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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham

on Lord's Day morning 16.3.52

Hymns: 315,377,255 Reading: Isaiah 49,50 Text: Isaiah 50.10

"Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.

Probably it could be said that we are all in one of these two verses that close this remarkable chapter. If we are found in the last verse then our end will be sorrow and sadness and it will be a terribly solemn thing to be found at last with a religion of our own, or a religiousness that has never extended beyond anything that nature can produce, to be found walking in sparks of our own kindling, in the light of our own fire, a fire that we have kindled. Yet doubtless a great many people are walking in such a light and in a false light but do not see their blindness and are quite content with a religion of their own, without any grace in it, without any of the exercise of the spirit of grace in it, self-satisfied, quite good in themselves, no repentance, no real need of Christ, no darkness. The Lord seems to refer to this in His Gospel by John where He speaks to the Pharisees who say that they see, "For judgment I am come into this world that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind" (John 9.39) Truly it will be the most awful thing to be deceived in eternal matters, after all to be weighed in the balances and be found wanting at last; but if by the mercy and grace of God we are found in the 10th. verse then we had far better have the darkness there than the light in verse 11. For those are God-fearing people who are more afraid of themselves than of anyone else and they find sin to be their greatest enemy. But these poor, shaken, tempest-tossed souls have a very tender word addressed to them here. Let such who fear God and obey the voice of his servant, who walk in darkness and have no light, that is, not as much light as they want, no clear inshining, not necessarily pitch darkness, but who yet feel that darkness, feel it in their souls and walk in it too in some of their circumstances. To such is a tender and gracious word, "Let him trust". whoever he may be, "let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God." Only grace can do this and yet truly it is a place where the Spirit of God will bring living souls to leave everything but Himself, and rightly viewed, everyone but Himself, so that they shall not look upon or trust in, an arm of flesh but in an all-powerful God shall be their confidence alone, a promise-performing God, and they will stay themselves upon Him.

In the chapter God expostulates, as it were, with His people or challenges them, that is the Jews, who by their apostacy and unbelief had separated themselves

from Him. He challenges them in regard to their condition in order to show them that it was not by reason of any injustice on His side. "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?" As though He would say, Now bring the documents and let us examine them and see by the evidence where the fault lies; and He told them where the sin was, "Behold, for your iniquities have you sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away". It is one of the greatest mercies that we can have to be brought to acknowledge our sin before God; to be brought to the place where David was when he said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest". (Ps.51.4) God refers to His power to save and that it is not through any lack in Himself that they were in such a condition. It is a mercy when we can rightly feel it refers to any known sin that His judgments are called for because of our deserts. Then the Lord Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Father in prophecy refers to His readiness to fulfil the commission laid upon Him, "The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned". The Lord Jesus speaks here of His prophetic office and His fitness to discharge it by reason of the instruction in that capacity He had received from His Father and expresses His obedience and suitability to discharge that and His alertness to hear what may be conveyed. So when a teacher may be instructing a class by his impressive manner, as soon as he begins to speak the children or the class are as it were arrested. There is a ready response to hear the instruction to be conveyed. "He awakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned". What amazing, condescending language follows, with what wonderful words the Son of God in prophecy describes His deportment under His sufferings. What matchless grace, "The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear" - He has as it were, informed me of what all this will mean, what it will cost Me, what I shall have to pass through, what I shall have to suffer. Then He says, "I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting", and so He proceeds to describe His holy determination to fulfil every obligation by the help of God. "I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary?" This seems to link a little with the Apostle Paul's words where he says, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again". (Romans 8.34) Therefore who is he that would appear to condemn one for whom I shed My blood, for whom I gave My back to the smiters? Who is he that will condemn? There

is no condemnation to such that are in Me. Who will contend with Me? What wonderful words and what wonderful moments too when a poor sinner burdened with sin and guilt obtains a view of a justifying Saviour and can rightly feel that all the devils in hell can never overcome him or successfully plead against him. Take away his filthy rags, it was said of Joshua in the vision, "And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head" (Zech.4.4-5) This is the Gospel! "Who is he that shall condemn me?" Many do, and then He speaks of those opposers; what of them? Why, "they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up". We can well afford to leave our enemies to God. We can leave them with Him who can, as here described, consume them as a moth, that is with the slightest touch of His hand they are gone, consumed. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord.

