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Sermon preached at "Ebenezer", Clapham by Mr. J. Delves on  
Wednesday evening, 10th. November, 1948

Text: "According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye  
came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among: fear ye not"  
Haggai 2.5

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The teaching in this prophecy appears to be two-fold. It is first to reprove the people for what appeared to be a spirit of neglect or indifference that had overtaken them because of certain very discouraging conditions. The foundations of the temple had been laid but the work had been grievously hindered through strong opposition; in fact, it had been stopped for the time being through the subtlety of their enemies and it seemed as though the people had become, more or less, settled down to their conditions. I suppose they thought, Well, the temple can never be built, it is an impossible thing now; it is doubtful whether it will ever be started again, the case is altogether hopeless; we shall never see the temple built now, therefore we will settle down, we will build our houses, we will have ceiled houses, we will dwell comfortably in them and make the best we can of things; but as for the temple, that can never be built. O, is there not something in that even for us? But the prophet was raised up by God solemnly to exhort the people on account of this; he calls them to consider their ways. "Now therefore thus saith the LORD of Hosts; Consider your ways." Do not say, It is of no use, the temple cannot be built, as soon as we start on it the enemy will come and overthrow it; it is of no use attempting it again. Now the Word of the Lord comes to them, "Consider your ways, go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house"; build it, and do not say it is an impossible thing. "Build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.

Then the prophet goes on to open up certain things which were a solemn voice to the people. Although, of course, they had suffered some very discouraging things, they seemed to have fallen a prey to adverse circumstances and now the prophet is raised up by

the Lord to encourage them to go on with the work. It is to be noticed that the Governor and the High Priest and the people are all encouraged in rather striking terms to put their hands to the work. They were not to sit down and say, Well now it is a hopeless case, we have worked hard but it is all so difficult, it is like a great mountain, it can never be done; for there was no faith in them. Neither is that faith in us when things appear so discouraging. I know there is a tendency thus to conclude, but the word came very particularly to these people, to the Governor and to the Priest, "Now be strong, O Zerubbabel". You who saw this house in its first glory; it was a wonderful building, a most magnificent place, it was the wonder of the world, there was not another Church like it. "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now?" A heap of ruins. "Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" But what about that? Do not give up, do not fall a prey to despair; the Lord says, O Zerubbabel, you are the Foreman, you have the thing in your hands, you are the Governor, you are the Leader, "Be strong, O Zerubbabel saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the High Priest." Be strong. You should be an incentive to the rest, you should encourage them. Be strong Zerubbabel, Joshua, be strong, all ye people of the land saith the Lord, Be strong, and work - and work! Do not sit down here and say, O, the Lord will do it; work. "Be strong and work for I AM with you saith the LORD of Hosts."

"I AM with you". We read in the prophecy of Zechariah that the prophet was raised up to encourage the people to this end; the Word of the Lord came unto him for the same purpose saying, "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." You will see the great secret here; this working seems to rest on a basis, it rests on a foundation, a promise, "Work, for I AM with you saith the LORD of Hosts;" not work, you will have no discouragements, everything will go well, all will be plain sailing. No, "Work for I AM with you,

saith the LORD of Hosts"; That is the secret of all good success. The building shall be completed without question, but it would be by the power of God in the people, not by human might of itself. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." But "Work for I AM with you." O but my need is so great. Yes I AM with you to supply that need. O but my enemies are so strong. I AM with you to fight your battles. O but my fears rise so high. I AM with you to allay your fears. O but I shall never get through. I AM with you to bring you through. Be strong and work. O but my enemies are strong. Be strong, though your enemies are stronger than you, that does not mean that you will fall even if your enemies are stronger. Faith is the great principle, be strong in Me saith the Lord, not in yourself, not in a fleshly confidence, but be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. O but it is too hard for me. Be strong, saith the Lord, it is not too hard for Me. O but I am faced with difficulties that are insurmountable. Yes, they are to you, but not to God. "Who art thou O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain."

Here is the Lord's Word and here is a very gracious promise; not only that the building should be completed, that the difficulties should be overcome, but there is a greater promise than that, - a greater promise here than of a beautiful building, a magnificent structure, that will be the admiration of all who see it; there is a promise here surpassing all that. What is the promise? "My Spirit shall remain among you, therefore fear ye not." It is the promise that the glory of the Lord will be in the place. "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of Hosts, and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of Hosts." There was a promise of distinct blessing worth more than a Cathedral, worth more than any material magnificence. This has borne its influence on my heart. "My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not."

