

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday
evening 29.4.73

Hymns: 886, 1060, 379,

Reading Isaiah 43

Text Job 23.3-5

"Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to His seat. I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me."

The reading of Job's exercises and experience shows that he was no stranger to his God. He is referred to as one "that feared God, and eschewed evil" and was commended by the Lord in a particular way, yet he passed through an experience unique in the circumstances that he had to walk in and the trials he had to endure, as well as the losses he sustained, so that it is no wonder that Job came to this place, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him" - not because he did not know Him but because at this particular juncture in his life a darkness seems to have overwhelmed him. This is not a strange experience to the living family of God, and it did not mean that God was against His servant, but that He had a purpose in the things that He laid upon him and through which he had to pass.

Here there seems to be, notwithstanding all, a venture of faith with a measure of confidence, as though he would say, Notwithstanding all the darkness, the misery, the trial, the conflict and opposition, and the hard things said against me, yet still I know He will not plead against me. Hard things had been said to Job, but "Will He plead against me with His great power?", as though Job would say, 'That would crush me completely', but though he was enveloped in this darkness he ventures his case before the Lord in a confidence that he would not be rejected, "Will He plead against me with His great power? No but He would put strength in me". Although he looked every way so to speak and a cloud covered everything, yet even so there was something in the heart of Job that pierced the cloud, this cloud of distressing, hard and heavy affliction. It was something that enabled him to venture with his case to the Lord Who understood him perfectly and eventually honoured him and

justified him as He did not those three friends of whom He said, "Ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job hath", and the Lord honoured it.

It seems a wonderful thing this matter of Job who was brought to such an extremity, to curse the day of his birth, and was apparently ^{his} taunted by his wife to curse God, but nothing could move Job to curse/ God Who had laid these heavy afflictions upon him. What an amazing mercy it is for any poor troubled, burdened one to know the Lord, and to take their matters, their burdens, to Him Who never misunderstands them. It does not matter how intricate they may be, the Lord understands when perhaps you cannot understand them, or your friends cannot understand them. So, although the history of Job is familiar, his experience is unique. It is a part of Holy Scripture that is for our learning, and I wonder whether you and I have ever been in the place where Job was, or if you are now in the place where Job was, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him", Not where I might find my possessions, not, Oh that I knew where I might find those camels and oxen and sheep and asses and my sons, no - everything else seems secondary in comparison with finding God. What a point there is here is there not? Naturally speaking Job would be set upon recovering what he had lost, for everything was swept from him, stroke upon stroke, loss upon loss, calamity upon calamity fell upon him, so that he might well have wondered where the scene would end; but even so there was one thing in the heart of Job, one desire, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him".

It is a wonderful thing to have an experience where a felt need of God rises above everything else. I wonder whether this may touch a spot with any who feel to be burdened with a load of sin, or it may be, walking in darkness and feeling to have no light, or not much light; or it may be walking in some heavy thing and possibly, as is often the case, Satan exploiting it and attempting to bring a poor, troubled, burdened one into despair and to curse God, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him", as though that would put everything right, straighten every crook, put everything right, dark as it is now.

"Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to His seat". What seat is this, in a Gospel sense? Surely it must be the throne of grace upon which sits the Mediator between God and poor guilty men. "Oh that I knew" - Oh that I could get a sight of Him, some sweet manifestation of Him - "that I might come even to His seat". That is set forth, as I have mentioned, by the mercy seat that covered the ark of which the Lord said, "There will I meet with thee, and there will I commune with thee". That mercy seat was a beautiful type of the Lord Jesus Christ, such a beautiful type of Him. He is the mercy seat, He is that throne of grace, He is that glorious One through Whom poor sinners may approach the Father and plead their cause for the Redeemer's sake. "I would order my cause before Him". Have you got a cause? You have got a soul, but have you got a cause, that is, a matter that you have to take to the Lord? A matter that no one else can manage for you? Each of his friends, you can see, seemed to come short of the point altogether. They were miserable comforters; and it may be you know something of this, have you been in a place where you have said "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat? I would order my cause before Him"? This is not often a long prayer, although it may be a long pleading before the Lord in secret.

The publican ordered his cause before God when he said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." That is a good way of ordering our cause before Him, not boasting of something, or of being better than somebody else, like the Pharisee who did not pray for anything because he did not feel to need anything. He had no cause or trouble to order before the Lord. But some of you here may have a cause to order before Him. Some of you may feel as we older ones were brought to feel in our younger days, like the poor publican when he said, "God be merciful to me a sinner". What better way can there be of ordering our cause before Him? Where a confession is real friends, where a confession is from the heart it is never rejected, never, and is it not the case with the Lord's people that in the disposings of His providence, in losses, bereavements, trials afflictions, in a mingled cup and sometimes a very mingled cup,

one and another is brought to this, "Oh that I knew", I would lay my case before Him, open my mouth to Him; and for our encouragement in the Psalm, the Lord says, "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" - open it wide. Not, there are a few little things - open it wide, that is ask for great things. The Lord says "I will fill it", that I will regard this opening of the mouth and I will satisfy the soul with good things. "I will fill my mouth with arguments".