Then comes an enquiry, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord?" There were not very many in those days but then, as now, there was a remnant of godly souls and there is a remnant today, a remnant indeed compared to the people that live carelessly and altogether indifferent about their state and eternal things. Though they may profess a religion, "Who is among you?" May not this be a pertinent enquiry in a congregation, "Who is among you that feareth the LORD?" that have this grace in possession, that are not of the world that liveth in wickedness? Who is among you that feareth the Lord." Do not the Scriptures altogether show that no chastening is comparable to this blessing. The fear of the Lord is "the blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it" This is not a slavish dread of God's holy Majesty though it is indeed attended with a holy reverence of His Name and character and Word but this is a grace that is imparted whereby the spirit is made contrite. It is a separating grace and what a wonderful mercy it is when it is given to young people, to young men and women. I can be thankful, I believe, that God wrought this fear in my heart when I was in the throes of temptations and nearly running after them. I did go into them a little and suffered for it but could not go into them without pangs of conscience because of the fear of the Lord but when His work deepened these temptations lost their weight and the more important concerns of eternity took their place, to be right with God, to have something real. I remember when I was a lad sitting in the gallery of Galeed chapel. How I longed in my soul to possess that grace that had been described that morning. The fear of the Lord is a wholly gracious principle.

What is this fear of the Lord? It has several ingredients in it, it has in the first place a conviction. There is a great difference between sentiment or opinion and conviction. Plenty of people may have certain sentiments about religion and opinions about religion and be as dead as a stone and yet they think

they are right, if everybody else is wrong; but all the time you see they may be walking in the light of a fire they have made themselves. There is no real conviction in it. But in this fear of the Lord is a heart conviction or what may be termed a conviction of conscience by the Spirit of God wrought there and it is a conviction that there is a God. It is true that devils believe there is a God and tremble but this is something different; it is a conviction that there is a God that brings a trembling but not a slavish terror and dread although I know that can rise up in the heart under this conviction but it is a gracious conviction that produces a sense of unworthiness of any notice by this God, that reveals in some measure His character, His Majesty, His holiness, His goodness and His grace.

There is also knowledge in it. No one fears or esteems a person of whom they have no knowledge. If you do not know a person how can you have any esteem or affection for that person? So in relation to God, where this holy fear of the Lord is, there is a knowledge, in some measure, by divine revelation, of God, a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in His wonderful suitability to the case of a defiled leper, a revealed knowledge that brings before the eye of faith the remedy for sin and guilt in the convicted conscience and that will cause the sinner to apply to that remedy. There is humility in it, for where the fear of the Lord is in exercise rightly it removes that inherent pride that is in us, it humbles us at His feet and though we may still feel that pride working yet we are made to be ashamed of it and to fall before the Lord in confession of it. Obedience is in it, there is a following in the truth, obeying the voice of truth and a walking with the cross upon us as pilgrims and strangers upon the earth, separating ourselves from a world that lieth in wickedness, not strangers to God, but strangers in the earth, pilgrims. What a mercy if it can be said of us, what is in Mr. Philpot's "Baca's Vale" this morning, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God". Perhaps you feel to be more a stranger to God than to the world or to have more of the world in you than of the Gospel; but if that causes a grief and mourning then in all probability what you feel of yourself is very wide of the mark; beneath all the burdens is there not a secret cry, "O that I knew where I might find Him"? "Say unto my soul I am thy salvation". O the workings of this grace in the heart!

"Who is among you"? In this congregation here, who is among you that feareth the LORD? Where is this grace in exercise operating in and under the unction and influence of the Holy Ghost? But what about this people? Does it say that their circumstances are always amenable and pleasant; that they have no trouble, no affliction, no difficulties, no burdens, no crosses, no darkness? Not at all; and is it not strange that these very people that are here referred to and that

