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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Wednesday evening, 20th. February 1952.

"If thou hast run with the footmen, 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?"

Jeremiah 12.5

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The prophet Jeremiah was one of a number of faithful prophets that God raised up in those days. It was no trifling, flesh-pleasing commission that was committed to their trust. Indeed the Word of the Lord was a great and heavy burden to them, and conditions were very different from these days in which we live. The faithful testimony of the Lord's servants in those times brought them much suffering and much persecution, yet God stood by them and supported them, confirming His Word; He did not send them to 'a warfare at their own charges'. Jeremiah felt his inefficiency for this great labour to which the Lord called him saying, "Before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations", and replied, "Ah! LORD GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child". I can understand Jeremiah's feelings for, to a point, all the Lord's servants are just this - truth is so profound, its heights and depths are so beyond us, that words often seem to mock us and fail us when we attempt to speak of these profound realities.

"Living tongues are dumb at best,  
We must die to speak of Christ."

But the Lord assured His servant that He would be sufficient for him. "Say not, I am a child": do not say that, "for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee". "Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them". So for about forty years Jeremiah proclaimed the Lord's Word to the people, but they resented it. Faithful, seasonable reproofs and admonitions, timely warnings, confirming predictions, ran through his prophecies in all faithfulness and yet they turned from them and would not hear the Word through him.

Consequently they were eventually carried away into captivity for seventy years under the Lord's judgments.

This verse I have read would appear to be in the nature of a gentle and timely reproof to the Lord's servant. It is obvious that at this juncture Jeremiah was under very mingled feelings: there were certain things that pressed upon him, that bewildered him, and he has not always been alone, has he? Many good men have, on occasions, stumbled and been in confusion because of the Lord's ways and purposes. "Righteous art Thou, O LORD," There is something very sweet about this which evinces grace in the Lord's servant, so that although he makes an enquiry concerning something he cannot understand, he acknowledges that the Lord is just. Other men have been in the same place. Jeremiah here evidently was in the same frame of mind as Asaph when he said, "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me,.... my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." We shall never find anything to confirm us or to straighten things within us, by looking away from God. Asaph was bewildered in his mind by certain prevailing conditions that brought him under great distress: yet how wonderfully the Lord cleared it all up. Very probably the Lord has cleared things up for you. He can! In fact at times you may come into some bewildering circumstances that the Lord alone can clear them up; but how sweet it is when He does, which is but a fulfilment of His promise. For He has said, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight... and the rough places plain. These things will I do unto them and not forsake them." O in a moment the Lord can put everything straight in your soul, and in your circumstances too, when He comes and speaks in them, however crooked they may have been before. So said Habakkuk, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." Then how can it be that this nation, though indeed it be a wicked nation, should be ravished and devastated by a nation more

wicked still? The Lord's people have to prove that it is not the worst thing to be brought into and under conflicting conditions, for these are where faith and patience work, and where, when the Spirit of the Lord operates, some wonderful lessons are learned. I believe we have to prove that the sweetest lessons are often learned in the hottest furnace, but if we never get beyond the how or why of things we shall not profit much. Wherefore said Jeremiah, "Let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments." You can, in your feelings, go with him when things are all upside down with you. "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" "That is not right, is it? Ought that so to be? Can that be kindness on the part of a covenant God? Can any word of His promise be fulfilled by such opposite conditions? The Scriptures show that it has usually been under these opposite conditions that the Word of the Lord has been fulfilled and His promises made good.

This fifth verse that I have read as a text is proverbial and may be termed a figure of speech. The Lord appears to be speaking to His servant in a very fitting and timely way. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?" That is a proverbial statement as though the Lord would say, 'If present difficulties are too much for thee, if they weigh thee down, weary thee, overcome thee, then how will thou stand when greater difficulties or greater trials come? If these present things are too much, are more than you can bear, how will you endure when heavier burdens press, when trials more fiery come than these?' They did come, for at the time of this prophecy God's judgements had not fallen upon the people, but they did fall upon them later. Greater afflictions came than those then present. "If in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" That is, 'If certain trials or difficulties in your life overwhelm you, then what will you do in the article of death? If in the wilderness you cannot face the difficulties, or endure a trial, how will you do in Jordan's

stormy flood - when called upon to pass through the last deep river of death?' This is a word the Lord addresses to His servant, evidently with the design of preparing him for things that would be even more painful and more difficult to carry than the present things. I do not suggest that this may follow out in your own cases, but it is a word suggesting that the Lord may in future days lay heavier burdens upon us than the present ones, in which case we shall need the sustaining power and efficacy of His grace to bear us through.

