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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at Ebenezer, Clapham,
on Wednesday evening, March 3rd, 1937

"But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."

I Samuel 30, 6 (last clause)

There are three things which present themselves to my mind in connection with this sentence. on which, if the Lord will give me a measure of light and understanding, I will endeavour to speak.

The first is the trouble that David was now in; the second his deportment under it; and thirdly, his deliverance from it.

David, you will know, at this particular period, was in, possibly, the deepest trouble and distress of mind he had ever been in. He had known what sharp trouble was before on a number of occasions, but it is evident that he had now come into the deepest extremity of his life; his possessions gone, his wives taken captive, and his own friends, his men, his company with him, threatened mutiny; all hope of recovery appeared to be gone upon the face of things here, and yet at the same time, it was remarkable how the hand of divine providence intervened on his behalf. His trouble was real, though it was circumstantial, at least apparently so. He had long been persecuted by Saul, hunted hither and thither as a fugitive, in danger of his life, though, when by God's providence he had opportunity of revenge, and of taking the life of Saul, he did not avail himself of it, always believing that Saul was the Lord's anointed, therefore he would not lay violent hands upon him, although his life was in his hand upon two particular occasions. But David, we read, discredited the vain promises and pretensions of Saul that he would spare him and would no longer seek his life. He said, 'I shall one day fall by the hand of Saul, I shall be a victim one of these days to his enmity and jealousy.' He believed he would be, too, when he said that, consequently he, with his company, seeks refuge in the land of the Philistines, and David goes down there to Achish, king of Gath, and God by His good providence gives him favour in his eyes, so that he is privileged to dwell there in peace. After a time David makes a request of the king of Gath for some place, a town in the country where he might dwell with his people and with their families, and we read that Achish, king of Gath, gave him Ziklag to dwell in. Here for a time David dwelt peaceably and so far, securely, but the day came when the Philistines had to go forth to fight Israel, and David went forth with them, though he was a Hebrew under the protection of Achish, who appeared to desire his company. He put his confidence in David, believing him to be a man of integrity, but the lords of

the Philistines objected to his presence, and refused to have him with them, therefore they prevailed upon the king to send him back to his own place. Now David, returning to Ziklag, after three days' journey, reaching the city, found that the Amalekites had invaded it, burned it with fire, laid it in ruins, taken his wives, and the wives of his men, and their families captive so that there was nothing left when David returned to Ziklag, save a smoking ruin. No one to greet him, wives and families and possessions all carried away captive by the Amalekites; but this was not the worst trouble. His friends, who had hitherto placed great confidence in him, seemed to turn upon this. They had hitherto held part with David, but we read that the soul of the people was grieved. David was greatly distressed, for the people spake of stoning him, for "the soul of the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters." Their distress was so pronounced, until, as we read, "they wept until they had no more power to weep." They were, so to speak, exhausted with grief, and David's own friends talked of turning upon him, and stoning him. He was in deep trouble here, but while this was the case with David we find that he encouraged himself in the Lord his God, and he enquired of the Lord as to what he should do through Abiathar the priest. Enquiry was made as to whether he should pursue, and if he did pursue whether he would overtake them, and the answer from the Lord was, "Pursue them, thou shalt overtake them and thou shalt recover all". So David had more in his answer than he prayed for; often that has been true. The Lord's people have prayed for something, and the Lord has given them, not only what they asked Him for, but more even than they could expect. "Thou shalt recover all." The history goes on to tell us how, by the means of an Egyptian, David was directed to the Amalekites, and finding them unprepared for battle, taking them by surprise, God giving them into his hand, he slew them, leaving neither man nor beast, we read. And he recovered his wives, and the families, the wives of the men and their families, and all their possessions, and more beside, so that the spoil was equally divided by them among those that went with him upon that expedition, and those who remained with the stuff; for we read that there were two hundred who were too weak to go over the brook Besor, and to accompany him on that expedition. But David divided the spoil equally among those who accompanied him and those who remained at home.

