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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at Shaw's Corner Chapel, Redhill on Friday evening, May 25th., 1951.

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." 2 Corinthians 4.17

It must be remembered that the Apostle describes here an experience that is absolutely peculiar to a living child of God, and moreover he seems by these words to point out the great distinction, in effect, in relation to the afflictions that befall mankind in this way. Afflictions attend all, whether children of God or not. Heavy afflictions, sorrows, losses, attend worldly people. But the great distinction lies in this - they do not work for them. This bears an evidence of one's being a real vessel of mercy, when the cross is graciously sanctified, when things, however adverse, are made to work for us. It is a wonderful mercy to be an heir of heaven, to be called out of nature's darkness into the light of truth and to some gracious knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom to know is eternal life.

If that be the case with us, there will be three things that will concern us and be more or less constantly with us. The first is the example that is set before us. As soon as we lose sight of Him, we go wrong. It is only as faith is enabled to keep a steadfast eye that we can consistently pursue the narrow path. And this is very beautifully described by the Apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews where referring to the cloud of witnesses that are recorded for our comfort and encouragement he says: "Let us lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus," looking to Him, not only as an able and all-sufficient Saviour, which He is, but as an example whom we should follow. One end in Christ's sufferings is to leave us an example to follow in His steps. We cannot be wrong there, because if we are really following the Lamb of God, and have Him before us in the view of faith, as we may be so favoured, we shall one day see Him face to

face.

Not only is there the example that is before us in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ as an example to follow, but there is also the path that is appointed us, and it is very confirming when we can feel that it is appointed us, not just concluding by deduction that what is to be will be, but to see in a gracious way all events in our lives, however adverse or minute, are in a Father's hand and appointed by Him. It is very sweetly consoling to the spirit when we can enter right into those two lines-

"A Father's hand prepares the cup,
And what He wills is best."

because, when you can really feel that and enjoy that relationship, you will receive every ingredient in that cup your Father disposes to give you. And when you can really receive every ingredient, it loses its bitterness. The bitter is made sweet like the waters of Marah when the tree was cast into them.

Then as well as the path that is appointed for us there is the end that is awaiting us. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." And it is a great thing to feel an assurance of that. Many of the Lord's people may not feel able to use that word there "we know", but would say "we hope that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens". But if the Lord comes and blesses your soul you will know it then. There is such a thing in spiritual experience as an unwavering assurance, that is absolutely free from all presumption. It is just the sweet confidence of faith under a sacred view of covenant interest in a Redeemer's love.

But who can tell what the Lord may have appointed us in this life? There will be some afflictions, but they will be light afflictions to the Lord's people. Not that they are light in their nature, actually or often. They may be very, very heavy. They may be like to deep waters where you feel you will sink and

never rise again. But still they are light afflictions, none the less. They have with some of the Lord's people been very heavy. They were with the Apostle Paul, who suffered greatly for Christ's sake. Stripes and imprisonment and stoning and scourging, and perils on land and sea and from robbers and his own countrymen, and I do not know what beside, yet he said "Our light affliction" and I believe he said this in the light of all this, yea, and even in the light of death itself; for in writing to the Romans he said "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us"; and it may be some of you feel you have as much as you can carry, but still they are light afflictions. They are light afflictions in every case. They are light afflictions however heavy they may feel to be upon your spirits or in your lives. They are light afflictions, not in themselves; they are very burdensome; they are light afflictions by comparison.

This is where the point applies with the Lord's people - they are light comparatively speaking. It is in this way. They are light afflictions by reason of their transitory nature. This is the point with the Apostle here. "For our light affliction which is but for a moment". Not our light affliction which is for ever so many years, though it may be that, and it is in some cases, even bodily affliction, but "which is but for a moment", that is, compared with Eternity. However long they are, they are but for a moment, for our life is but as a flash, a spark, a moment, compared to Eternity. In fact, there cannot be any comparison. Life must soon terminate, but Eternity never will terminate. No comparison can be drawn actually, but in this way it can be said that they are light afflictions, because they must be short, though they may be sharp. "Our light affliction".

This, then, is one point that applies in this case. But they are also light afflictions when we can look beyond them instead of looking to them. They are light affliction working for us, "While we look not at the things which are seen." Is there

not a great propensity to look at seen instead of unseen things? All the things this side of the grave are, so to speak, seen things, material things, temporal things. "For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Now this is what constitutes them light afflictions, when by faith we look beyond and above the affliction itself to unseen and eternal realities. This will sustain the soul in and under the deep waters. "Our light affliction which is but for a moment."

