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Sermon preached by Mr.J.Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday evening 26th August, 1951

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. Isaiah 41 v.17

It may be remembered that I read this blessed word this morning and attempted some description of this peculiar condition, which the Lord's people as they may be instructed will be sure to feel more or less. Though in itself it is a painful consciousness that we have of our poverty and weakness, destitution and dependence, yet it is a mercy to be brought there, to be so brought down to depend entirely and absolutely upon what the Lord gives. Here we may have great comfort because we are assured that He will not fail nor forsake us. He will supply the need of His needy and feelingly destitute people. Moreover one of the things to be dreaded is a false security or a vain confidence or satisfaction in religion, that arises out of something of our own producing. If our religion never rises above that which is inherent in ourselves it will leave us woefully lacking. We shall be sure ultimately to be weighed in the balances and to be found wanting. We shall find the bed too narrow to stretch ourselves upon, and prove eventually that we have nothing more than a form of godliness. Moreover in order to experience the power and grace and comfort of the Gospel we must first become poor and needy; we must be so empty as to have room for Christ, and so feel that emptiness as to have to cry after this manner, to seek for living bread and living water, to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

What a mercy it is to receive something from God, and yet be out of hell; to receive something from God and yet still be on praying ground; to receive something other than penal punishment which is due to us, and which will certainly fall upon us if we live and die out of Christ. What an amazing mercy it is that there is a way opened whereby needy souls, however needy they are, are welcome to a Throne of grace the Saviour's blood to plead. In this matter they cannot be too needy. The poorer the beggar the more welcome he is here to plead and sue for Christ's sake. The more needy the more welcome, so that in this aspect we are in the best place when we feel we have nothing to recommend us to the mercy of God, but have to come in our dependence and our needy condition and fall flat before the Lord pleading mercy for Jesus' sake. Yes, and how many of this

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congregation here are really poor and needy in their own feelings? How many are hungering for God, panting for the living streams and long to feel the cleansing, purple flood that flows from Calvary. Is it not a wonderful consideration that there is no Scripture standing against a poor and needy sinner who is sensible of his condition and lack, and is enabled with all his poverty to seek at the Throne of Grace for living bread and living water. There is no Scripture to discourage them, no Scripture to incline them to give up seeking or to suggest that their seeking will not be fruitful. God is on their side every time; they are not forgotten by Him. They may sometimes seem to be forgotten. "The needy shall not always be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever".

It is a great thing really to be empty enough to long to be filled with that which nature can never give. Have you and I got a religion that only God can satisfy, a religion that preaching cannot satisfy, praying cannot satisfy, no obedience can satisfy, but it can only be satisfied in the possession of Himself? The Lord Jesus is the fulness of grace. God can satisfy. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else". If we are poor and needy in the sense intended here then we shall seek for this living water which will be life in our souls when we receive it. I mentioned this morning in closing what the Lord said to the woman of Samaria, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst", that is it will satisfy him. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." That describes an experience. There will be more or less in our hearts a springing up of this living water, bubbling up like a living spring. This is the springing up in the soul of faith, hope, love and prayer and other graces, all of which are produced by the Spirit of God in His gracious teaching. They are the spices, "Awake, O north wind: and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits," that the spices thereof may flow forth. This is a sure mark of grace that needy sinners cannot be satisfied with anything else and that is a very important point. Some people can be satisfied with duties in religion and go no further; their poor souls never really cry out

for God. But if we are brought to be poor and needy in this way we cannot be satisfied with any external trivialities or duties performed, but only with the sweet flowing in of His blessed Gospel in our souls. That brings rest when we get it; that brings rest; and this is what is evidently designed by the Psalmist in the 23rd Psalm where he says, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters". They are living waters, though they are still waters, and this is where the soul is brought to that is in this needy condition, that is poor and needy. How sweet it is to be refreshed by the water of His grace and by that living bread which is essential to the life of our souls.