The point for us to consider in connection with David's trouble is his deportment under it, "He encouraged himself in the Lord his God." David had good reasons for so doing; he had on previous occasions been

a witness to the power of God in delivering him from his enemies, and now he has recourse to his God, knowing Him to be his God. "He encouraged himself in the Lord his God." By this we may gather that his friends did not encourage him, for the word is personal; they appeared to turn against him, and even threatened to stone him, but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God. We do not read here that the Lord encouraged him, although we have not the least reason to doubt that He did, but it does not expressly state the fact. David seemed to be brought into that place where his faith was tried to the very quick, and where it appeared for the time being, as though all would come to nothing. even concerning what the Lord had previously told him, relative to his becoming king of Israel, and having the kingdom given to him. But in the case of David here, the darkest night was just before the dawn. God was working in another quarter. Here was David mourning over the destruction of his city, pursuing after the Amalekites, but what was happening elsewhere? The Philistines were engaged with Israel in battle, Samuel was already dead, and Saul, being forsaken of God, as we read, was left to his own resources, and sought guidance from a familiar spirit, the witch of Endor, who told him he would be ruined. This had such an effect upon him that he fainted, and, as it would appear, had no heart to go to battle with his soldiers, and in that conflict with the Philistines, Saul, being wounded, called upon his armour-bearer to put an end to his life. This he refused to do, so he fell upon his own sword, and died. That was the end of the first king. God was working deliverance for David at the very moment, as it would appear, just at that very time, when he was mourning the loss of everything that was dear to him. Yet quickly after that, David was raised to the throne of Israel, God delivered him once and for all from the hand of that bitter enemy, Saul. "He encouraged himself in the Lord his God." The darkest night was immediately before the dawn; deliverance was at hand. He encouraged himself. In considering this, we may rightly believe that David was brought to know that there was no help for him but in God alone; it was the only Refuge that he could have here, to have recourse to his God, and this he did. "He encouraged himself," that is, he strengthened himself, "in the Lord his God." The Lord will bring His people to know that He, and He only, can deliver them in times of trouble. He will teach them to know that they must not put their trust in princes, or in men, but in God alone. "He encouraged himself." At this time of his greatest need his friends forsook him, and may we not refer to the case of the Lord Jesus here? When He was in the depth of His trouble, (not that He needed human aid, God forbid the thought,) we find that when He

was grappling with the power of hell, His own disciples, who had professed such loyalty, all forsook Him and fled, and He was alone; when He was apprehended by the Jews in the Garden, they all forsook Him and fled. And are there not times in experience when the people of God are brought, so to speak, away from all creatures, when they have of necessity to deal with God about their matters, knowing that He alone can take them in hand. "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." He did not despair, though his grief was very great, but believed that he had a God nigh at hand, and not a God afar off. He encouraged himself, as though he should say, 'Lord, I have come to this spot now, where I must depend upon the exercise of Thy power and mercy on my behalf.'

What is it to encourage ourselves in the Lord our God, Why, it is to draw near to Him and Him alone when all other helpers fail; this is to encourage ourselves in the Lord. And God brings His people to this point too.

"Could the creature help or ease us,
Seldom should we think of prayer"

Do you believe that is true? But when all other props fail, then we have to go to Him. I believe it was Bunyan who said, "We make the Lord Jesus Christ our last shift." But how condescending in Him it is to receive us when such is the case. It is natural to us to go to this and that one, rather than to go to God, but there will be teaching in this. God will not allow His people to rely upon an arm of flesh. He will bring them as humble suppliants to His feet. He will teach them and cause them to know that He alone can deliver them, whatever means He may be disposed to use, whoever He may be pleased to raise up as a means, God Himself must do the thing. He is the almighty Deliverer, and David encouraged himself, strengthened himself, as though he might go to the Lord, and take His own Word, and His promise to him, and say, 'Lord, I stand upon this, I have many times been encouraged by it, help me to hold fast to it, though everything appears so black, as it does, yet, Lord, I believe that Thou art able, even now, to deliver me.' He encouraged himself. We have good reason to do this, and we shall prove that it is the wisest course we can take in our trials. To encourage ourselves in God then, is to draw near to Him with our burden, with our sorrow, our grief, our affliction, take it to Him in prayer, lay it before Him, commit it to Him. This is encouraging ourselves, strengthening ourselves in the Lord our God. It is in the exercise of faith upon God relative to the trial we may be passing through. Faith is that grace which will enable a poor sinner, a tried, tempted believer, to hold on to God's

Word, and to His promise, concerning whatever may be pressing upon him. There is an encouragement to do this in the perfections of God, and in the revelation of His own word, wherein He has declared that He will be with His people in and under all that they have to pass through.