This you see was the Word that the Lord covenanted with them when He brought them out of Egypt. They came out of Egypt, but how did they come out? The Lord brought them out with a mighty hand. Could they have come out of Egypt in their own strength? Could they

have overcome the difficulties? No. What then was the secret behind all these remarkable events. It was the Word the Lord covenanted with them when they came out, and that was the secret behind the whole thing, the ultimate fulfilment of that promise. Although the Lord covenanted with them not only to bring them out, but to bring them in to the promised land, yet were they faced with many difficulties that threatened destruction and with seeming impossibilities. They were an absolutely dependent people and so are we; but still, He covenanted with them, therefore the Covenant made must be fulfilled. It was fulfilled in their case, it will be fulfilled in your case. "According to the word that I covenanted with you." With whom did the Lord covenant? Well, He made His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, with Moses, with Israel, and all unto the same end. He made it with Abraham, assuring him that his seed would be great and that he should be greatly blessed, that he should be a father of many nations, and said, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." He covenanted with him - and the Lord does not play with people, does He? If He covenants with you it will come to pass. O but it is all dead. It matters not about the death. Why if there appear seven deaths to come on it, if the Lord covenant with you that covenant will be honoured, for He never goes back. He covenanted with Isaac at Beersheba, He covenanted with Jacob, assuring him of the same blessing in his seed that was promised to Abraham and to Isaac. He spoke to him from above the ladder saying, "I AM the LORD God of Abraham thy father and the God of Isaac". And what is this covenanting of the Lord with His people? Well it is a making over His Word, His promise unto them. He covenanted with Israel. Although that was a national covenant and the promise involved a great temporal good and blessing, yet that is a type of that spiritual covenant, the covenant of grace that the Lord makes with His spiritual Israel. "According to the word that I covenanted with you" - as though He said, I promised you My good Spirit and that will remain among you, I will not take it away. So Nehemiah said, "Thou gavest also Thy good Spirit to instruct them."

Well now, could you hope to feel that has ever been so in your case? Can you look back in your spiritual experience to any spot or place and feel that the Lord covenanted with you, when He brought you out of your Egypt, when you came out of the world, when He took you in hand, when He opened your blind eyes, when He quickened you into divine life, when He brought you out of your Egyptian bondage? Has the Lord ever covenanted with you? If so, He will fulfil that covenant. He makes it with His people. He made it with David, as he himself affirms. "Although my house be not so with God, yet hath He made with me an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, for this is all my salvation and all my desire." Now have you had the Word of God in your heart? Say you, How can I know if ever God has covenanted with me? Well, I believe you can, at least I believe you can have reason to hope, if not deceived, that the Lord has covenanted with you. His covenant is in His Word. Now has there ever been a time when you have really felt the Word of the Lord come into your heart? I know some people make much of 'words' and seem often to get them. We must leave that matter between the person concerned and the Lord; but we believe that the Lord does apply His gracious promise unto His people, and that is covenanting with them, the promise being a covenant promise.

Every gospel promise is in Christ "Yea, and in Him Amen unto the glory of God by us.". Now if you are kept lively, I believe you will hear the Lord's voice. "My sheep hear My voice", He says, they do, they will, hear My voice. You may hear it sometimes in reproof, in admonition, in direction. But has there ever been an occasion when you have heard the Lord's voice in a promise in your heart? O, say you, Well I believe I have felt something once but how can I know whether it comes from the Lord? Well, I believe there is a point here. When the Holy Spirit is at work with a child of God what you feel will operate in your heart, that is in your affections; it will move you, it will humble you, there will be an influence in it, it will not be a theory, it will not be just reading and taking something, you will feel the sweetness of it. Have you ever felt that? If so, then the

Lord has covenanted with you. I would not like to set anyone down short in this because it is very important, but I believe myself when the Lord does covenant with a person, a child of His, when that word is applied, or that promise given, it makes a mark, as it were, in the soul of that person that is never erased. It is like a kind of a seal; it makes an impression in the heart. It is not something you feel, or look at, and say, that is very nice, a beautiful promise, a lovely word; no, not that, but an influence, a power in your heart in the receiving of that promise that draws your affections to the Lord, humbles you at His feet, works repentance, brings confession, puts you in the dust, gives you to admire His goodness and seals you, as it were, as one of His children -

"According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt." O, say you, Well what word does the Lord use when He covenants with His people? He will use His own Word; we are not to take a word that someone else may have had and try to apply that to ourselves. When the Lord comes He brings His own Word, He brings His own graces, He brings His own influence, He brings His own love. He fills the heart, He draws you forth unto Himself, He raises a hope in you that you are one of His children according to the word that He covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. "So My Spirit remaineth among you, fear ye not." He does not say, in this case, I will send My Spirit to you; no, they had His Spirit already. "My Spirit remaineth among you", that is to say, I will not take it away; and this is designed for your comfort to sustain you in your difficulties; this is to hold you up under your discouragements; this is to enable you to be strong, to be of good courage. "My Spirit remaineth among you, fear ye not."