Upon the general trend of this verse, I would like to bring before you two points this evening. One is the fact that there may be many things in the lives and experiences of the Lord's people that may greatly discourage and dishearten them; and the second is the remedy or secret, whereby they may be sustained and brought through them all, even to the swelling of Jordan's flood. The way or pilgrimage of the Lord's people here is designed to be a more or less rugged one. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." "There is a path" it is said, "which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen." Neither the profane nor the eagle-eyed professor has seen that narrow path/<sup>into</sup> which grace alone brings a vessel of mercy. No eagle-eyed professor knows the secret experience of the redeemed of the Lord in that path which the Lord has appointed them. Truly there is in that path much to give them joy, comfort and happiness, even in this life, but the Lord has designed that the pathway shall be interlaced with certain trials and afflictions, that will at times greatly dishearten and discourage them - sometimes unduly so. It may be often that such is the case with the Lord's people. Whether despondency of mind is justifiable in some cases the Lord only knows. His servant David was in great despondency of mind, in Psalm 42, and yet expostulated with himself concerning it. He said, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me:" and yet he said, "I will remember Thee." Very choice language that is - 'yet'. "Therefore will I remember Thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the Hill Mizar." He knew where

his strength was, where his comfort was, his refuge was, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God:" The dear people of God never come to such a pass that deliverance is impossible to them in the Lord's account, for what is impossible with reason, is possible with God. "With Him all things are possible." Yet where is there a child of God who has not at times become weary in the race? Where is there one who has not at times felt to be in a fainting condition like Jonah? "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple."

Sometimes adverse or crosshanded providences occasion great inward discouragement and a disposition to give everything up. Do they weary thee? Have they wearied thee? Have you got weary with running with the footmen, or in the land of peace? If so, how can you contend with horses? If you cannot keep pace with the footmen how could you keep pace with one on horseback? If in the land of peace you become weary and disheartened, how will you stand in greater floods, in the swelling of Jordan? It is a great question! But still Scripture shows that some of the strongest have, at times, come under great discouragement. Elijah fled from Jezebel into the wilderness and sat under the juniper tree and said, "Take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." A weariness came upon him. Does it come upon you sometimes? Such a weariness in your feelings that you can hardly continue much longer? You are only, as it were, running with the footmen, but you will prove that God sufficient Who sustains you now, to sustain you under far deeper afflictions if He disposes them. He will never lay a child of His under a rod without giving him to see mercy in His heart. Though the rod be in His hand mercy is in His heart. Still it is very hard travelling when perhaps at times, you may feel with Jacob, "All these things are against me", all of them. Then "deep calleth unto deep" at the voice of the Lord's waterspouts, when the echoes of one trial are scarcely over, before you find yourself in a deeper one.

"If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee." Where is there one who has not been wearied inwardly, if they have not expressed it? Sometimes something very hard to bear in your path or life may occasion great discouragement. It is a question whether the Lord's people often come into trials without having a battle with reason, is it not? Reason will raise its voice and say, 'Why should this cross be? Why should that Burden be laid upon me?' It wearies thee, does it not? Sometimes the daily conditions of life weary thee. You rise in the morning and have something before you that you know not how to face; the difficulties of the day, the difficulties of the business, the home, the family, the office, or whatever it may be, weary thee. I do not know how you feel about these things, some of you, but at times, it may be, your very soul is sick of it all, and you long inwardly to be free from it.

"Weary of earth, myself and sin,  
Dear Jesus, set me free."

That crook in the lot, that thorn in the flesh, wearies thee. This affliction comes just at a time when you did not want any affliction, or some particular cross is suddenly laid upon you, when you may have felt the least fitted to bear it. It wearies you. Sometimes certain persecutions or oppressions weary you, and not always from the world; there can be at times hard things to bear even from the Lord's people, things that weary you. So it is found, more or less, at times, in the life and experience of the Lord's redeemed family. Do you get any weariness? Do you say sometimes, How can I go on under these conditions? Is there no remedy? Is there no escape?

Sometimes too, weariness arises from bodily afflictions; infirmities of the flesh press hard and heavy. Is there not too at times a great weariness in your soul occasioned by the Lord's silence, and prayers that appear to be disregarded, so that you become weary in the effort of praying? When you attempt to get near the Throne of Grace, you find sharp and heavy temptations and a thousand voices, as it were, to put you to confusion. O the

weariness! Who is there who has not had a hard battle with the devil at times when attempting to pray? He suggests that it will be to no purpose, it will make no difference, what the Lord intends to do He will do, and if He intends to save you, you will be saved. The devil will drag and drive the poor struggling sheep of Christ to fatalism if he can. It wearies you, does it not? Things go on and still the Lord seems to withhold the desired blessing and faith becomes weary in the waiting. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh it is a tree of life." Well, what then can there be to strengthen and sustain the Lord's people under these wearying, weakening, difficult, hard, painful things? What is there? Here is the secret! There is no trial, no affliction, but that there is a remedy for it in respect of the Lord's children; the Lord has the remedy in His hand.

