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preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday morning 11.7.71

Hymns 480, 117, 159

Reading - 1 Corinthians 15 (1-28)

Text - Ephesians 1.22 and 23

"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church. Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all".

These two verses appear to be a concluding observation by the Apostle of his prayer referred to in the 15th. and 16th. verses, "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him". His desire is that the following things to which he refers may be their experience, that they may have a spiritual and gracious understanding and knowledge of these vital realities. You may remember I referred to this last Sabbath day, that in order to any right understanding of these things we need that spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. If we have this blessing then the eyes of our spiritual understanding will be thereby enlightened, so that we "may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints". Here he goes on to refer to the glorious exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ, that all things are put under His feet, which of course is a figurative expression indicating His supreme control over all things. All things friends. So that must be your things, otherwise it would not be all things if our things were left out; but it does not say that the Father hath put some things under His feet, for if it did we should be left in question about our own case and position; but the Father has "put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church". The fact that this is so is expressed in what I read in 1st. Corinthians 15, that this ascended and exalted Saviour has all things put under His feet and that He is head over all things to the church, and every believer that is in the church of God; they are all believers that are

in the true church of Christ, because the church is His body, "His body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all".

This profoundly blessed termination of the Apostle's prayer can be strengthening to the faith of the Lord's troubled ones as they are enabled to realise that whatever may concern them here, and their eternal destiny is all under His feet. Nothing is beyond His power, no enemy can prevail against Him; all indicates His supreme control. This can be sweet to feel, it can enter into the minutest circumstances of our lives for these are all under His feet; it does not say "excepting some things that are beyond His power", for if a small thing is under His feet then a great thing is under His feet, and what is the greatest thing as far as we are concerned that must be under His feet? Surely it must be the redemption of our never-dying souls, and ultimately of our body, as we read in the Scripture, to be glorified and with Him for ever. This then as far as we are concerned in our own particular cases is the great thing. Everything else really comes beneath it in its importance to us, because this is a blessing that will never, never terminate. The redemption of our souls is a blessing that will be for ever and ever, world without end, which cannot be affirmed of any providence so considered, important as those providences may be. This is a point of faith, dear friends, here, the Father has put all things under His feet; that is, all is placed under His control, supreme control, mediatorially; for this refers to His mediatorial exaltation and power, for we read that before the Lord Jesus went up into heaven He said to His disciples, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth".

All things are put under His feet. This is a confirming point in relation to the ministry, because the Lord connects it in this way, seeing that all things are put under My feet, "Go ye therefore as servants of mine and proclaim this Gospel to all nations, proclaim to them my supremacy, proclaim to them a once crucified and now exalted Saviour, proclaim it to them, preach Christ to them. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations", preach this Gospel that all things are put under my feet and teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded them.

It can be very sweet to feel this. But all things include something else as well as His supreme authority and power; all things being put under His feet incorporates His guiding hand guiding and controlling all these things. We can believe this doctrine theologically, and I believe we do, but we want this precious doctrine to come into our hearts, lives, circumstances, need, difficulties, burdens, afflictions, and many other things, and it does, for in all these things it is a guiding hand. I like so much what Asaph said after the Lord appeared to him and delivered him from his conflicting feelings; he said, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory", as though he would say, 'Lord Thou must guide me through this intricate path, amidst all these difficult things, these hard things, these painful things, you must take me by the hand, Lord, and guide me through them, and when I come to the end of them all take my soul into heaven'. We find Asaph saying, almost as though he was there, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee". We can hardly be nearer to heaven than that while we are down here, and if we get that view of Him we shall feel in a sweet and particular way that all our things are put under His feet. He guides us through this wilderness where are fiery serpents and scorpions and many things that would otherwise consume us. He takes us by the hand as much, if not more, when we are right down in the valley as when we are up on the mountain side. We need Him more down in the valley of trouble and affliction, we need Him sensibly and consciously more, He takes us by the hand and carries us through.. Many of the Lord's people have felt as though the Lord had carried them through this or that matter, and they had seen the mountain fall and the valley filled. They are all under His feet, He guides us through them, although the path is dark and heavy and we feel weary and sometimes ready to faint and give everything up; yet all the time He is guiding us with His hand we shall not fail or give up, He bears us safely through; He has put all things under His feet. You have never come to a place yet where He has said, "This matter is beyond my power"; we have to say that, we may often have to say it but He does not because all things are under His feet.

