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preached by Mr. J. Delves on Wednesday evening 3.3.71

Hymns 24, 1056, 1110

Reading 1 Samuel 29 and 30 (1-19)

Text: 1 Samuel 30.6

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"And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."

If we read the Psalms and, in connection with them, some of the circumstances in the life of David, we can see a very close connection, although we cannot always place the particular circumstances he was in when he penned some of these Psalms. Here we have some similarity to the Psalm that I read on Monday evening (Psalm 42) where David said, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me" and "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?". So here in this particular chapter we see David in great distress, and indeed the circumstances were distressing to a degree; yet even so, as we read, we can see a controlling providence over all the circumstances through which he passed. Nothing escaped the eye of his God, every circumstance was as it were registered in heaven, all divinely appointed unto him. We see in his life, as in the lives of those before him, of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and many others, a guiding hand, an over-ruling power, and an end in view to accomplish in the Lord's own time.

It is true that here David was in very distressing circumstances. He had been before, but he could look back upon the Lord's appearing in former times, he could look back upon a delivering God, and now under these extreme conditions we see him encouraging himself in the Lord his God, although he was greatly distressed, and though the people spake of stoning him because the soul of the people was grieved - which is not surprising. It would appear that David was practically alone in this matter for it says, "but" - although he must have been overwhelmed, - "but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Although at that time David did not know it, he was very, very near to a time of deliverance from the long and weary trial and persecution through the envy and jealousy

of Saul. He was on the verge of deliverance from it all; but even so his fears ran high at times for we find him saying within himself, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul". Although he had two opportunities of taking the life of the king he would not touch the Lord's anointed. When his fears seemed to rise high deliverance was very, very near. This may be true in some instances. Things looked as dark as ever, yet the battle ahead was to be a battle that should result in the death of king Saul. David had fled into the land of the Philistines where king Achish appears to have favoured him and had much confidence in him. By David's request he granted him a city to reside in, and there he abode until there was preparation for war with the children of Israel. David went up with the army of the Philistines and he was appointed bodyguard to the king but the Philistines refused to have him in their company and insisted that he should return to his own place. In all this the providence of God unfolds itself, for when he returned he found the circumstances of which we have read.

In this matter of David encouraging himself we may say there are three things. First of all there was a looking up to God as his God for he encouraged himself in the Lord his God, not in a God of whom he had heard, but in the Lord his God; he had a sense of relationship even under the darkest circumstances, and the most painful trials, as in Psalm 42 he said, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me". Yet he looked up to the God of heaven, and in Psalm 141 "Mine eyes are up unto Thee". He was in a most distressing condition. Some of you may know something about this looking up to the Lord when it may be you have come to the end of everything as far as you feel yourself. Even so, whatever the circumstances may have been, there has been a looking up, "Mine eyes are up unto thee, in thee is my help, leave not my soul destitute."

Not only was there a looking up but there was a confidence in his God; although he could not see the issue of things, still he had a confidence in his God, otherwise how could he encourage himself. So in the Psalms we find him saying, "in thee O Lord

do I put my trust", "My times are in thy hand". Not only so but he could reflect upon former interpositions of God's providence, which may have come to his mind. He was a witness to the fact that God had brought him hitherto, and so it may be with us when we can say in our measure,

"Thus far my God has led me on,

And made his truth and mercy known."

He encouraged himself. It is rendered that 'he strengthened himself' in the Lord his God. I would take this to be the exercise of faith in his God under those conditions. Sometimes painful circumstances can bring faith into a ripe and lively exercise which before had been lying somewhat dormant. God orders circumstances to stir up His people to call upon Him, and to bring faith into a living exercise. In the New Testament we have exhortations where we find the Apostle Paul saying, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life". This is like encouraging ourselves in the Lord our God. In another place we find him saying, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus... forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before." This was encouraging himself in the Lord his God. I wonder what some of us know about this. It may be you can look back to some circumstances when you encouraged yourself, strengthened yourself in the Lord your God, thus those particular circumstances were used unto this end, to move you to wait more earnestly upon God. This encouraging himself would indicate that he poured out his heart before Him, prayed unto the Lord his God, having no help in any creature, and later, in more particular details, we find that he sought the Lord's guidance as to whether he should pursue after these Amalokites and whether he would overtake them and the Lord answered him, "Pursue; for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all". What a wonderful encouragement that must have been to him. He had the Lord's own word that, although at that time he was stripped of practically everything,

