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Prayer Meeting Address at "Ebenezer" Clapham on 28th. July, 1952

Hymns: 319, 411

Reading: 2 Corinthians 1 and Psalm 90

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The Apostle here evidently makes some personal reference to some extreme circumstance in his life, when apparently he was in very great danger of death. So it was that he despaired, as it is said here, even of life, and was pressed out of measure, and had the sentence of death in himself, that is the answer of death, as it is in the margin. While indeed this was evidently so circumstantially, it can have a far deeper meaning in a spiritual aspect, in the experience of the conscience of one brought under the sentence of death, under a broken law, feelingly without hope, and brought to the place Paul describes in writing to the Romans, when he says "When the commandment came sin revived and I died." It is a wonderful mercy for any sinner to be brought thus under the sentence of death, although in itself it is distressing; because it is preparatory teaching, whereby one is brought to an entire dependence on the sovereign distinguishing mercy of God in the Gospel, which, when revealed by the Holy Ghost in the soul, constitutes its one and only foundation. It is a great thing, an essential thing, to be killed by the Law and made alive by the Gospel. So Paul, writing to the Romans in the eighth chapter speaks of the law of sin and death and the law of the Spirit of life. It is a great thing to be brought to such a point, to be stripped of all our fancied meetness, and ultimately experimentally to be clothed with the righteousness provided in the Gospel. The Apostle speaks also here of the fact that the sufferings he endured were not for his own sake. All that he went through was, so to speak, for the benefit of others, and designed to be for their consolation and salvation.

Then he speaks of an experience peculiar to the children of God, which when it is experienced is profoundly sacred. "For, as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." It would appear therefore, and so it is,

that the Lord condescends, so to speak, to apportion this. If it were not so we should not survive; but there is a power supporting under the cross, which enables one to continue and endure under the burden and weight of the cross. For this the Psalmist prayed when he said "Make us glad according to the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us and the years wherein we have seen evil." "There is at times I believe with the Lord's people a particularly sweet sense of the Lord's favour and mercy apportioned to them in their afflictions. This is the comfort referred to here, where the Apostle speaks of God being the God of all comfort "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation." Trouble is common to all, but tribulation is peculiar to the Lord's children, because it is the dealing of God with them in a particular way, and usually the consolation is felt in its sweetness when the spirit acquiesces in the Lord's will concerning His disposings of us. It has well been said that it is for us to submit but not to prescribe. The Lord alone is the disposer, and the need of grace is particular in receiving the ingredients of that cup which the Lord shall dispose. I believe at times He can and He does make even the most bitter ingredients in our cup sweet unto us when He walks with us in the trial, in the affliction, and brings into the soul the peculiar sense of the spirit of adoption. There is such a thing as falling into the Lord's hands.

As the sufferings of Christ abound in us..." They do not refer to the substitutional sufferings, for they cannot abound in us in a personal sense, but there is a bearing of the cross by His faithful followers in which He is faithful to His own promise of divine support, and in enabling them to follow in that path that He has appointed them. It is a wonderful thing for a child of God to feel a sense of the Lord's approbation in trouble. "There is something remarkable about that and it is so when the Lord is with you. He can and He does deal with our sins and chastens us on account of them, but does so manifest His love thereby as to

produce a holy conformity. This and this alone will make the bitter sweet and the waters of Marah not only drinkable but refreshing and reviving to the soul. The experience is peculiar and can never be brought into the heart of another by describing it, but it is very, very real. I believe it could be said that all the Lord's people exercised in divine things will feel it, that is to say they will not be left absolutely, but will feel a secret prop and find support, a heavenly consolation. It keeps them from sinking, supports them in the conflict, brings them through, and eventually effects deliverance. The Apostle says in referring to this "Who delivered us from so great a death and doth deliver, in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us." It is faith alone that can reflect, gather up present things, and commit future things into the Lord's good hands. This has often been sweet to me as you know, the way the Apostle Paul expresses it with a gracious caution "Who delivered us from so great a death and doth deliver, in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us." This is not to be considered as a doubting whether He will or not, but by way of a holy confidence, leaning upon Him, looking to Him, trusting in Him. Having been comforted by past helps and deliverances, faith resigns an uncertain future, to us a dark future, into His hands, and then there is a wonderful rest. It is a sweet rest that faith finds in this resigning of our concerns into His keeping. Then you can say "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee."

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