In these days there is a grievous withholding of the Spirit of the Lord, hence the desolation and bondage, the darkness and worldliness, and the lack of conformity and liveliness. Yes these are sad days but still there is this confirming word here "My Spirit remaineth among you, fear ye not." You are My people, I have brought you out of Egypt, I design purposes of grace toward you, not for anything in you as being better than the rest, but because I would.

"The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all people, but because the Lord loved you." "So My Spirit remaineth among you, fear ye not." This is a searching point with us really. Do we feel the influence and authority of that good Spirit as being with us, remaining with us, though there may be trying things, weakening things, conflicts, fear, discouragement, seeming impossibilities? Still "My Spirit remaineth among you, fear ye not."

Now this is the great point. O, may His Spirit remain with us! His Spirit is in the Churches, it is in the one true Church of God. I believe it ever will be, because they are the Lord's children, the spiritual Church, those whom He has gathered out from the world that lieth in wickedness and anointed by His grace; He will bring them through. It may be a rugged track, but His Spirit will remain among them. Therefore there is no actual need or reason to fear. O may His Spirit remain! I believe His good Spirit does dwell in the hearts of His people; this is a word of the Lord concerning it. "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your Spirit which are God's". It is very sacred to feel that. His people are not their own property, they are Christ's property and belong to Him and His Spirit dwells in them. "He shall dwell in you." Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost which we have of God, we are not our own. My Spirit remaineth among you in this sense in My indwelling. This is what makes a real religion so sacred, so profound, a blessed, solemn reality. There is no real experience of the truth apart from the Holy Spirit. This is His gracious office to open the blind eyes and to bring forth the prisoners out of the prison. We read of the washing of water and renewing of the Holy Ghost. Can we feel this in our own case? Can you and I feel that His Spirit is thus remaining with us, dwelling in us? May His Spirit remain among us! Everything depends upon this. This is the greatest blessing we can have. Though we be in evil days and though so many things bear a

discouraging aspect, yet we shall know the sweetness, the sacredness and blessedness of vital things if His Spirit remains among us in His gracious influence.

O, this is a great thing. How much of this actually do we feel? and how much are we actuated and moved by the influence of this good Spirit? We read about an anointing that teacheth of all things and is truth and is no lie, we read about that, but how much do we know of that sacred anointing? Can we feel that this unction, the unction of the Holy One, is really with us? Does it move us? Does it influence our words and actions and thoughts? Does it remain with us? Can you look over things today or during the past few days and perceive in your own feelings the softening influence of the Holy Spirit in your heart? In your private moments, in your meditations, in your contemplations, can you really feel as before the Lord, that His Spirit's influence is moving and actuating you aright? "My Spirit remaineth among you." This you will see is the very life and substance of all. If this is lacking, if this good Spirit is lacking, we may have a form of godliness but we know not its blessed power. May His Spirit remain among us! May He remain among us in His softening operations! Are you able to trace anything in your experience as being the Spirit's work, that He has done. Have there been times when the Lord has shone upon His work; so as to assure you that it was His Spirit's work, in conviction of sin, in showing you where you were, your guilty sins, your great need of the blood of Christ, of His free mercy? Have you felt that? My Spirit remaineth among you in His saving operations. Nothing less is saving. We may have a lot of religion, a lot of works, and we are told here to work, but His Spirit is the great thing. Unless there are those saving operations there can be no saving effect, no gracious fruit.

What are these operations of the Spirit in our hearts? Well they come in a number of things; they come in conviction, in repentance, confession, forgiveness, a knowledge of Christ, many things. Can you feel anything of that? Is there any power at times



in your heart that draws you to a Throne of Grace, that brings you before the Lord? "My Spirit remaineth among you." Yes! and may His Spirit remain among us to guide us into all truth! I believe He does do this. There will be no real opening up of the precious gospel in the soul apart from this good Spirit, to guide us experimentally into the truth. There can be no real receiving of the nature of the gospel in the heart apart from this good Spirit. He may teach us more in a few minutes by His gracious revelation of the truth than we can ever attain by any natural means. O may His Spirit thus remain among us in these revelations! May He remain among us to glorify Christ! "He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you." O blessed revelation! Sweet opening up is this of the Person of Emmanuel in the soul. Have you ever had any of this? I think you will know if you have.