He encouraged himself. Poor sinners doing this may receive encouragement, comfort, and strength in their experience; this alone will enable them to hold on their way. Faith in God alone will enable a sinner to continue - faith in the heart in exercise upon God, receiving that grace and strength from Him which He is pleased to communicate to His people. Real religion brings those who are the subjects of it to do business with God in secret about things. They are brought to know that they have no help and no strength in themselves, and yet they may lay hold on omnipotent strength in God. He encouraged himself. What a mercy it is to have a God to go to when we can get to Him. Job in his trouble said, "O that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat." Now, you see David's deportment here was good. We do not find that he broke out in open rebellion against God's permission relative to the burning of his city, and the carrying away captive of his wives. No, he was kept constant, we would believe he had faith and patience even under his great grief, by which he was enabled to wait upon God, and to receive strength from Him; thus he encouraged himself in Him. There are several reasons why we may encourage ourselves in God; that is, there are true and real grounds of encouragement in God, which a believer, realising and apprehending, may make profitable use of in time of such extremity. We may encourage ourselves in the free mercy, grace and love of God. What could we do without this? But it is a ground, you see, upon which we may come to the Lord, and plead for the power, the delivering power, to be made manifest in our souls. This is a ground of encouragement to a seeker, and he may encourage himself therein. If we are favoured to believe that God is a God of mercy, that He dispenses mercy to His people, we may come and seek that mercy, we can plead that mercy. How can it come? Through Christ and Him alone, no mercy for a sinner otherwise. But by faith in exercise in the soul upon Christ, pleading His Person, blood, and righteousness, they may encourage themselves, that is strengthen themselves by the teachings and guidings of the Holy Ghost. This is true in soul matters when guilt is felt in the conscience, when there is a sense of condemnation, when we may feel that we have merited God's wrath, that we have merited everlasting punishment for sin. When the guilt of sin lies upon the

conscience, a sinner may encourage himself in the Lord his God, may apply to Him for Christ's sake for that mercy to be dispensed to him.

"Mercy is welcome news indeed,
To those who guilty stand,
Sinners who feel what help they need
Will bless the helping hand."

Encourage yourself in this, here is a ground. We may come to the Lord as we have faith and grace, and say, 'Lord, Thy Word says that there is mercy with Thee, that there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared. This is what I need, Thou has promised it to penitents, Lord; do bestow it upon me, and forgive my sins for Christ's sake.' This is to encourage ourselves in the Lord our God.

Divine power, too, is a ground of encouragement. All power belongeth unto God; all creatures are subservient to Him; all enemies are under His power and control, and if we are enabled to believe that, we may commit our case to Him, and encourage ourselves in Him. He is all sufficient, and the sufficiency of Jehovah is a ground of encouragement to a sinner; it is strengthening to him when he can receive the truth, and believe that whatever he is passing through now, God has control of it, and He is able to deliver in His time. The fact that God has a perfect understanding of all our circumstances, is a ground of encouragement. They were decreed by Him in His council, and decreed from all eternity. The circumstances of our lives do not come to us by chance; God knows all about them, every detail concerning them, His knowledge of them is a perfect knowledge, and He knows how to deal with His people under them. If they could rightly appreciate this, they may commit their case to Him and plead with Him for that sustaining grace and power day by day, to bring them through their trial. We have to take our things to God, and if we are favoured with access at the throne of grace, then we can plead all that He is on our behalf in Christ - His power, His love, His wisdom, His grace, His sufficiency, His knowledge, - and thus encourage ourselves in Him. David did this; he had recourse to God in his trouble, and the Lord heard him too; He gave him direction. What a mercy that was to him, and so it will be for us. You may come to a place in your life when there may seem to be no-one else upon earth but God and yourself, and the trouble you are in, and God dealing with you in it. Religion becomes a very real thing then; it is between God and the sinner without question; it consists in doing business with Him often unknown to another fellow-creature. But what a mercy it is to us that when all other helpers fail, "God is the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever."