Another point is, they are light afflictions compared with what we deserve. "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" One sin is enough to merit eternal punishment, because it is a violation of God's holy law that demands perfect and absolute obedience. "And he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all." You may often hear people say "Well, it might be worse," when they speak of certain things and certain afflictions, and that is perfectly true. But that may be very casual and a very different thing from feeling our deep sinnership in the sight of God, and perceiving that we owe to Him every blessing above what the fiends have in hell. A deep sense of our unworthiness of the least of His mercies will constitute our afflictions light afflictions, or at least greatly lighten the burden of them.

Then there is this very choice point too. They are light afflictions when we are graciously supported under them.

"How light when supported by grace
Are all the afflictions I see."

I would not speak lightly on these points or lightly of afflictions. But there is a peculiar experience here that is wonderfully choice to feel, and which is peculiar to exercised souls. That is the Lord's presence felt right in the midst of these afflictions, which, when enjoyed, makes them very light. Yes, and it does something more than that; it brings a holy willingness to bear them. A few moments of that is sweet fellowship with the Lord Jesus in His own sufferings. Have you got as far into Gethsemane, so to speak, as to be able to say "not my will but Thine be done"?

With Jesus there, concerning your own matters and your afflictions, you have felt them to be light afflictions. "There is a very sweet resignation of the spirit that is occasionally felt in a child of God, that words cannot describe, that may steal over you in the silent watches of the night, and break you to pieces. O, this is wonderfully sweet.

Then there is another point that is very sacred, and that is, they are light afflictions compared with what the Saviour suffered.

"At most we do but taste the cup
For He alone has drunk it up."

That is all we could do. "That is all we have strength to do. That is all the Lord intends we should do. We should be consumed if it went any further. Yet in the heart at times is a sweet fellowship when, perhaps in heavy afflictions in your soul or body or circumstances, you get a glimpse of an agonising God. "They are very light then.

They are light afflictions too with the Lord's people because there is no curse in them. It would be very terrible if there was. We should sink and never, never rise again if there was a curse in them. But in the Redeemer's sufferings there was a curse. Whose curse was that? It was ours, that was transferred to Him. The Apostle declares that to be so in writing to the Galatians. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." You will not have a hard heart many seconds if you are brought into that. "His unworthy me, to be thus favoured to have the sting taken out of affliction! And you may be favoured to go as far as this and say "Light afflictions, because the Lord has brought His love into my soul in them, and not His curse." And is not that a wonderful thing? O, His love is never so sweet as when we are in the depths of some trouble. And that is usually, if not always, where He brings it in, and then it drives the trouble out and He fills our hearts with Himself. Perhaps just before you had been as rebellious as you could possibly be, but in a few moments you would not move a straw. No, and this is when these light afflictions work

for us. They work for us, and this is not a cold bit of theology, but a very choice experience. Yes, they work for us, because they bring us to His blessed feet, weeping, mourning, rejoicing, and heaping untold praises on His blessed head.

"Our light affliction which is but for a moment". They are light afflictions compared with the sufferings of the damned in hell. We have never been there. O, may God in His great mercy grant that we never shall, any of us. And we cannot contemplate that penal punishment, where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched. But I will tell you this. You may, and you probably will, under the lashes of the law, feel a hell in your conscience, the wrath of an offended God, and you may get a taste there of the bitterness of that. But if you are favoured to see the law fulfilled in the perfect obedience of your Emmanuel, then all sufferings will, comparatively speaking, be light afflictions.

They are light afflictions compared with the glory that is waiting for us if we are His.

"The joys prepared for suffering saints
Will make amends for all"

I have sometimes mentioned what I heard my dear Father say when I was quite a boy, and I have never forgotten it. He said: "It will be worth a life-long struggle to be right at last." And it will be a life-long struggle if we are going to be right at last. For hell and Satan and sin and a thousand other things will obstruct the way, but they will never overcome us. No, never.

"Our light affliction which worketh for us." This is a very close point to consider and may cause some searching of heart. Are our afflictions really working for us? "O", say you, "well, I do not know how to put up with some things and I do not think I shall much longer." But if that is all there is in it, can they be said to be working for you? "O, but why should I put up with this?" Why did the Saviour put up with what He put up with for you? But they work for us, they will be sure to work for us if we are the Lord's people, notwithstanding all the uprisings we may have against

them. And we shall have some uprisings against them, all of us. We are sure to, because that is according to nature. But still they will work for us in the purposes of God, in the end.

