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on preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday morning, 11th. December, 1971

Hymns: 664, 472, 1155

Reading: Revelation 21 (1-14 and 22-27)

Text: 1 Thessalonians 4.18

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Announcement at beginning of service

Following the hymn friends (664) I have this sad announcement to make that our beloved friend (Mr. G. Hunt), to whom reference was made in the hymn, passed away from us on Friday morning at 12.10 a.m. and, if the Lord will, the funeral service will be held here at Ebenezer Chapel on Wednesday at 11.30 a.m and the interment at Croydon, Mitcham Road Cemetery at 12.30 p.m. May the Lord help us and be with us in this sad and solemn time. We can say that our loss is his eternal gain. He is now absent from the body and as to his ransomed soul, blessed soul, present with the Lord, and will eventually be both body and soul in that everlasting enjoyment in glory for ever and ever.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

The latter part of this remarkable chapter, as can be observed, is particularly designed to be for the comfort of sorrowing friends, relatives, or who ever they may be in a church under the sorrow of bereavement. This appears very probable, for we find the Apostle saying, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope", and then he proceeds to set before them certain precious, vital truths that can be for their comfort and peace of mind in this time of sorrow. It has been to my feeling rather sweet to notice that in more places than one the Apostle refers to death as a sleep to which in a sense there can be some similarity in that a period of sleep is a time of unconsciousness to everything around; and in the case of those who die in the Lord, it is "asleep in Jesus", as indeed we can feel to our comfort that it is with our dear departed brother.

There is a particular point made here by the Apostle, he refers to those that are "asleep in Jesus". This is the all important point,

beloved friends, that touches the very kernel of the matter, because it all depends whether when one dies they are asleep in Jesus. This is the point with the Apostle where he says, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him", Happy souls are they! It is the body that is asleep in Jesus now of our beloved departed one; his soul his ransomed spirit, is in glory. Happy soul indeed; for him it is "absent from the body, present with the Lord". I do hope and pray that when my time shall come, (and every loss we have is a warning), that it will be "asleep in Jesus". We mourn the loss of our dear brother, I shall feel his loss keenly, but more particularly, more than all beside, his dear widow mourns who is now deprived of her husband. We have need to pray that the Lord may be very gracious unto her under this heavy loss, although we can but rejoice for our departed friend; yet nature mourns, and grace does not forbid mourning the loss of those we have loved and have enjoyed sweet communion with.

Our dear friend came to us here at Ebenezer with his first wife and family, after they returned from Manchester. His mind was quite decided to settle in attendance here and he was led to unite with us in church fellowship in February 1947. From that time to this we have walked together, and I can say of him that "The memory of the just is blessed". I think I shall not forget how often my late dear friend would refer to a sermon and say in a feeling way, not mechanically, "You have been helped" or "It has been good to be here" or something like that, which can mean more to a pastor than some may anticipate. As he began to fail and particularly as his mind began to fail, one of the first things I noticed was that he would make an attempt to say something to me but his emotions overcame him and he could not express what he desired to convey. Quite a number of times this was the case when he was failing. As this infirmity gained upon him we noticed it in his prayers, as he attempted to engage in public worship; but his time has now come, and we need grace to bow to the will of God in regard to the discharge of His sovereignty in these dispensations. We can truly say, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the

name of the Lord".

Death is profoundly solemn; in itself it has a terror with it which only that good hope through grace can really take away, then the precious atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ as applied removes the sting, this entirely removes the sting, so that one can say under some felt sweetness,

"If sin be pardoned, I'm secure;  
Death has no sting beside;  
The law gives sin its damning power,  
But Christ, my ransom, died.

In these verses here the Apostle refers to death particularly as a sleep. In the Epistle to the Corinthians he makes the same point. He refers to the Lord appearing after His resurrection to above five hundred brethren at once of whom "some are fallen asleep"; he does not just say 'some are dead', but "some are fallen asleep".

This is a comforting word. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words", With all who are taken home to glory their decease is characterised as falling asleep. This refers of course to those, who die in the Lord. In the book of the Revelation we read of this, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them". To connect this, I have felt my mind led to this word, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words".