"When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst" - a very striking word this, very descriptive of extreme suffering, "when their tongue faileth for thirst". That is the last extremity; they could not get much lower than this and survive. "I the Lord will hear them" and this is the point to notice particularly here; when is it that the Lord will hear them? When their tongue faileth for thirst. He may permit you to sink so as to feel you will never rise again, and yet you will rise again. "I the Lord will hear them". If you have ever been there, and I believe some of us have, in this extreme condition, yet is it not a mercy that no condition is too extreme for God? No poor sinner can be so far at the ends of the earth that the arm of Omnipotence cannot reach him, and no poor thing can sink so low but that the arms of His mercy and power can be underneath him. "The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms", underneath, and no poor and needy soul can sink through them. "I the Lord will hear them." How personal the word is here. He does not say I will get someone to help them, but I, O this wonderful I, there is no I like it, this is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, "I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them", no not even when their tongue fails for thirst, and here is a great point for our comfort and consolation. We read here, and in many other Scriptures, of a prayer-answering God and of a promise-performing God, and if we are bound up in that covenant, in all things ordered well, we shall prove the truth of it. We shall prove it however low we sink sometimes. We shall prove that His mercy and His loving-kindness will never

depart from us, "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee". Now while the Lord's children will dread a false security they will be favoured with a real one and they, above all others, will bless the Lord God of Israel for His faithfulness to His Word and promises unto them.

"I will hear". Has there ever been a moment in your life when God has distinctly heard your prayer? Heard your prayer? Say you, He hears every prayer; yes but it is not that I mean. There is something more than hearing in that sense here. You may hear of a person's trouble, you may hear as they tell you of their trouble and distress, and yet not be able to do anything for them, not be disposed to, but when it says, "I the Lord will hear them", it means that He will do something for them. Has that ever been in your life or in mine? Have there ever been circumstances where you have had to cry from the bottom of your heart and have proved that God has heard your cry? In the Scripture we have remarkable instances of this and on each occasion some deliverance was wrought for those who cried unto Him. The Psalmist proved that in the Psalm (34) that we read just now, "This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him". That is not all the verse is it - no - "and saved him out of all his troubles". Has that ever been so with you? You say, I believe that the Lord did deliver me out of a deep trouble once but I was soon in another. Then you have to cry to the same God again that delivered you in the last one. Yes, and perhaps you say He has delivered me more than once but I am in fresh troubles now. Then you must cry to the same God who has delivered you in your past afflictions. The Apostle Paul knew this teaching where he says, "Who delivered us from so great a death and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us". "I the Lord will hear them".

I will mention one or two instances in the Scripture that may be confirming. God heard the children of Israel when they groaned in their bitter bondage. They groaned a long time too, for they were a long time under that hard bondage and cruelly treated by their task masters; it made them groan and that is a very descriptive word, He heard their groanings. If you are in a lot of pain, especially if the pain is spasmodic and takes you suddenly in some part of your body if you can groan that brings a little relief. Some of you know

what I mean, and it is just the same spiritually, if you can groan before the Lord when something is pressing hard and heavy upon you, that groaning will bring some relief. It is the Lord that gives the relief to the soul groaning in hard and bitter bondage. The children of Israel suffered long in their bondage and groaned under it but the time came when God remembered His covenant and came down and said to His servant Moses, "I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant." When the Lord speaks of remembering His covenant it does not mean that He had forgotten it, but sometimes it seems in one's experience as though the Lord has forgotten to be gracious. "They seek water and there is none." He seems to take no notice and they go on groaning, it may be, in their bondage. He seems to have forgotten and perhaps you say so, as the church did later in this prophecy, "Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.". But was that really so? This is my point, was that really so? It was apparently so, but what was the Lord's answer? "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" - Yes, that can be possible - "Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee". He seemed to have forgotten them; so it may be with you, but He says, "I the LORD will hear them", and this means that He will deliver them too. He came down and made a way for the deliverance of His people through His servant Moses, whom He commanded to go to them and to declare to them that God had sent him to bring them forth out of their bondage. The Lord assured Moses that He would be with him, saying, "Certainly I will be with thee", and so He was.

Then again did not the Lord hear Samuel when he cried unto the Lord when the Philistines came up against Israel and when God's judgments had been upon them for their idolatry. Samuel offered a sacrifice and cried unto the Lord for them and the Lord heard him and sent a mighty thunder upon the Philistines and discomfited them. When the Lord does work He will usually let it be seen that it is His work and not the work of man. That is the Lord's way of working. He needs no helpers though He may use instruments. "I the Lord will hear them" He is all sufficient of Himself. So it has ever been that the Lord's people have had to see the salvation of God, the waters divided, the hand of the Lord going before them. "I the Lord

will hear them". Did not the Lord hear His servant Hezekiah when he turned his face to the wall and prayed in his distress? Truly he was poor and needy then. It was an extreme condition; His tongue was failing for thirst. He turned his face to the wall and prayed under the sentence of death and you may have had to do that, so to speak, when there has been no other avenue of relief but the Lord Himself. "Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live", He turned his face to the wall and soon the prophet came with another message. "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years."