But how can they work for us? Well, they work for us when they loosen us from the world and its things. A friend was speaking at the tea-table just a little of the goodness of God to him, and he said: "When you get a little of that sweet brokenness of spirit, then there is nothing in the world." O, have we really got that choice experience? Then the Lord fills the heart and there is not room for anything else, spiritually speaking of course I mean.

They work for us when they are sanctified to us, and there is a great deal in that word 'sanctification'. To sanctify is to set apart from a common to a particular use. Now your afflictions work for you when they are the means, in the Lord's hand, of separating you, not only from the world, but from yourself; and that means more separating than anything else. But it is profoundly sweet when we are really separated from all but Him, and are brought to His blessed feet. They work for us. They will work for you if you are a child of God. Perhaps you will say: "Well, I do not bear much evidence of this." Neither do I, alas. But they will. In the course of your life you will find they do. They work for us when they cause us a deeper exercise of soul about spiritual things. With all that we may have had or hope we have had, we can get very cold, luke-warm, which is worse, I think, and very distant, very hard. But if the Lord touches us with a chastening hand and sanctifies that chastening hand, it breaks us down, doesn't it?

They work for us when they produce repentance and holy contrition for sin, and they will do that now and again. They will in our spiritual experience, and it is very sweet. They work for us when they bring us to a Throne of Grace, and it may be remind you that you have not been there lately. Perhaps you say "Well, I have had no particular need." That can never really be so with a child of God. But you may have no pressing need, and the mercy-seat may be neglected in consequence. And then the Lord touches in some

way and the scene soon changes and it is; "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee... When my heart is overwhelmed lead me to the rock that is higher than I".

They work for us when they bring a gracious submission to the will of God as I have hinted earlier. There are moments when a very sweet submission is enjoyed in the soul. They are working for us then, and there is no cross-current between the will of God and your soul. Moreover they work for us because they are put in our path for a specific purpose. No cross, no loss, no affliction, is purposeless in God's account; they work for us. They work for us when they bring us into sensible communion with Him, and they are the means of this sometimes. And I doubt not that some of the choicest moments of communion that you have had have been in the depths of some trouble. Yes, some of you, some of us I think we can say, may have walked down a street in Redhill or a street in London, and have felt we could look up and say "Lord, I am satisfied with Thy will concerning me. Satisfied." It is wonderfully sweet then. I felt that very particularly at the time when my settlement at Clapham was pending. One bitter cold, snowy dreary Sunday, I went up and the Lord favoured my soul very sweetly in the railway carriage and I walked about the streets up there (dirty streets they were, some of them) and I said "Lord, I would not have anything altered. Thy will satisfies me." But the secret of that was, the Lord was in my heart and I loved Him and that put everything else right. Our afflictions are light afflictions then. What a sweet willingness there is, not only to follow Him, but to run after Him. When His love touches your heart you cannot be offended. No, but if we are left to ourselves we may soon, and we do soon, start fighting. But the Lord has a wonderful way of making us lay down our weapons and embrace Him.

They work for us a far more exceeding weight of glory, that is what they work for us. It does not say they work for us a fortune here or a great name in this world, or a great reputation among men, but something far beyond all that, "An eternal weight

of glory." Not a weight of glory for seven years or a hundred years, but an eternal weight of glory. What is that? Well, it appears to me to show that, if by His mercy we enter those eternal habitations, the cup of glory will be full to over-flowing, world without end, never to cease. And if it should be that we could reflect at such a time (for the sake of hypothesis) we should certainly say that all the afflictions were light afflictions compared with the glory prepared for us. An eternal weight of glory! What is heaven? This is heaven, that eternal weight of glory. But what is heaven? It is to be where Jesus is. What heaven could be greater than that? But there is something more in this eternal weight of glory than being where He is. It will be to be like Him, transformed, not to His suffering image, but to His glorified image. And if we are never transformed to His suffering image here, how shall we be transformed to His glorified image there? No cross, no crown. They are rather striking words, I think, "Far more". Far more than what? Far more than these light afflictions. Yes, one day, if we are His, we shall be where former things will have passed away, and there will be no more trouble, no more light afflictions, no more heavy ones. All soon will be left behind. I know my people have heard me say it before, but many years ago working in my shop in Brighton, and wondering what heaven would be like, the Lord brought that wonderful word into my soul: "We know not 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." And I said "Lord, that will be my heaven." Yes, and that will be your heaven. Amen.