Now these words, it is true, can incorporate the whole of the Gospel, for the Gospel is in itself a comforting word, as well as a saving revelation. In the prophecy by Isaiah we have this, "Comfort, ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins". This is a comforting thought that all who thus sleep in Jesus are in this aspect characterised as being both pardoned and justified in Christ. What a comforting word is this, and so more or less all through the Old Testament we have these comforting words. Comfort is a relative term, indicating some trouble, affliction, distress, pain, sorrow, bereavement or what ever may be an occasion of grief. Comfort has a relative bearing. If there is no trouble, pain or sorrow, comfort is not

relevant. Comfort is administered to those in distress, trouble and affliction. In the case of Joseph for instance after he was exalted to that honoured position as lord over the land of Egypt, his brethren came to him, he saw dreams fulfilled, they fell down before his face for they were in great alarm lest their brother should take revenge upon them as they deserved because of their former treatment; but instead of that he spoke kindly to them, and comforted them. He said to them, "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is in this day, to save much people alive." He comforted them. This could be applied to a number of instances; we have in Hosea that sweet word of promise; "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her"; We may also refer to the dear Redeemer Himself when His disciples were troubled by what He had said to them. The Lord uttered these words, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me"... "I will not leave you comfortless (fatherless ): I will come to you"; also "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you". Words of comfort like these can be very, very timely in times of sorrow, grief, trouble, distress and particularly bereavement.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words". It is very obvious that it was connected here with some loss by bereavement, for the Apostle said, "Ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope". Now the Apostle says "Comfort one another with these words" which appear to commence particularly from the 13th. verse which I have just mentioned; then he goes on to convey the ground and foundation of all true spiritual comfort and consolation. He says, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him". This is a comforting word and, as I have mentioned before it refers exclusively to those who sleep in Jesus. What a transporting thought it is! This is bound up with a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and I know I can so to speak carry my beloved departed friend with me in each of these points, I know he possessed this faith, for this word can be no comfort except to those who do possess it. The Apostle says,

"If we believe"; therefore if we do not believe this sacred revelation then there is no comfort to us in it. The comfort can only apply, you see, where faith is in lively exercise and contemplates where it carries us to, even to that day when the Lord shall come again. "Even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him", as we have it recorded in chapter 3.13. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope". - I link chapter 3.13 with the subject, "asleep in Jesus". We may assume therefore, although I do not wish to be imaginative, that when the dear Redeemer comes with clouds as we read in the Revelation, in power and great glory, and every eye shall see him", that the spirits of just men made perfect, and the angels, will fill the visible heavens, this is my conviction. But what an awful, awful day that will be, what an awful awakening to all unbelievers, all who die in their sins! No words can convey the terrible issues in such a case, but when He comes dear friends, He will come to be admired in all them that believe. This will be that glorious morning of the resurrection of which the Apostle treats so beautifully in the Epistle to the Corinthians where he refers to this corruptible body which, though it is sown in corruption, will sleep in Jesus until the resurrection when it will be raised in incorruption; though sown in weakness, it will be raised in power, though sown in dishonour, not the dishonour of living in any known sin, but the dishonour of the fall, and this applies to us, yet it will be raised in glory. O let us contemplate this blessed word which the Apostle refers to here, this comforting word.

In this way the Lord balances the clouds in His peoples sorrow; for this is a word of comfort and consolation, and a sweet ingredient is put into the bitter cup. When we come to lay the body of our dear departed friend in the grave we lay that body there as the Lord's property, it belongs to Him, He died to redeem the body as well as the soul. We lay that body in the tomb as a purchased possession. I have been to a good many funerals in Brighton of those that I have known and loved when my late dear Pastor has officiated, and often he would say, "We commit this precious dust to the grave; in this cemetery is much precious dust"; for there are many, many

redeemed bodies in those Brighton cemeteries who are now asleep in  
Jesus. O blessed sleep, as one says,

"Asleep in Jesus, blessed sleep,

From which none ever wake to weep"

