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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham on Sunday evening  
24th February 1957

Hymns: 957 297 329

Reading: Isaiah 43

Text: Isaiah 43. 1 & 2

"But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee: and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

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It has pleased God to have recorded in His own words, many most confirming promises unto His people, here represented by Jacob and Israel. Indeed, when the comfort and strength of such a word as this can be felt in the heart, there will be no fear. The two cannot go together, because they are so opposite in their nature. If the Lord's love is shed abroad in the heart, it disperses fear and darkness, and produces a holy confidence, a sweet reliance, upon the promise-performing God. What moment can be sweeter to a child of God than this? It is one of the surest witnesses of real religion, of union with Christ, and of a personal interest in the everlasting gospel. Indeed, according to this first verse, it would appear that no children of God would have proper ground to fear, for they are the Lord's property, owned by Him, are in His hand, under His divine care and Fatherly protection. "Thou art mine." He says. What can He say more than this? "I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." Does not that cover everything -- the pardon of sin, covenant relationship, divine union, and the assurance of everlasting peace ?

Every vessel of mercy forms part of the new creation, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the Author, Alpha and Omega. By His divine power, a soul, a sinner dead in sin, is quickened into divine life and made partaker of that which he did not possess before; it is brought into existence in his soul. It is a divine creation, the life of Christ in him. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

"I have redeemed thee." What a wonderful gospel it is! The work of redemption by our great Redeemer, must ever be the life-blood of the glorious gospel. What standing have we for eternity, apart from the atonement? What standing have you, or I? I believe that without this great High Priest we are lost to a man - doomed to endless ruin, but through His precious, sin-atoning blood, a way to heaven is opened for a sinner deserving hell. What an amazing consideration is this! Would you change your religion for the abominable errors and dogmas that prevail in this day? No, no, God forbid! But what is sweeter to faith than to

"Creep beside Him as a worm,  
And see Him bleed for me".?

O, for my part, I do not want to look about for another religion, for a modern religion, that denies Christ in His glorious Person and work; I want to know more of Him than I do, because if I knew more of Him I know I should preach better, and I believe I should seek to live nearer to Him. At the same time, I believe where this precious life is, where there is divine quickening, Paul's language will fit. "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made comformable unto His death." O say some people now-a-days, All this is old-fashioned, it is out-of-date, we want something fresh, more attractive, more alluring. God forbid, for I feel persuaded that nothing but the old-fashioned truths (if such they may be termed) will stand us in good stead "in the swelling of Jordan." What a wonderful mercy then, to have a religion that will do to live and die by! But O may our dear young friends be preserved from the terrible errors that abound in these days in which we live! I have recently been reading a little about these different religions, and it has brought to light things that shock me, which would seem, as it were, to sweep away the foundation from beneath me, if they were true. But what I have to say is this:-

"On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand."

Let us keep close to redeeming love and grace. Redemption through blood- that is the price. Redemption by blood. "The Lord hath

redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he."

"I have redeemed thee, I have called thee." Every vessel of mercy is the subject of a divine calling, which is intimately and vitally connected with the new birth, although the calling may apply, possibly, to some outward circumstances or dispensations of God's providence, whereby a poor sinner's blind eyes are opened, and he is called out of nature's darkness. O what a wonderful mercy! The apostle Peter speaks a little of this; he says, "Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light", the light of the blessed gospel, the light of the knowledge of Christ. His people are called with an effectual calling; none will ever be left out, neither will it be a calling that will fail of its end; for where God begins His work in the soul, He will surely perform it. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," when the purchase of His blood leaves earth for heaven, to dwell where Jesus is. What a wonderful calling! It is said to be a heavenly calling." It is said to be a holy calling - that His people are called with a holy calling not according to their works, but according to His purpose and grace. Meanwhile we must remember that every vessel of mercy is "His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." O what a wonderful mercy for one to have his eyes opened and, as we read in the epistle to the Colossians, to be "translated" from a kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Christ.

I have called thee by thy name." In so far as this refers to Jacob, it was beautifully true, for the Lord often spoke to Jacob. He speaks to His people. This 'calling them by their name' is expressive of His perfect knowledge of every one of them individually. Moreover they are said to be "sons and daughters". Every one is registered in heaven. "Better than of sons and daughters" is the Name the Lord gives them; "I will give them an everlasting Name, that shall not be cut off".

"Thou art mine." This covers everything, does it not? But perhaps you say, I feel so far away from all this and have to "grope for the wall like the blind"; the prison fetters hold me fast, I am shut up and cannot come forth. Yes, all that may be true, but this does not mean that you are "walking according to the course of this world", does it? or "according to the prince of the power of the air", that you have no desire for these things, no interest in them? O, no, say you, very different from that; in fact, I can say, and sometimes do say,

"My God, my Father, blissful Name!  
O may I call Thee mine?  
May I with sweet assurance claim  
A portion so divine?"