There are many instances where the Lord heard the cry of His people in their distresses and delivered them, and why not you if you have need of Him? Is He not the same God now and is it not your privilege to take your circumstances, your burdens, your pressing things, to this great Omnipotent God? I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who said I will hear thee. I, the God of Israel, will not forsake thee. Not only I hear thee but I will not forsake thee. Has he forsaken you? Say you, the days of darkness have been many with me. Yes, but has the Lord forsaken you? Have there not been revivings, fresh touches of His mercy and grace and love in your heart, lifting you up again from the depths of the earth? Has He forsaken you utterly? He will never, never leave us nor will let us quite leave Him. What a mercy it is that He holds His people in that covenant that can never break. "I the God of Israel will not forsake thee." Did He not say this very thing to Moses and Joshua? "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage." And the Apostle Paul referring to this says, "Let your conversation be without covetousness and be content with such things as ye have for He hath said, (He hath said, and this is the beauty of it, He has said) I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; but it is the application of truth that brings a firm conviction in the conscience. It is when it is brought into your heart that you can testify of its reality. If a blind man comes to you and says there is no brightness in the sun and no colours in the rainbow, you could refute him if you have seen the brightness of the sun and the colours of the rainbow but you could not convince him. Every place that the sole of your foot treadeth on, that shall be yours. Has there ever been a word brought into your heart by the Lord Himself? If there has been, a thousand deaths will never eradicate it; no water will

quench it and no fire will burn it up. It will stay there and pass through many, many changes in your life and experience and yet rise up again at times with a renewed sweetness. Yes, it comes back again; the same word can be applied again and again with a fresh sweetness and unction. It is true that some promises may apply to certain particular circumstances or have respect to some particular trouble and appear to have their end in that deliverance, while other promises live in your heart all through your days more or less. In fact if a promise has a fulfilment in some particular deliverance in your life, the promise does not die but lives and it can live in your heart and be revived again and again. Why? Because the Lord says, "I the God of Israel will not forsake thee," and this is what the Psalmist prayed for when he said, "Hide not Thy face far from me, put not Thy servant away in anger: . . . Thou has been my help, leave me not neither forsake me O God of my salvation."

There is a right way of laying hold of a promise. A spiritual perception of its beauty will not make you careless or satisfied with the letter of truth but it will greatly help you to plead it before the Lord again and again when you feel your poverty, darkness and need. Or it may be that in some difficulty or fresh trial or affliction the cry goes up after this manner, "Leave me not neither forsake, me O God of my salvation." That is a wonderful point; the Psalmist prays as one sensibly conscious of his interest in redeeming love, "O God of my salvation, leave me not neither forsake me." Neither will He. God does not change with changing circumstances. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," I the God of Israel will not forsake them. He will not forsake the work He has begun in you, if indeed He has begun it. He that began a work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ He will perform it, but O what may lie between the beginning and performing, what changes and ups and downs and trials and afflictions and darkness and fears and helps and deliverances. But "I the God of Israel will not forsake thee." He will not forsake us when most we need Him and that will be when we come to die. I visited a dying man in hospital once in Brighton and practically all he could say to me was, I need Him now, I need Him now, and I have never forgotten that. It is very, very true. No time of need in a sense will compare with that, but what a mercy it is that the Lord's promise carries through the floods of Jordan. It does not just take one to the verge of it and

then leave them for the last lap. He carries them through it. Well, you say, the Lord's people die sometimes apparently in much conflict. They have much conflict I believe at times up to their end, but I believe you will usually find that they have the Lord's smile when they are about to pass through the chilly flood. I will not forsake them in life or death. Well, beloved friends, what a wonderful mercy it will be to know God, it will be heaven. What a favour to be born to know the Gospel and to be made an heir of eternal life, a vessel of mercy, to live for ever where Jesus is, where there will be no sin, no going out and where they cast their crowns at His feet and crown Him Lord of all. O may you and I be found among them, bound in this unbreakable covenant and then it will not so much matter to us what comes upon this poor perishing world. Great tribulation will come upon it, but if we are found in Him then all will be well. The Lord grant that it may be so with us. Amen.

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