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52/MM

Prayer Meeting Address by Mr. J. Delves
at "Ebenezer" chapel, Clapham on Monday evening 17.3.52

Reading: ISAIAH 41 COLOSSIANS 2

In the first place God affirms His faithfulness unto His church and affirms that He has chosen her and will not cast her away. Moreover He would quieten their fears and strengthen their faith and confidence in Himself and their ultimate victory over their enemies, thus giving them to prove the blessedness of that implicit trust in Himself and in Him alone. "For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not: I will help thee"; "Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee".

It is those sentences that I particularly wish to bring before you this evening. You may remember that last evening I said that I believed I had heard the Lord's voice like a tender whisper in my ear on one occasion when I was in great distress and when I felt I could not go forward and could not turn back. The word that was spoken to me at that time, I believe, was just this, "I will strengthen thee", and I suppose at that time no word could have been more fitting for I was weakened in body and put to an exceedingly great test of faith in relation to a matter that had been laid upon me. Actually it was concerning the ministry which was being brought about and was about to commence, but in such a way that I had never anticipated, and the prospect being brought before me in the way it was well nigh overwhelmed me. I had a night of terror and of exceeding great conflict so that I feared my reasoning powers would go and I was exceedingly weak in body in consequence. But early in the morning I seemed actually to hear a voice saying just this, "I will strengthen thee", and I proved it. I was strengthened and helped through what was before me at that time in a way beyond all that I could have anticipated. Truly the Lord was not only faithful but He was better to me than I could ever have expected. After I had been before the church at Galeed concerning the ministry our pastor was taken ill and I was advised that as the pastor would not be able to preach on the following Sabbath I was to occupy the pulpit. This was something I had never expected and you can imagine what I passed through in those three days. So when the Sabbath came I was so weak and ill I had to rest in bed in the morning and when my wife came home from the service, she said, I felt the whole church are praying for you, and that had such an effect upon me that I began to feel strength coming back into my body. It was on the Saturday morning, the day before, that I believe the Lord gave me that word, "I will strengthen thee". The afternoon wore away and time came to go to the service and I was so weak that my legs seemed as though they would not carry me up the hill to the chapel. However, I arrived and I went up into the vestry. The chapel filled with people and I was left alone. Presently I heard the deacon give out that hymn,

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"Lamb of God, we fall before Thee,
Humbly trusting in thy cross;
That alone be all our glory;
All things else are dung and dross."

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I opened the door and saw this mass of people and as soon as I went down into the pulpit the Lord brought a wonderful quietness into my spirit that I should never have thought possible. I read and prayed and then we sang another hymn and I ventured to speak before that congregation for the first time from these words in Philipians, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." The Lord carried me through, not only gave me matter to speak upon the points which opened before my mind but to speak with comparative ease and comfort. All fear was removed and after the service I was renewed in strength in body and in soul too and stood, as it were, as a witness to God's faithfulness and mercy who had said, "I will strengthen thee". That was the first time I preached and was a time that I think will not soon be forgotten.

I hope you will forgive me saying all this, I never intended to when I came in except just to make one or two comments upon that word, "I will strengthen thee". We all have need of renewed strength, we need that strength at times in particular which God only can give and happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help. We need Him to strengthen us under burdens that may lie upon us. You will need that. Often when I speak from the pulpit I am, as it were, speaking out of my own little book of experience although I do not refer so very much to the first person. I have proved the need of this renewed strength many times and the Lord has been merciful; burdens that have been laid upon us, burdens that have been laid upon you, sometimes in the providence of God, have led you it may be to feel sometimes like the Psalmist when he said, "My soul is cast down within me", or like Jonah when his soul fainted within him. Have you ever proved the Lord to be your strength in certain things through which you have had to pass? We need him to strengthen us to face what may be before us, not in a way of going forward to meet troubles, but as we cannot tell what may be before us we need the Lord to strengthen us in a way of fulfilling His promise, to be with us and not forsake us. We need Him also to strengthen us to believe what He has revealed to us. Revelation of divine truth is in the Scripture but we need God to give us faith and often to strengthen that faith to receive in our hearts what God has revealed in His word. So here is a fitting promise, and if the Lord speaks it into your heart He will do it. It is a great thing when we can just rely upon Him and though burdens at different times may press heavily we can trust in the Name of the Lord and stay upon our God. Truly He is a wonderful God and I know some of you would say the same. I feel you would speak well of Him if you could and it behoves us all to do this for is He not worthy? Here I leave it with just this observation that when God drops a promise into your heart He will fulfil it. It is true we may read it in the Scripture and not derive any strength from it actually, thus proving it is not the letter of the truth; but when the Spirit of the Lord speaks it in then it is a power in your soul and some of you doubtless have walked in the strength of that meat even for many days. Amen