Here is one secret whereby the soul is sustained: and that is that all these things, these difficulties, these wearying things, are passing away; they are of very short duration even if they are sharp; and even if they last for your life, they are but of short duration. Is there not a consolation in this - "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment". That is the point - but for a moment. O but nature says, It is insupportable to me. Yes, but it is but for a moment. "Our light affliction" - that is comparatively speaking. Paul's afflictions were not light in themselves but they were comparatively light, as assessed by what God had prepared for him. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"! Here is the great secret. When we are really brought into this, then not only can we, by His grace, run with the footmen, but we can contend with the horses.

"Our light affliction"! All are of a very transitory nature. Another secret which is an antidote to this weariness is the view that faith has, that all our times are in His keeping. Is there not something very sweet about that at times, even when you have

got a bit weary with running with the footmen? They are in His keeping. The Psalmist felt a consolation in that, although he had enemies, persecutors, and those who sought his life. He said, "My times are in Thy hand." Is not that strengthening under a weariness you may feel? And is there not another point here too? namely that there is a need-be for these things? "Wherein ye greatly rejoice" said the apostle Peter, "though now for a season if need be," - O the need be. We cannot always look at it, and receive it, but it is in the Lord's account, the need be is, and you may have been well brought out of the trial before the Lord shows you the need be, or you may be right in the midst of the furnace. The Lord can show you the need be for these things, and when faith realises that in a gracious way, there can be such a realisation of the "need be" of the whole thing. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass."

Again, there is this which is very strengthening at times under this weariness - the Lord designs that all things shall work together for our good. How hard it is at times to believe that, especially when one thing after another appears to go against you. But every link in the chain is forged, as it were, by the hand of infinite wisdom and He has never made a mistake yet, and never will! "If thou hast run with the footmen" and art become weary, if present things press thee down, discourage, weaken, dishearten thee, how wilt thou do under greater pressure still? Well, I believe it can be said that at times the Lord's people may be far more disturbed by something comparatively trifling than by some things that are of a more serious nature; but the secret is here and the remedy is in this - that the Lord is all-sufficient. His divine presence felt in the soul will sustain in the swelling of Jordan or in contending with the horses. Perhaps it has been with some of you, that you have said you could not bear anything more, and then something far heavier has unexpectedly come upon you, and you have been brought through that more comfortably than through the former trial. His



presence is the great secret. He said to Jacob, "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest". Is not this true at moments at least,

"How light, while supported by grace  
Are all the afflictions I see!"

Then there is another choice point about this. When we come to "contend with horses" or come to "the swelling of Jordan" - the Lord's people have fellowship therein with a suffering Saviour. Nothing is so reconciling as this, and nothing so conforming to the will of God as this. Sweet fellowship! Perhaps when you have a bitter ingredient in your cup, the sweet and the bitter mingle together and Marah's waters become refreshing to the soul. How wilt thou contend with horses? "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" God can contend with the horses for thee and be with thee in the swelling of Jordan, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" is His promise. But still the way is designed to be one of great difficulty, the path is shown to be one of suffering, and though in these days with respect to the Church of God, all will not be murdered martyrs, yet all will 'suffer martyrdom within, though that seem less glorious.' Is there a weariness of some things? Sometimes the enemy takes great advantage of this weariness and will turn the tide with thee if he possibly can. But despite all the difficulties, the battles, the conflicts, the fears, the hardness, the fretfulness, the peevishness, the rebellion working within, yet in a moment the Lord can bring a wonderful quietness into your heart so that you can walk in them. "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."

Then another point is, faith will look beyond the grave to the joys prepared for the redeemed of the Lord. The apostle said, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Nothing will keep the mind so steady as the eye of faith being fixed upon omnipotence in Christ. When you can see God above the ladder as a covenant God, and every rung of that ladder as indicating some difficult thing in your life, faith can triumph over it all and lay hold of God and prevail. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Well, all is in the Lord's hands; whether we may yet have to "contend with horses", that is have greater difficulties, burdens, trials, or afflictions than the present ones, the Lord knows; but the purport of this word is - if we faint now, what shall we do then? What a wonderful grace faith is! Faith eyes divine sufficiency and can say with the Lord's servant Job, "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold." Amen