Then there is another sweet point, and that is "there is an end in view". However dark we may feel to be, however heavy the burden, or intense the conflict, He will lead and guide us through, for He has an end in view. What is the end in view? It is to have you to be with Him for ever, to receive you up to the mansions above when your appointed days shall be.

All things are put under His feet - but there are some points leading up to this that I would like to consider. In verse 19 the Apostle refers to the exceeding greatness of His power. What does he mean by this? I believe the Apostle refers to the greatness of the power of God in Christ to usward who believe, for it points to this. This may refer particularly to Christ's mediatorial power that the Father has put into His hands, as you can see, and which He exercises, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead. This is a beautiful point. After the Father raised Him from the dead you see He exalted Him at His own right hand and put all things under His feet. This is the glory of His mediation in heaven where He is now exalted a prince and a Saviour to give repentance to Israel and remission of their sins. It is wonderful indeed to get a sight of Him; it is something more than simply reading about Him, which we can do any time; but if you get something beyond that in the eye of your faith, if you by faith view an exalted and all-sufficient Saviour, able to save unto the uttermost all who come to Him, and that all things are under His feet, it can greatly help you to commit your way unto Him, because it is by this exercise of faith you see Him in a believing heart. As you apprehend the blessed truth in a gracious experimental way it has this sweet reaction in your own soul. You can cast your care upon Him feeling that all things are put under His feet.

"The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe". His power, it is true, is exceeding great in creation, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"; and sometimes we can look up to the material heavens and see these dynamic bodies there, the sun, moon and stars, all as strong, fresh and clear and beautiful as when they were created. They do not wane in any way

whatever, they do not weaken, nothing in creation weakens from this point of view; no, here is the "exceeding greatness of His power". But there is a greater power than all creation can give and that is "the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe". What power is this then? Why it is the power of Christ that is wrought in Him by the Father, committed to Him, given to Him, and is put under His feet. This is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe in our redemption. It does not concern the world, the ungodly, the dead, the careless, the blind, but it is to us-ward who believe.

Now the exceeding greatness of His power, friends, can refer first of all to the new birth, for there cannot be any saving faith apart from the exceeding greatness of His power in the new life implanted within us, the new birth. We must be born again. The Apostle Peter says of the second birth, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever". If we are the subjects of this we come under this "exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe." This goes beyond the sun, moon, stars, and all creation, to something far more profound, more abiding, for heaven and earth shall pass away but the word of Christ, that shall abide for ever. Here then is the exceeding greatness of His power by His Spirit in quickening poor lost sinners from a state of death in sin. The Apostle says of these Ephesians, "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins". If the Lord has effected this, you see, if He has, if our souls have been quickened from a state of death unto spiritual life with some knowledge in a saving gracious way of a precious Redeemer, then we are the subjects - this is the point - we are the subjects of this exceeding greatness of His power. It all seems too much; it seems beyond us, it hardly seems that it can be that a poor man preaching here, and a few poor people hearing him, can be the subjects of the exceeding greatness of His power; but if there is life in our souls, it must be so, because something has been done for us and wrought within us that all the powers of nature could never do. We are the subjects of the exceeding greatness of

His power, for this is to us-ward who believe.

There is something else as well as this and that is the sustaining and upholding power of His grace to us-ward who believe all through our earthly pilgrimage, not simply the beginning, but as was mentioned in prayer this morning, "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." This performing incorporates all that we may have to pass through while we are here in this time state where there may be much groaning and crying, many heavy burdens to carry, and much to bear with, yet still it is the exceeding greatness of His power that sustains us under every load. So it was with the Apostle Paul, although he prayed very hard three times to have that thorn in the flesh removed from him, it was not the Lord's way in this instance, not because it was beyond His power to remove the thorn, not by any means; if He could raise a dead Lazarus He could remove a thorn, but that was not His purpose for certain reasons; therefore He said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee". This was the exceeding greatness of His power imparting all-sufficient grace, all-sufficient grace. What ever the path may be we cannot turn round a bend or a corner and be beyond the reach of all-sufficient grace. It is true we may be left to a backsliding state which is very sad, but all-sufficient grace can bring us back again to His dear feet in deep confession of our guilt and base backsliding. It may be a heavy burden that one has to carry but it is all-sufficient grace that supports under every load. There may be painful afflictions, but the exceeding greatness of His power can support under them, bear His people through them, and deliver from them too. The Lord assures us in the prophecy of Zechariah, "I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried", and the issue will be good. "They shall call upon Me and I will hear them, I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God". It is sweet to feel this when we are in the fire, are being brought through or have been brought through. He can give quietness of spirit, confidence, and grace, to go through the dark valley, through the

fire, through the furnace, through the flood, proving all-sufficient grace.