he would recover all, and it came to pass as the Lord told him, as we have been reading. So in the end "there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor anything that they had taken to them: David recovered all". We have not known these particular circumstances, but in your little lives it may be that some of you have proved the Lord has been much better to you than all your fears and has wrought exceedingly abundantly, has gone before you, and provided for you better than you have anticipated. What the Lord has done in the past should encourage us to put our trust in Him for the future. As an old divine has said, "Let past deliverances open the mouth for new ones." He encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

Now I would leave David to speak and attempt to speak for a few moments about what is involved in this matter of encouraging ourselves in the Lord our God. As the dear Redeemer Himself said in the days of His flesh when He was in the world, 'ye shall have tribulation', and so it has proved. Is not a time of bodily affliction a fitting occasion for a believer to encourage himself in the Lord his God? Is there not a Throne of Grace open to receive a poor sinner's cry, and One who will respond to his need and condition, and everything that pertains to him? Did not the Lord Himself say, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". Sometimes the Lord's dear people have encouraged themselves in the providence of God. This could well have been the case with David as he reflected upon the victory over Goliath and other things and so it may have been in your own case as you have come into certain things; the way the Lord has led you in the past and some former appearances and it may be here and there an answer to your poor prayer. You have been helped to encourage yourself in the providence of God. There is something in your heart that gives you confidence in the dispensations of God's providence as a hymn writer says,

"His providence unfolds the book,
And makes his counsels shine;
Each opening leaf, and every stroke,
Fulfils some deep design."

What child of God is there who in looking back can fail to see

a guiding hand, the Lord going before and sometimes overturning things, closing one door here, and opening another there. He never fails; so, as you look back upon some former things you may feel somewhat encouraged under present needs to wait upon the Lord and thus to encourage yourself in the Lord your God. This is the power of faith in the heart of a believer looking up to Omnipotence. What are all these little things, as comparatively speaking they are, to this God Who is "too wise to err and too good to be unkind". We know providence is not grace, but even so we have providence in the Scriptures. We have the circumstances of the lives of godly men, what they passed through; and we can clearly see the guiding hand of the Lord in them. So it may be with you sometimes when reflecting upon some past things you may feel a little strength given you to encourage yourself in the Lord your God, not in the Lord God, but in the Lord your God. You encourage yourself in Him, as though you would say, will He fail me now? That was a sore trial I passed through at such a time, they were some hard things I had to be shown, but He did not fail me. He went before me, though it was in a way I knew not; yet He fulfilled His word where He said, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known, I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them".

May not this lead us to another point, may we not by His grace encourage ourselves in the promises of God? They are said in a Gospel sense to be yea and amen in Christ. We cannot go through Old Testament history and fail to see that many promises were made to different ones relating to their circumstances in life and particular things that the Lord promised He would do for them, as in the case of Abraham and Jacob and others. So it is sometimes that faith encourages itself. You encourage yourself in the promises that God has made. I know it is one thing merely to read them, and another thing to feel some application of them, but when faith is active

then a promise may be taken and pleaded before the Lord and you encourage yourself in that promise, that is in the God Who has made the promise, Who has put that promise in His Word. Many a child of God has encouraged himself in a divine promise, being assured that it is the promise of an unfailing God. Old Testament Scriptures abound with promises and so do New Testament Scriptures. Faith encourages itself in God, in His promises. Have you not seen some fulfilled and is it not strengthening and encouraging to see the hand of the Lord in this or that matter, to see even a providential promise fulfilled or something coming to pass in which the Lord has indicated He will fulfil His Word?

