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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham on
Wednesday evening 9.11.66

Hymns 1057, 1054, 136

Reading: Isaiah 26

Text Isaiah 26.20

"Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy
doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment,
until the indignation be overpast."

This verse appears to be a song inciting to praise and confidence in God in view of what He has appointed for the safety and protection of His people, particularly here referring, probably, to national calamities. So in the first verse it is said, "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks". It is comforting to observe that in the Word of God whatever outward conditions prevail, whatever may take place upon the face of the earth or among particular nations, in our land or in the church of God, whatever commotions may be in the earth and however extreme these conditions, God has provided a place of safety where His dear people may betake themselves in their condition of need or whatever may attend them. He has appointed a city that is surrounded with walls and bulwarks, "Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in". Now there is just a spot where, as we read in the Psalm, "Though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea", there is a spot where a living soul may find peace, and that is in God Himself, when the mind is stayed upon Him. This is a particular point to notice, it is only as the mind, or the heart, is by faith really stayed on God. How different often we might be in our feelings if we could bring ourselves to this place, to this experience, to this condition, to be as Paul says, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God - that is mentioned here - which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"; but it is not in nature's power to exercise this trust neither do we find ourselves able without that good Spirit and His gracious power in

some manifestation of the goodness and mercy of God to us to bring ourselves into this spot; but there is a spot, there is a place, which, though it be but for a few moments, can remove the distraction of mind and spirit and fill the heart with a sweet, heavenly peace when the mind is really stayed on Him, because then we feel the strength and power of that foundation from which we can never be moved.

In the verse that I have read there are two or three points that may be profitable to notice. First of all there is a people, we find here, that appear to stand in relationship to God. What an amazing mystery is this. Now the Lord does not say, 'Come this people' or even 'that people' but He says, "Come, my people". This indicates relationship and if we view this in a Gospel sense we must conclude that it incorporates the whole family of God in whose hearts is His fear and who by the covenant purpose of a promise performing God stand in a relationship unto Himself. We know this is perfectly true of the Lord's dear people because in a number of instances the truth is confirmed. They are referred to as sons and daughters of Zion and that this is an evidence of the incomparable love of God. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God". There is a relationship then in which the Lord's people stand, where they are free from condemnation and that is in these chambers, in this refuge, in this protection involved in, and embraced by, that covenant love from which nothing can separate. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Now there is something I want to notice here - perhaps it can be surprising the number of times this relationship is indicated, and where concerning the Lord's people it is said "My people", as here, "Come, My people". I would like to refer you to one or two Scriptures. First of all this is said by way of reproof and complaint as to God's national people because of their propensity to disregard Him and to go their own evil ways. In chapter 1.3 the prophet says, and the Lord through him, "The ox knoweth his

owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider". "My people". This is a complaint about them because of their ways, but even so still they are "My people"; though the Lord exposes their ingratitude and their evil propensities and ways yet still He brings forth the amazing declaration of a complete and full forgiveness. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow". Then there is another Scripture that has relation to the Lord's people in the furnace of trial and affliction, "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: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God". "My people" in the furnace of trial being refined, purged, chastened, but still "My people". My point is to bring to light the relationship under these varied conditions; and what a sweet point of truth, beloved friends, is this, that when the Lord's poor people are being chastened and when they are tried in the furnace of affliction it is still "My people". "I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God". There is another reference to this in a way of comfort and encouragement to the living family of God in chapter 40, "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 word of consolation to the redeemed of the Lord in that their salvation is accomplished in this divine purpose, their iniquity purged and their sins forgiven; these are "My people". Then I would direct you to one more Scripture and that is where this people are referred to as having their sins borne away by the suffering and substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus Christ in chapter 53, "For the transgression of My people was He stricken", and this seems to be a very sacred reference to the relationship subsisting, If we could really be brought into this and feel our personal relationship with the Lord

Jesus Christ it would be a very sacred occasion. We are not left in any question in the Holy Scriptures about this people, as being the Lord's people who were eternally loved by Him and were chosen by Him and for whom a full and complete redemption was made. What a mercy if we can feel in our own cases that you and I are among such. "Come my people".

Then following is an invitation, "Enter thou into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee". This indicates some condition of danger where a refuge is particularly timely and necessary as a protection and a place of safety; and that is what is evidently intended. You see by these chambers there is indicated a place to enter into where those who do are saved, as in olden times from the avenger of blood. Here those who enter in are saved from the condemning sentence of a broken law; here those who enter in are saved from the calamities that may come upon the world and the nation. There is a place of safety, there are chambers. Sometimes these chambers are referred to as places of communion as in the Song of Solomon where the church says, "Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into His chambers", so they are the Lord's chambers. Here the Lord says, "Come, my people enter thou into thy chambers"; so these chambers also belong to the church; but even so they are the same chambers because they are what the Lord has provided for His church and in this instance for their protection and safety. Now here is an invitation, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers", as though the Lord would say, I have provided a refuge, a place of safety, of protection from the enemy; enter into these.

We know how this is set forth under the Old Testament order where the cities of refuge were appointed for the man-slayer who had taken the life of another; he might flee from the avenger of blood to the cities of refuge where his case would be tried. If it was proved that he did slay unawares he could remain there in the city of refuge during the life-time of the high priest, but if it was

proved that he did slay another with intent and purpose then according to the law he was put to death. This can be very typical of the refuge, the protection, that the Lord has provided for His people in times of danger and need. This is referred to in chapter 25 where it is said, "Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall". So then the poor and needy may run into this refuge which the Lord has provided, those who are aware of their danger and exposure to the wrath of God under a broken law.