"Dost mind the place the spot of land  
Where Jesus did thee meet?  
And how He got thy heart and hand?  
Thy Husband then was sweet!"

O have there not been a few occasions in your life when the Lord Jesus has made Himself more precious than words can say? when He has filled you with a sense of His goodness so that you could say, "There is neither Greek nor Jew, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all"? "So my Spirit remaineth among you."

Not only so but we need this good Spirit to remain among us to help our infirmities. O, what infirmities, say you? Well, the Apostle speaks about these infirmities in our praying; he says, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." And it is this Spirit which remains among you unto this end. Are there those groanings at times, and yet in those groanings a moving of your soul toward the Lord in earnest pleading, so that you could say, "Lord, all my desire is before Thee; and my groaning is not hid from Thee"? O, I believe you will be able to tell when the Spirit makes intercession in your heart when you pray. He will remove the bondage, He will bring you nigh, He brings the comfort, He will bring you, as it

were, to the Mercy Seat and will enable you to plead with the Lord for what you need. There is a sweet moving in this, a gracious liberty; you lose sight of self, this dreadful myself, and many other things; you see God, you see Christ, He draws your affections and you pray. He removes the infirmities; and when that is the case, you will ask for what the Lord designs to give. When this good Spirit helps your infirmities like this you will not pray in vain. May His Spirit remain among us in this particular.

May He remain among us to bring the gospel in living power into our hearts. It is not very much we know of this, is it? Yet the Apostle assured the Thessalonians that it was so with them. "For our gospel came not unto you in word only but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Say you, This is too high for me. Well, I do not know, but if this good Spirit remains with you, it will remain to bring this great gospel into your heart by the application of His blessings as you may feel to need them, the blessings that Christ is exalted to give. You see, if there is no power in the gospel in its application to your soul it will be but a dead letter. You must have it brought in. And who can bring it in? This good Spirit. And do you know what that is? Yes, you say, once or twice I believe the Lord has softened my heart when I have read His blessed Word and it has broken me to pieces; I have felt so unworthy and have told Him so; and the more I told Him I was unworthy, the more He blessed me, until I fell at His blessed feet and wept to the praise of the mercy I found. Do you know what He was doing? He was covenanting with you! and He will not go back, the Spirit will remain with you. You do not feel like that now? No, these seasons are very rare. Still there is a reviving again from time to time by the Lord's mercy.

This Spirit remains to keep the soul alive. But I get very dull and weary. Yes, you may get very dull, but if He has begun the good work in you He will perform it. He does not begin and then leave it, drop it or give it up. No, He completes what He begins, and if He has laid the foundations of this blessed temple in your heart, He will complete it, He will complete His own work of grace

in your heart. He will bring forth the headstone. His Spirit will remain; and this is an evidence of true discipleship. "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed." There have been some people who made a great show in their profession but have gone back into the world again. It has been a lot of wildfire; but where the Lord begins, His Spirit remains. He has brought you on thus far, through many storms and conflicts, many trials, and His Spirit remains. You have not fainted yet. Say you, I have fainted many times. Yes but you have not given up, and why not? Because His Spirit remains with you, that is the great secret. You see, if you are one of His, the Lord will not give you up. No, His Spirit remains. Watch this very closely, and if you are enabled to watch and pray you will find that His Spirit remains. You will not be left utterly desolate. You will not be entirely, absolutely forsaken. You may get into some very dark, low, desolate places, but even then His Spirit remains, and here and there amidst all your darkness and desolation, you will get a little lift. It may come now and again in the preaching or reading or in whatever way the Lord may dispose. His Spirit remains, and you will feel it. You may walk down a street and suddenly feel something drop into your heart that revives you, revives your hope, makes the things of Christ precious again, and you get a little lift up. Why is all this? Because His Spirit remains. He will not give you up. "According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt. So My Spirit remaineth among you, fear ye not."

Now this is to inspire a right confidence. Fear not. If you examine your fears you may find much sin in them, much distrust of the Lord in them; and you cannot deliver yourself from them. No, but this good Spirit can. This good Spirit, as remaining in you, can bring into your heart that which will remove all your fears, straighten every crook, turn darkness into light, help you to fall before the will of God, enable you to believe that all will work and issue well.

"Fear ye not." I AM God, Almighty God. "My Spirit remaineth, fear ye not." Look unto me though storms rise, though the way be rough. "Fear ye not." "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I AM God, and there is none else." Well, you see this is the great point. Let us watch closely for this. Does His Spirit remain among us? May the Lord help us to pray for this and give us to realise it and to have some experience of the blessings promised in this chapter! Amen.