"The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe". Then there is something else beside this and that is there is the end He has in view in all these matters, and what can that be? Ultimately it will be the resurrection of the body, the redemption of the purchased possession. All this rests upon the power of an exalted Saviour, in the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, that is, who believe in the exceeding greatness of His power, who believe in what He has already accomplished, who believe that He is able to save them to the uttermost, who believe that He will never fail of His Word, who believe that where He has begun a work He will complete it, who believe that nothing is too hard for Him. "To us-ward who believe". So it is, dear friends. that all the blessings of a risen and exalted Saviour are procured for His dear people in and through His substitution. All these spiritual blessings mentioned at the beginning of the chapter are to us-ward who believe. That places great importance on the matter of believing, not just as I have before hinted in a general credence of things, but the power of faith in a believing soul. This can be wonderfully sweet, quieting, separating, strengthening and confirming. It can bring sweet submission in the heart as being to us-ward who believe. So, as the church is blessed in all spiritual blessings, all these spiritual blessings are to us-ward who believe. Perhaps sometimes you may feel you can say, "Lord I believe, help Thou my unbelief". You may feel like the poor blind man when the Lord came to him and said, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" and he responded saying, "Lord I believe, help Thou may unbelief". This is a secret conviction that can fill your heart, I am sure it can, when the Lord is with you and when you can feel something of the power of His blessed Gospel. It enables you to say it, "Lord, I believe , said the blind man and he worshipped Him". This is the exceeding greatness of His power according to the working of His mighty power. We read in Isaiah, "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it

shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please." So it is in the experience of His people, it is according to the working of His mighty power as He is pleased to exercise it in your case or mine for there are not two alike, are there.? There are not two alike in their circumstances. Sometimes it may be needful for the Lord to deal quite differently with one in some particular circumstance from what He may in another, for certain reasons known best to Himself. He exercises that power committed to Him in a sovereign gracious way as He may see fit according to the working of His mighty power. Is not this sometimes particularly felt? It can be felt like this in regard to prayer. As you know, sometimes the Lord has been pleased to answer prayer immediately, as we read, "While they are yet calling I will answer". Sometimes, but because the Lord may do that with one, it does not mean that He will do it every time or always with others, or always with that same person. He may answer prayer immediately according to the working of His mighty power if He so disposes, or He can try your faith by a considerable delay, yet still intending to answer that prayer. Why not answer it straight away in some spectacular manner? That may not always be for the best. It is as He shall see fit. He deals with our matters, our afflictions, our troubles, our burdens, that crook that you may have in your lot or that thorn in the flesh, He deals with our matters in a sovereign way, and yet brings us to admire His sovereignty in so doing, if you can understand me in this. He may keep us waiting sometimes concerning some particular matter until He has brought us to see the reason, and to thank Him for the way He has dealt with us in the matter. All this comes into the working of His mighty power to us-ward. Truly this is a confirming and beautiful word, in the view of faith it carries us over everything as we are helped to view this exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe. This power is all-sufficient, it is unlimited, it is almighty power. All things are under His feet; but the working of it out is in a sense another matter. This can be in a mysterious

way, often it is a mysterious way and yet it is always effective.

Then we read in the following verse relating to the Father "which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places." This is very blessed to faith, is it not? There He is exalted, but we must remember that there could be no resurrection and exaltation of the dear Redeemer from the dead apart from the sufferings He had to pass through, that brought Him eventually to the grave. As we by grace contemplate these intolerable sufferings of our holy blessed Substitute, we solemnly observe their necessity to procure for us all spiritual blessings according to the greatness of His power to us-ward who believe. The terrible suffering,agony and death the dear Saviour endured to which He so freely submitted Himself, His glorious resurrection again from the dead, a blessed day indeed it was, and His ascension up into the heavens, constitute one complete work securing the eternal salvation of all who truly by His grace believe according to the "greatness of His power to us-ward". How expressive is the hymn,

"That wrath would have kindled a hell
Of never-abating despair,
In millions of creatures, which fell
On Jesus, and spent itself there."

Here I must leave it. Amen.