Is that the language of this world? Is it the language of those who are going the broad way? No, say you, I do not think that; but still my soul longs for Him. O favoured soul, then, press on, press your case before Him.

"The time of love will come,  
When we shall clearly see,  
Not only that He shed His blood,  
But each shall say, "For me"."

"I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." This, then, seems to seal everything up in that "covenant ordered in all things and sure." So it does, for nothing can affect that blessed covenant relationship, in which the Lord's dear people stand. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." What then? Will they just go sailing to heaven without any winds or storms or anything to hinder their progress, try their faith, bring them down to the depths? Not so. If that were the case, then much of the blessed Scriptures, would serve but little purpose. There would not be a 'fear not,' would there? if the Lord's people were not a fearing people, often afraid and fearful. There are some very kindly 'fear nots', in the word of God, which sometimes were spoken indicating a heavy path. On one occasion God appeared to Abram and said to him, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Not just "thy reward"

but "thy exceeding great reward". It seemed very prophetic, as though the Lord would say to him, In the heavy trials that lie ahead, you will prove Me to be sufficient. On another occasion God said to him, "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect." Fear not. When such a word is spoken with a quiet, inward whisper, how quietening and comforting, confirming, strengthening it can be!

So it appears to be in this prophecy, for on a number of occasions we have this 'fear not'. It is repeated in verse 5, "Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the East, and gather thee from the West." In the 41st chapter, too, it occurs in a very confirming way, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." In verse 14 too, Jacob comes in again, and he is being addressed, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel". It is true Jacob personally was not always very wormlike, but it is descriptive of what the Lord's people are, in the eyes of the world and in their own eyes too, often. They feel to be but as worms. as nothing really, and yet the Lord comes down to such, and tells them to "Fear not". "Fear not, thou worm Jacob." How condescending the Lord is!

So, when the children of Israel came to the Red Sea, Moses said to them, at a time when they were evidently under very great apprehension, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever." O these are some beautiful 'fear nots', and this is when the Lord calls us by our name, is it not, when He speaks that Fear not, into the heart? Sometimes He does, not necessarily just this word verbally, but a quietening, confirming, strengthening word, that can bring a stillness, a beautiful stillness, enabling you to fall into His hands and know no will but His.

The Lord gave a 'fear not' to Daniel, when, being overpowered

by the vision he saw, he was prostrate, and felt to have no strength left in him. "O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong." What a timely word this is to some poor things who feel so weak, spiritually speaking, and it may be, even physically too; but a word spoken by the Lord can put strength into your body, as well as strength into your souls, you know. I believe I have proved that; I believe I have felt a word from the Lord remove the greatest distractions a poor thing can be under. It is very wonderful to get such a whisper in your heart. One touch will do it! What a "fear not" it was the Lord gave to John in the Isle of Patmos. Here John, seeing Him in His Kingly glory, "fell at His feet as dead." But you see, "He laid His right hand" upon him, saying, "Fear not: I am the first and the last." O when the Lord speaks a 'fear not', there is strength in it; and this does not puff people up with a vain confidence, make them think a lot of themselves, dispose them to despise others or think they have more religion than other people have. A 'fear not', whispered in your heart will lay you low at His blessed feet, and bring a sweetness there. O such a sweetness! So that you can rightly prove, that in quietness and in confidence is your strength. I know I am speaking of things I do not know much about, but I know a little about them - I know enough about them to describe them.

"Fear not:" He says, "for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." If the Lord speaks that into your heart, your faith will receive it, and you will not want to dispute it, although Satan may be at your right hand to resist it, and say, O that is not of God, you have a little natural emotion, that is all, nothing more than that. O what a cruel adversary he is - always ready to try to overturn anything in a poor sinner's heart that is likely to be for the honour and glory of God there. But the Lord will not allow him to gain the victory. No, His word says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." But we need faith to do this.