This was my reason for venturing again with this because it is such a beautiful point in a believer's experience, "I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments". Our language at best is very poor - but it is like bringing before Him something that would move Him to receive you. This coming before the Lord, ordering our cause before Him appears to indicate a very troubled state of mind, because of the Lord's mysterious dealings. So it was with Habakkuk, as we read in the first chapter, "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear"; and when the Lord did answer it was a terrible judgement that was to come upon the land. But what was the effect of this response with Habakkuk? He said, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me", and what I shall answer when I am reproved" or 'argued with', that is, when the matter is debated. It is not quarrelling with God but waiting upon Him, to have something explained that may for the time confound you. You have to take it to Him, and wait to ascertain what the Lord would say; and this was the point with Job, he says, "I would know the words which he would answer me". He has filled his mouth with arguments so to speak, and now he is waiting to see how the Lord would answer him. "I would know the words which he would answer me and understand what he would say unto me". He was not waiting in a despairing state of mind, he was waiting with a simple confidence, notwithstanding all the complications of the case. He was waiting with a humble confidence. "Will He plead against me with His great power?" Will He crush me absolutely, will He condemn me? Job said in another chapter, "I will say unto God, Do not condemn me", here you see he had a measure of confidence,

"Will he plead against me?", turn me down, reject me, cast me away, despise me - no. This is one of the best no's in the Bible, "No, but he would put strength in me". That is what Job appears to have felt, so he could continue to wait upon the Lord, and order his cause before Him.

To a point what I have more particularly upon my mind is these arguments, "I would fill my mouth with arguments". There is something very beautiful about this, that is, I will venture to take something before the Lord, I will bring something before Him that He can hardly reject. I will have some arguments with Him as a reason why He should regard me. One of these arguments can be the Lord's invitation to a poor thing to come with his matters, whatever they may be. Is there a burden of sin pressing any? Can there be any argument about that? I have been thinking about what is said in Isaiah 1, the Lord says, "Come now, and let us reason together", as though He might say, you have an argument, bring it to Me, let us reason together, fill your mouth with it, bring it before me. How sweet this is, and what did the Lord say about this reasoning together? Not, 'well I will think about it, but I am afraid your sins are too black, too dreadful' - they are black and they are dreadful, but not too black and dreadful for the Lord to forgive them, "Let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool". Here is an argument.

So now if any may be burdened in this way under a sense of guilt, and long to have a taste of His pardoning mercy, you have an argument, or perhaps you might say you would not dare to come and attempt to enforce your case, but He invites you to; and here is the argument, you remind Him of His promise, Why, say you, would not that be presuming? No, because He says, "Put me in remembrance" - not because He has forgotten - but because He will have you bring it before Him and be free about it too, this is to open your heart before Him. I would fill my mouth with arguments. What argument can there be for a poor sin convicted one? The argument is the precious blood of Christ, that is the argument to be used in faith at the mercy seat. This is an argument on the ground of a promise, as it

is in the Epistle by John, where John says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". Is not this an argument? Faith takes in its hand the divine attributes so to speak as an argument. Is not this an amazing thought? "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins", faithful because He has promised to forgive them, and just because atonement has been made for them. Oh yes, and when this really comes into your heart, when it is felt, when it is a sweet experience, then you are not far from heaven - not far away from beholding the Lamb as it had been slain.

Another argument is the all prevailing mediation of the Lord Jesus. He sits on no precarious throne. The Apostle Paul to Timothy says, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus". He gave himself a ransom for all - all these arguers - to be testified in due time". It is great when one can feel their spirit drawn to God under a view of the Mediator, for He stands between inflexible justice and one who is covered with filthy rags, He stands between the two parties,

"But since my Saviour stands between,
In garments dyed in blood,
'Tis he, instead of me, is seen,
When I approach to God".

Oh what a blessed Mediator He is; He can deal effectively with both parties, He does not make some offer to intercede and fail. He pleads His own merit and that can never fail. "I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments".

Another argument is the wisdom of God. This can be an argument to fill your mouth with. Does not James say, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him". If any of you lack it - I do not know if any of you do actually, but I know I do. Oh but you will say, so do I; I am walking in something now and I do not know how to deal with it, I do not feel to have wisdom to walk in it, or wisdom to handle it either - I do not know what to do. I can tell you what to do - fill your mouth with it, and take it to the Lord as an argument. In that beautiful chapter of Proverbs as you know the Lord Jesus Christ is speaking under the appellation of Wisdom and He speaks very beautifully. He is that Wisdom, He is made unto His

people "wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption". But you may say, I have got some very trying providences and I revolt against them, I do not know how to walk in them, I do not feel to have this wisdom, my case is so intricate nobody really understands it. But here is something to fill your mouth with. "I will fill my mouth with arguments", with something you greatly need, which only the Lord can do for you and bring to pass.

I will fill my mouth with arguments, I will plead it before Him, I will order my cause before Him. This filling your mouth with an argument is like bringing before the Lord some reason why He should accept you. You have an argument, we may say, and what is it? It is His own promise, and there is no better argument than that, "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good". You take the promise to Him, but perhaps you say, what you are talking about may be all very well but what I want is to see the promise fulfilled. You have been lingering on a long time perhaps, but not so long possibly as the poor man was waiting at the pool. Have you been waiting a long time for some deliverance, and here and there have had just a ray of light on it? If you have been waiting long and you say, I know not what to do, I can tell you, fill your mouth with an argument and take it to the Lord. Thou didst say Lord, "I will fill it", you may remind the Lord, remind Him of what He said, as in the Psalm I have mentioned, "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" - not, keep your mouth closed but "Open thy mouth wide". Fill your mouth with arguments, whatever they are - "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it".

Here are a few points then and here I must leave it. Many a poor troubled, burdened one has proved what Job proved to be the result with him, "Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me". Fill your mouth then, remind the Lord of His own word and promise, and wait upon Him, whatever your matters may be, and eventually you will have to say, He has been better to me than all my fears after all. Amen.

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