What a wonderful mercy it is for you and me that there is a refuge, that there are chambers provided and that there is an invitation to enter into them, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee", but what are we to understand by these chambers as a place of refuge? According to the Scriptures they refer to God Himself, for it is said in Deuteronomy, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms". Here is a refuge to which His poor, needy, tempest-tossed people who are assailed by the enemy, are invited to betake themselves, and when it says "The eternal God is thy refuge" I believe we may take this to incorporate those divine perfections that constitute God to be what He is. We may say that His love is a chamber because He is a God of love. "God is love", and this love is unchangeable, a love that is in Jesus Christ toward His people, and this is a chamber into which His poor, tried, afflicted people who may be hunted hither and thither by one enemy and another may enter. When that love is shed abroad in a poor sinner's heart he is in the chamber provided by the Lord for him, where he is perfectly secure, enfolded in the arms of divine love.

His power too is a chamber because He is an almighty God, and it is as faith views this that we find comfort in this blessed truth, "I am the Almighty God, is there anything too hard for Me?". It is then that faith views omnipotence and feels the comfort and strength of it. His immutability is a chamber; as God He changes not. When you feel in your heart the strength and power of a covenant promise and can feel it is God's immutable purpose of love and mercy to you, you

enter that chamber of divine immutability and feel the security and strength and peace and joy that such a perfection of deity brings into your heart. So His name is said to be a strong tower into which the righteous enter and are saved.

The Lord Jesus Himself is a chamber of refuge for His people as it is said later concerning Him, "A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land". Here again beloved friends is a chamber and O what a chamber it is! It seems to incorporate the glorious Person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ; and God with all His divine perfections is only that refuge to His people as He is known in the Person of His beloved Son. That is where the refuge is and this is the refuge for sinners. Is it not poor sinners who need a refuge? Is He not just that refuge for sinners?

"A refuge for sinners the gospel makes known;
'Tis found in the merits of Jesus alone;
The weary, the tempted, and burdened by sin,
Were never exempted from entering therein."

Here is a chamber for poor, sin-stricken, sin-burdened, needy, lost and wounded sinners to enter into, not to look at at a distance. They are invited to come. "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers".

"Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers". Now this is a divine provision and this is the provision of the Gospel.

Now I would like to take you to another spot and that is the cross of Christ which is a chamber for poor, guilty sinners to flee to.

"Beneath the shadow of thy cross
The heavy laden soul finds rest"

The shadow of Calvary is a chamber of refuge for poor sin-burdened sinners to flee to, as in the Old Testament that brazen serpent was lifted up and those who looked unto it were healed of their serpent bites. What a mercy that there is such a spot as this where those who by precious faith shelter can never fall a prey to Satan and will never be eternally lost. How beautifully this is established by the Old Testament when the children of Israel were going out of Egypt and a lamb was slain and the blood sprinkled upon the lintel and the

side posts of their houses so that when the angel came they were sheltered; the blood was their salvation, "When I see the blood I will pass over you." O what a refuge is this. It is a safe one, it is a sure one, it is an abiding refuge, so well might we say,

"Rock of Ages cleft for me;
Let me hide myself in Thee."

That is a chamber and there is none to compare with it. If only eventually you and I are found sheltering there we shall be saved from an offending law, we shall be washed and clothed, we shall stand complete in Him, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers".

Other chambers might be mentioned, but there is this point to notice - "And shut thy doors about thee". Has this any significance? I believe it has. It does not say, Come to the door, but, Go right inside; and not only go inside, but shut thy doors about thee. This appears to me to indicate that complete trust and confidence in God Himself and His provision; to shut our doors about us is not to be looking this way or that way, or to be looking for some goodness in ourselves, or some ground to stand upon by virtue of our own merit. To shut our doors about us is to renounce all for Christ's sake and to enter by faith into that refuge, that chamber, as we may be invited to do so, and feel the strength, fulness, blessedness and completeness of the Gospel in the merit of the sacrifice, love and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ; to feel to be safely enfolded there; to live by faith there; to prove Him to be the Bread of Life to us and to need nothing outside that precious provision. "Shut thy doors about thee", put complete trust and confidence in Him alone, and this is where peace is to be found, I feel sure it is. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee". He shuts the doors about him and does not lean to his own understanding. He puts his complete trust in his God and shuts the doors about him. This is the place where a poor sinner will find rest for his soul in Jesus Christ. It is Christ who invites such to come to Him saying, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest"; I will bring you into these chambers. So we find the church saying, "He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love." This is to hide ourselves for a little moment, until the indignation

be overpast. This may refer literally to threatened judgements that would eventually come upon the land.

The Lord invites those who put their trust in Him to enter these chambers for a little moment. Is there any significance in this? I believe there is, "Hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." It will be but for a little moment, not for a great length of time. This is to be considered comparatively. This expression is used in the Scriptures in a way which is very sweet, very comforting, very confirming. In Isaiah 54 the Lord says, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee." For a small moment My indignation may be upon thee, which is a righteous indignation; it may be some dealings of the Lord with us or it may be some judgements upon the land. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee". I would refer you to Corinthians where we read, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory". So we can see that all these things, these afflictions, light afflictions comparatively, are designed to work well for us in the Lord's purpose. What a sweet moment of rest and peace it is when by faith we can and do hear the invitation and respond and enter into these blessed chambers and shut our doors about us. So may we be helped to hide ourselves in Him until the tempest be overpast; then if this is really true of us He will receive our souls at last, bring us safely through to enter into that heavenly chamber of love where we shall go no more out. Amen.