David encouraged himself in the Lord his God, and not only so, this exercise of faith, this encouraging ourselves is in the power of God. We find God saying in the book of Jeremiah, "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for me?" If you can get hold of that you will see nothing too hard for your God; too hard for you it may be, but this is a matter of faith, a matter of confidence in your God, in His power, May we not look at this in a Gospel sense, not only relating to His divine providence in our lives, though that is important, but to the power of Christ to save a lost soul as the Apostle Paul declares, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them". "Is anything too hard for the Lord?", said the Lord to Abraham. "Is anything too hard for the Lord", for Omnipotence? You may look at your own case, the darkness and uncertainty of your standing and you may question whether anything is real but here is a divine direction. "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God" and why not you, although things may be dark and heavy, painful, difficult and distressing, as they were then? This is the privilege of the Lord's dear people to encourage themselves in their God.

"All our times are in His hand
All events at His command"

May we not encourage ourselves in the Lord our God under discouraging conditions? Although sometimes they seem to get more and more

discouraging, is not this a matter for faith to wrestle with the Lord about and to encourage itself in the Lord our God?

David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. Does not this sometimes apply to the wisdom of God? Do we not need this? Have not you sometimes come to a pass in your matters that you know not what to do? We find one saying this, "Neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee". "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye". His infinite wisdom is coupled with power and strength, that under difficult things His people are exhorted to wait upon Him and, as enabled, to encourage themselves in the Lord God, in His wisdom, and also in His faithfulness. We read of God that He cannot lie. "Hath He said and shall He not bring it to pass?". In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read of two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie.

Here then is faithfulness coupled with wisdom, with power in grace and providence. To trust His wisdom can be great sometimes. Christ is said to be wisdom and righteousness and redemption and we can as helped encourage ourselves in these divine perfections. Are we depending on our own strength or are we taking our matters to Him, placing them in His hands, leaving them with Him, putting our trust in Him? "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God". This encouraging ourselves then is that exercise of faith in the heart of a child of God who knows his God, and who is favoured to feel something of that sacred privilege of taking his matters to a God of whom he has some gracious knowledge and understanding.

Sometimes we may feel so unable to do this, too weak and confused in our minds, and it can be sometimes too distressed, but here it is - let us our encourage ourselves in the Lord our God. Let us encourage ourselves in His Word, His Word that He has spoken; let us encourage ourselves in the Gospel that He has revealed; let us encourage ourselves in these precious promises; let us encourage ourselves in that there is hope. David encouraged himself when he said, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why are thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance." He was encouraging himself and so

sometimes it may be that you, like David, expostulate with your own soul. You are cast down; David was cast down; and yet he comes to this, "Why are thou cast down O my soul?", and then he encourages himself, hope thou in God. Faith is an active grace here, faith looks above the circumstances that may attend us, David did; he looks up to his God. We find him saying in another Psalm, "And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee". He is encouraging himself in the Lord his God, and I do not question but that you know something about this. You may be in certain circumstances that are difficult, and you say are these impossible things? You look above them, and say with David, "Hope thou in God".

You encourage yourself in the Lord; and so in a Gospel sense poor, needy, sinful sinners encourage themselves in a precious Christ. They encourage themselves in His precious sin atoning blood, they encourage themselves in His justifying righteousness, they encourage themselves in His all-prevailing intercession, and see Him by faith able to save them to the uttermost although their sins are very great and lie very heavy upon them. Yet we may as helped encourage ourselves in the Lord our God, Who is greater than all our sins. Though we are great sinners we believe He is a greater Saviour. Have you ever encouraged yourself in the Lord your God when things have got beyond your control and when you have been very, very cast down? It is a very sweet experience when you are helped and enabled to take all your temporal difficulties, and your soul's case to Him and feel they are all in His hands - all in the hands of a Father Who has prepared your cup, and will give you strength to drink it. Then you can fall into His hands and encourage yourself in the Lord your God. May the Lord often help us to encourage ourselves in the Lord our God. Amen.