moulded according to His will, when He bends your will into line with His own, and gives you a willingness to fall entirely into His hands, it may be said that He has made you perfect, "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." And this may be said to be where there is submission to the will of God in His afflictive dispensation.

But it also implies this: make you upright, sincere. God appeared unto Abraham when he was ninety-nine years old, and said: "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect," that is, upright and sincere. "Walk in thine integrity, according to My laws and statutes, perfectly, sincerely, with purpose of heart, unmixed." "Make you perfect."

And there is this accomplished in the fire of affliction and suffering, the purging away of the dross. Have you found that sometimes? Perhaps you may have been unaware of the accumulation of dross until the Lord has put you into some furnace for purging and purifying. And when He has done this, He has shown you some things in your heart that were unseen before, and He has purified you by means of His chastening and afflicting hand, and made you perfect.

And He may be said to make you perfect in this, when He brings you wholly and unreservedly to venture for your salvation upon the finished work of His beloved Son; that is, bring you to clear light and understanding in respect to God's way of saving sinners. He may make you perfect in this by purging away from you all that legal righteousness that clings to us naturally, and just bringing you, in the words of Toplady, with nothing in your hand to bring, simply to His cross to cling. "Make you perfect" in the comparative sense of the word; that is, bring you into a holy conformity to Him,

unmixed, sanctify you, separate you for His own honour and glory, to perfect His will in you. "Make you perfect."

But there is another point. There is an absolute perfection that believers have, into which they are brought experimentally, that is by virtue of union with their glorious Head manifestly. There is perfection there; that is, when the Lord brings one to feel that he is clothed with the robe of righteousness, He makes them perfect. One says:

"And, lest the shadow of a spot
Should on my soul be found,
He took the robe the Saviour wrought,
And cast it all around." (Gadsby's 109)

Is there not perfection there, I ask? And how does the Lord bring His people to this point and standing? Through suffering. Through suffering in their consciences for sin, and through suffering various afflictions, the Lord prepares them, and brings them to this great gospel blessing, even to the imputation of His own righteousness, making them perfect. And the church is perfect in Christ. Everyone is perfect in Him, without a spot. But the point is this: the Holy Spirit brings that seamless robe to the poor, corrupted thing, and covers him with it, and makes him perfect there. Ah, and there is perfection here – no mistake about it! There is not a flaw in this robe, poor sinner. If the Lord puts that robe upon you, you will be perfect. It is said of the Lord Jesus Himself, that He is made perfect. How? Through suffering; through suffering. And so are His people. They are made perfect through suffering. The Apostle says: "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together." And the Lord makes His people perfect in this absolute sense by covering them with His righteousness imputed to them.

Shall I be going beyond the experience of a child of God if I say the Lord brings them to this? I believe not. You may say, "This leaves me a long way behind." O but the point is this: does thy soul reach out after it, and you sometimes say, "Lord, take away my filthy rags, and give me a change of raiment, and cover me with Thy righteousness; make me perfect in this sense absolutely?" He will do it. He will do it! He will never disappoint one whose heart is set upon Him for this – never! "Make you perfect."

"Stablish you." We may say that we need establishing, that is: building up on our most holy faith. And there is only one Person that is competent to do this in us, to stablish us, and that is the Lord Himself. But in what respects may we be said to need establishment? We need establishing in this particular, in respect of right views, and a right knowledge of the doctrines of grace; a right sense of the importance of doctrine. We need establishment in this. You know, we may be very confused in our views of divine truth. We may be as the man who had his eyes opened partly. It is said, that he saw men as trees walking. He did not see them clearly, to tell who they were; did not see them to distinguish them. But he saw something. And so it may be with some of us. We may see or view with clearness the importance of true doctrine. We need to put doctrine in its right place. In respect to salvation it must always stand first. Some people are what are spoken of as very strong upon doctrine, and so it is all doctrine, and they belittle experience, and say we make a religion of our frames and feelings, and put them above the Lord Jesus. But I don't believe the Lord's people,

when rightly instructed, will do this. But we do need establishing in this particular point, with regard to a right view of the importance of doctrine; that is to say, divine teaching, as it is revealed in the holy Word of truth. We need right views of this, of the revelation of the will of God to men. And we know this, that true doctrine really stands substantially for the vital doctrines, the teaching of the everlasting gospel, the doctrines of free and sovereign grace. And we need establishing with respect to holding these doctrines rightly. But how can we do this? Only as we do it under the teaching of the Spirit, by some right apprehension of their vital importance. We are not to be saved by our experience in the first sense. We are saved by grace. And this is doctrine, the doctrine of God's grace. And we need establishing in this.

And we may also be inclined sometimes to make too much of experience, and put that before doctrine; and this is wrong. We need establishing in this particular thing, with regard to a right view of the importance and necessity of a gracious experience. And I would like to put it like this: that all true experience that a believer has is an experience of doctrine, as a stream from the fountain. If we take the doctrine of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, I say we need establishing to put that doctrine before any experience that we may have of it; otherwise we may be guilty of an abuse of this truth, and turning His grace into a snare, by glorying in something that we have felt. I hope you may follow me rightly in this. I believe this: that when the streams of everlasting love flow into the heart and soul of a child of God, it will always tend to exult in Him, the Author and Source from whom these blessings come; and in this way the Lord will establish him. You won't put your experience first. It has often been said: "Doctrine is heaven," and in my earlier days I was greatly mystified by that statement. But, if I might refer to myself, when, as I humbly hope, the Lord blessed my soul, and gave me a sense of His pardoning love, that made the doctrine of the Lord Jesus heaven in my soul, and made Him in His blessed Person and finished work the Desire of all nations to me, and put me down in the dust at His blessed feet, praising and admiring the riches of His grace. And I believe that believers will always put the doctrine first, although they will never belittle the experience of it. A gracious experience is a real necessity. A feeling religion is a right religion, and we would constantly insist upon this, that we must receive in our heart and conscience the streams that flow from the fountain of His love; and then we put things in their right place. But we need establishing in this.

We need establishment too in this particular, in respect of our life and practice. We do need to be established, that is to say, to be held up in this particular. We are very weak and unstable, and we need divine teaching and grace and strength to enable us to walk humbly before God, and uprightly before men. We need establishing in respect of doctrine, experience, and practice; and the Lord is sufficient to do it.

"Strengthen, settle you." There is to be a final settlement of all believers in Immanuel's land. Here we may be very unsettled, in respect of our stations in life. Everything is ebbing away from us. The wheels of Providence move fast, and there is no settlement really; and yet there is settlement in the truth. Faith is an abiding grace. I do firmly avouch that faith is an abiding grace. "He that believeth shall not make haste" – not jump from one thing to another. No; faith cleaves to Christ. Faith holds Him. Faith depends upon Him. O, it is a great thing to be united Christ. I was reading a short time ago of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and in reading of the women to whom the Lord Jesus appeared after His resurrection, it is said that they held Him by the feet, worshipped Him. And that

was made so good to me. I did feel such nearness to the Lord in prayer, and felt my heart was softened, and I believe I did in faith the same as that poor woman did – I held Him by the feet and worshipped Him. And as a risen Christ He was as real to me as He was to Mary Magdalene, who laid hold of His feet. And there is the strength of faith in that. Faith lays hold of Him and says: "He is my only hope and trust, saved or lost."

Amen.