Our dear brother needs no words of comfort now as to his ransomed soul, he is where there is absolute and unalloyed joy, peace, happiness, purity, holiness, and worship. At our prayer meeting last night I read more than I can properly understand. The Apostle John said, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is". Thinking about this before I came into the prayer meeting, I thought what a glorious, blessed future is awaiting all who sleep in Jesus, and those also that are alive and remain as we have it here, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Our poor finite minds cannot grasp these heights of glory. My beloved friends, we are not going to heaven upon some grounds or ideas that our poor reason can fathom or understand; it is here in these words, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." Now this is the base and foundation of all true spiritual comfort. There can be no spiritual comfort apart from the blessed doctrine here revealed, that Jesus died and rose again. These are the comforting words, and with these words the Lord would have the Thessalonians comforted; and what can be of greater comfort to us than this, especially when we can feel that He died and rose again even for us.

I have often noticed a feature of our late dear friend in his prayers, he was not one to say so much in a personal way, but he always evidenced a very clear view of doctrine in his prayers. He seemed sometimes to open things up very sweetly. You could tell where his mind was centred, where his hope was placed, and where his comfort came from. He would go in spirit to Calvary; the foundation truths of the precious Gospel were at times sweetly revealed in his prayers, although he was not one to say great things about himself; he did make very clear points in regard to his knowledge of the truth

and the exercise of his faith. What a wonderful mercy it is if we truly believe that Jesus died and rose again. Everything hinges upon this, and this is the most important "if", as far as I can see, in the Holy Scriptures, for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and for what purpose did the Saviour die? He died in the place of His dear people to remove from them the curse that lay upon them as being guilty before a just and holy God. Our dear friend was very clear about this, for if we believe that Jesus died, by His death He bore that curse away. How did He bear that curse away? By suffering the curse in His own person. He could not bear that curse away without being made a curse Himself. How unspeakably solemn is this, He died, laid down His life, paid the ransom price, appeased the claims of justice, removed the curse from us, if we are His, and opened a way to heaven. He opened a way to heaven through the merit and sacrifice and satisfaction of His sin-atonement, most precious blood. My dear people here know how often I have spoken of the atonement and alas how sad it is that there is a drifting away from it, and in what are called places of worship. Instead of the sacred truths of the Bible there are blasphemous procedures connected with the communion, in St. Paul's Cathedral, this can only make us tremble at what may come upon us. O what a mercy if you and I, like our beloved departed one have our faith and hope fixed upon the blood shed at Calvary; the Lamb once slain.

"Saints, raise your expectations high;  
Hope all that heaven has good;  
The blood of Christ has brought you nigh-  
Invaluable blood!"

I know I have no other foundation but this and, if I am not mistaken, I believe the all-importance of the atonement has been embedded in my heart, for two or three times in my life I have seen a way to heaven for me through the merit of that most precious blood. "Ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ".

He rose again - O what a blessed truth is this; so that we are not worshipping a dead Jesus, we are worshipping a living Saviour, able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by

Him. He said to His disciples, "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me; because I live, ye shall live also". There He is, in our nature, glorified, His disciples saw Him go up into heaven, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?", said the angels, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." This prediction is drawing near, dear friends; I feel persuaded that the time of the Lord's return is not far distant, for we continually notice certain signs of the times that point so pertinently to the blessed fact. But still all that is in the Lord's hands; it will not matter when my friends, if we can feel of ourselves as we can feel about our dear brother, even that "He loved me and gave Himself for me", then, as an old friend used to say, we shall have nothing to do but to die. And there shall we be until that glorious day when He shall come again. I am quite satisfied with what is revealed to us about the future, I am quite satisfied, but I do often inwardly, feelingly say, ❀

"Assure my conscience of her part  
In the Redeemer's blood;  
And bear thy witness with my heart,  
That I am born of God."

Now I shall have to leave this subject for the time being. I hope to make some further reference to our beloved brother on Wednesday morning when I may have some particulars relating to his exercises, which I hope I may be able to refer to; but his happy state does not rest upon that actually, his happy state rests upon the fact that he died in the Lord and now he is asleep in Jesus until the resurrection morn. May the Lord help us to observe the warning and receive the comfort, the comforting words I have noticed, and may we with our late dear friend one day be partakers of the glory. Amen.