Asaph, at the conclusion of Psalm 73, confessed this, "It is good for me to draw near to God, I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Thy works." Thus he encouraged himself in the Lord his God. But there is a sense of covenant interest here. It does not say simply that David encouraged himself in God; he did that, but he did it with a knowledge, an assurance, to his own soul's comfort, that God was his covenant God. "He encouraged himself in the Lord his God." He knew Him as such, and could address Him as such. "O, Lord, Thou art my God, early will I seek Thee." "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." Many times we read expressive sentences implying assurance like that. Thus he encouraged himself in the Lord his God, and you will need to know that too, otherwise you cannot really encourage yourself in Him. We need to know Him as the Lord our God, as our covenant God, who has indeed purposes of mercy toward us. We need to know Him in Christ as the God of all grace, as having all covenant blessings for His people in Him. We need to know Him as the Saviour of sinners. "Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else."

"The Lord his God." How are you to know that? Well, you may know it by the way the Lord appears for you. If He has appeared for you in days gone by, and delivered you and blessed your soul, given you some evidence of saving interest, then you can say, The Lord is my God. "He hath delivered." And faith will help you to say, "He doth deliver, in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." If you can lay hold of His word, take it to Him and plead it with Him, you can encourage yourself, strengthen yourself in Him as your God. He will draw near to you as such. How are you to know He is your covenant God? By His Spirit's witness. The Spirit of God bears witness in the hearts of His people that they are His people, and this is a strength and comfort to them. He seals them unto the day of redemption, bears witness with their spirit that they are the children of God. This entitles them to the blessings of redeeming grace, and this will enable them to encourage themselves therein by the help of God. "He encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Thomas, we read, was able to say, when the Lord appeared to him, "my Lord and my God." He realised covenant interest then, he believed that it was Jesus, and his Jesus too. But Thomas had unbelief at first; he said 'I will not believe until I have put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side.' But when the Lord appeared to him, Thomas said, "My Lord and my God," and so will you. He will help you to say it, He will speak the word to you

and enable you to say, "Abba, Father." "My Lord and my God." And you need to know Him as such for your comfort and joy, and if you have proved Him to be such, you will prove Him to be the same all through. He is a God that cannot lie; He is unchangeable, immutable, and this is a ground of thankfulness for a sinner. All the changing vicissitudes of this life will never cause God to change in his purposes. He may vary His providences, and He does, but His mind and purpose is the same in them all. And this is a ground of encouragement. What a mercy it is for us to have a God to go to, and to know it, when we can go to Him as our God and feel it, when we can open our hearts to Him in faith and receive strength from Him. When all other helpers fail He will never fail; God is not a creature, he will never fail. "I will never fail thee nor forsake thee." Joshua had to say, "Not one thing hath failed" of all that the Lord had promised. David recovered all, he recovered all, that was his deliverance. Not only did he recover all, but he saw the end of that persecution which he had long suffered from the hand of Saul, and the way was now opened for him to enter upon his royal power, and begin to reign over Israel, which he did. He recovered all, and so will you. There will not be one thing left undone that God has promised, or that He has purposed, and I believe that when the Lord's people come to the end they will say the same, 'Not one thing has failed.' And has He not shown himself good to you many time That being so, could you not encourage yourself in Him as a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother, as one that can never change in all the changing scenes of time? Hold fast to Him. David encouraged himself; it was a personal thing with him, it took him away from every other source, and every other quarter, but he encouraged himself in God, and God stood by him, although he passed through some deep and sore afflictions.

Amen.