obey the voice of Christ are the very ones who walk in darkness and have no light, that is no clear shining? Yet to such it is said, "Let him trust in the name of the LORD and stay upon his God", in the darkness. That is the point friends, in the darkness. "Let him trust", and what is this? Why, cast your burden on the Lord and He shall sustain thee, let him trust. Yes, let him trust. O but these inward irritating, perplexing things! Yes, let him trust, all the more reason. 'O but I do not know how to put up with them', Let him trust in the name of the Lord. 'O but I cannot bear them, this or that injures me, wounds my feelings', Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. There is one course with the Lord's children that will never be proved wrong and that is the course of taking their concerns to Him, and this is what is intended here. Have you difficulties? Is there darkness upon you? Is there a darkness in your soul; a darkness in your path; a darkness in your future? Is there a dark cloud covering you in something that divine providence has caused you to walk in just now? What about it? "Let him trust". O but it is all so terribly dark and confusing. It is not too dark, too black to Him. It is not too conflicting and confusing for Jesus to understand. Is it all stormy; there is no storm in which He cannot speak and say, "Peace be still". Let him trust. It is a very tender word is it not and sometimes it can be when the Lord speaks such a word. "That obeyeth the voice of His servant"; it can come into this. You may go off to business in the morning, and not necessarily to business, but you may have before you a day when you feel to be overwhelmed with things and yet under these overwhelming things this can just drop into your heart, "Let him trust", and these three words will do. I want no more. Why? Because it is the still, small voice of Jesus in your heart. "Let him trust". 'O but I am so helpless', Yet you may find such a freeness in speaking to Him at such a time, 'I am so helpless, Lord'. Yes, bring your helplessness to Him. 'I am so dark'. Yes, bring your darkness to Him. 'I am so burdened'. Bring your burdens to Him. "Let him trust". Has there every been a time when this has been like a voice in your heart bringing a quietness there and saying,

"Be still my heart! these anxious cares
To thee are burdens, thorns, and snares"

What a rest it brings. You see nature cannot bring it and some of you know the contrast. I believe I do. I would not dare to say I feel that the Lord had never dropped such a word into my heart but I will tell you this, when the Lord drops it into your heart He gives the power with it and you find yourself trusting. You say, 'Is this faith in my poor soul, Lord?' and you will find that He will receive it and your spirit will find rest. It is a wonderful stay. Now these are the pilgrims spoken of in the Canticles, "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness?" Are you coming up from the wilderness? How are you coming up? "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" Leaning upon Him, not just putting her arm into His, but leaning her whole weight

upon Him. "Let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God", let him stay upon Him. Is not the spirit of adoption here? "Let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God". What a mercy that there should ever be such a word as this for poor destitute, needy sinners. "Who is among you?", and that those who fear the Lord should be coming up from the wilderness, strangers and pilgrims in the earth, separated from it, having no union with it. What union can there be between Christ and Belial, between light and darkness? Coming up from the wilderness leaning upon Jesus, leaning upon Him. "Let him trust."

"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant". Who is this servant? Why, the dear Redeemer of His church, the dear Son of God. And what is His service? His service is to pluck brands from the burning, His service is to remove the curse of a broken law from those who lie under that curse helpless and tempted. His service involved three things which are beautiful and attractive to living souls when faith is in exercise. It involves first of all His incarnation, for the work could not be accomplished without Christ being made flesh. The babe was born at Bethlehem to a service appointed Him by His Father who delighted in Him with great delight. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Is.42.1) They are such choice words are they not? They are such choice words and then you see this servant of the Father in the verses a little way down that chapter and the way in which He discharges that office and deals with the poor, weak, trembling things for whom He came to suffer, bleed and die. The bruised reed He will not break nor will He quench the smoking flax. He is the Father's servant who came, He passed by the nature of angels and took on Him the seed of Abraham as a servant. Though eternally the Son yet He was appointed to this office in the covenant. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb.5.8) and truly it was a wonderful service that He did. He did service to His beloved Father and He did service to His beloved people. He did for them what they could never have done for themselves, never. His service also involved substitution. Have you ever had a moment when you have seen as it were the the light and joy of heaven in that word, He was made sin for us, He knew no sin, but what a service He did, what a service for thee sinner, what a service it will be,

"Behold a scene of matchless grace,

'Tis Jesus in the sinner's place"

Here is the service. Have you ever worshipped Him in heart at Calvary, ever crept beside Him like a worm to see Him bleed for you? It will captivate you, it will gather you up, there will be nothing in the world then, He will fill you.

"For love of me, the Son of God
Drained every drop of vital blood.
Long time I after idols ran;
But now my God's a martyred Man."

O friends, if you and I are brought to that place we shall not be walking in sparks of our own kindling. No. Well, be this religion mine. Amen

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