Although the people of God are a blessed people, although they "know the joyful sound" and are reserved to an eternal inheritance

prepared for them in the mansions above, yet they have a pilgrimage here, and this second verse seems to describe in a way at least, some features of that pilgrimage that is appointed unto the living family of God. Here are four things mentioned- Waters, Rivers, Fire, Flame. What does all this mean? They are figurative expressions, highly significant, and indeed, they may have different interpretations in the word of God. Sometimes waters set forth the glorious gospel in its rich provisions, as it is later in this prophecy. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Again, Ezekiel saw waters issuing out from under the threshold of the Sanctuary, which he was made to pass through, first to the ankles, then to the knees, then to the loins, and then a river that he could not pass over, waters to swim in. Sometimes the graces of the good Spirit of God in divine teaching are likened to water "He that believeth on Me, ..... out of his belly (out of his heart) shall flow rivers of living water." But more generally speaking, waters set forth the trials and afflictions of the Lord's people in their pilgrimage here below - they are waters of affliction. We find Jeremiah saying, in one place, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." This seems to express the deep anguish and sorrow of his heart, on account of the afflictions that were upon them. Divine chastisements were heavy upon them, and were to be heavier still. So in the Lamentations we find the good man weeping and mourning on account of the desolation of Zion. Thus there are waters expressive of the heavy afflictions that may be laid upon the Lord's people, or that they may have to pass through.

The Scriptures speak of the waters of Marah, to which the children of Israel came, and could not drink of them because they were bitter; but when the tree was cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet. Have you ever seen that in your life? Have you come to certain things of which you have said, I do not know how to face it? I cannot sustain it? I feel I shall sink under it? Yet then you have got such a sight

of the Lord Jesus Christ, as to give you, for the time, to lose sight of the trial, and even to enjoy in your soul the sweetest moment you may ever have had.

But here are the "waters", and according to the Scriptures which are our guide - good and gracious people have had to pass through these deep waters of trial and affliction. What deep waters Jacob passed through! When so tried and distressed concerning his family, when his sons came back from Egypt and they must take Benjamin, the poor old man said, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me." O some of the Lord's people have had to pass through very deep waters concerning their families; others in their circumstances, others in their relationships in life; all, more or less, in their souls' experience.

What deep waters David had to pass through, did he not? To take one instance particularly, when he and his company returned to Ziklag, and found the city a smouldering ruin, it is said, "David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep." What deep waters! Everything seemed lost. All must have seemed to be going against him, all looked as black as it could be. Yet even so, wonderful to say, "David encouraged himself in the LORD his God." O what a mercy to have a God to go to! Eventually, "David recovered all." All things surely must "work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

Many instances might be quoted, but no one ever passed through such deep waters as the dear Redeemer Himself. How highly prophetic are those words in Psalm 69, "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." How highly descriptive of Gethsemane and the intolerable load of imputed guilt that lay upon the suffering Saviour, so that as it is said of Him, that He "bore all incarnate God could bear with strength enough, and none to spare." He prayed to His Father, saying, "O My Father,

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if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Deep waters indeed! Deep sorrows too! In the Lamentations of Jeremiah we read, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow",

Here these waters and rivers are expressive of the same thing, to a certain point. Rivers seem to imply that one is almost, if not quite, swept away for the time being, swept away by the tide, losing all power in himself, having no standing, deep rivers. Yet rivers are spoken of sometimes in the Scriptures as setting forth the love of God. "He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." There is a river we shall all have to pass one day. Sometimes we feel ready to faint now. That is how Jeremiah felt, evidently, when the Lord reproved him, "If thou hast run with the footman, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" There is the river of death - to use the figure - which all of us will come to meet, one day. But when we come to face that last enemy, His blessed grace and word will be sufficient. There will be a Refuge for the Lord's people then.

"In that dread moment, O to hide  
Beneath His sheltering blood!  
'Twill Jordan's icy waves divide,  
And land my soul with God."

Then there are fires and flames. Fires. What does the Lord say of His people? "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." You may depend if you are one of His chosen ones, there will be some furnace work, in some way; some things will have to be burnt up by this fire. "The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." Yet there is a blessed promise to the Lord's people, even with regard to this furnace. He says, "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." But what about all this? It will have a good end. Much may be lost, much in our religion may be burned up; it may narrow things

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up to a very small compass indeed - but it will have a good end. "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."

And Flames! "Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." This flame is the fire burning. O have there been times when it seemed as though everything would be burnt up? This heavy furnace work seems as though it would burn everything up. But it will never burn the gold, after all. If it only leaves that, it will leave only that which is worth having, will it not?

"As gold from the flame, He'll bring thee at last."  
The good old hymnwriter seems to understand it better than I do.

"The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design  
The dross to consume, and thy gold to refine."

O what flames! The three Hebrews "were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace," were they not? "nor was an hair of their head singed." Divine providence went with them and even the king saw "the form of the fourth .. like unto the Son of God." That will do, will it not? His blessed presence will do for the furnace - it will do for any affliction, any trial, whatever it may be!

May the Lord in His mercy fulfil it then, in our own experience, and order all things well!

Amen.