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Sermon preached at "Ebenezer", Clapham by Mr. J. Delves on Sunday evening, 8th. May, 1938

Text: Job 23.3-6

"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. Will He plead against me with His great power? No; but He would put strength in me."

This cry of the Lord's servant was not a cry of ignorance of God, but rather of a belief in Him, of one who believed in His divine perfections and walked before Him, but who, being in deep affliction, had, at the time, a cloud between his own soul and God. "O that I knew where I might find Him." I believe that this will often be the cry of a living soul who cannot be satisfied apart from sweet communion and intercourse with the Object of love. It is one thing to believe in the omnipresence of Jehovah, but another thing to walk in the light of His countenance, to enjoy His presence, to hold communion with Him, to experience the relationship of children, to call Him our Father, to worship Him in the Person of His Son. O how often some of us may have to cry as one expresses it, "Larger communion let me prove; With Thee, blest Object of my love." Christ will ever be the centre of attraction to a living exercised soul, and when there is a cloud between, when one is pained by His absence, when distance is felt, this cry will go up, "O that I knew where I might find Him!" The Church expresses the same desire in substance: "Tell me, O Thou Whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon."

Thus we see Job giving expression to his complaint and his desire. 'My complaint is heavy; he said, "My stroke is heavier than my groaning". All that he had groaned out in the bitterness of his spirit did not convey the bitterness of soul he had felt. He had felt more than he had given expression to, but there was his desire, "O that I knew where I might find Him". Is that your desire, fellow believer? Are you longing for His blessed presence, to enjoy

fellowship with Him? Where is He to be found? He is to be found in the Person of Jesus. There God will ever be propitious to coming sinners, for He has said to all such, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Certainly there is no other way of access to God but this, but this is a living way, "A new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh."

"Come, then, repenting sinner come;
Approach with humble faith;
Owe what thou wilt, the total sum
Is cancelled by His death."

Here the Father is worshipped; here the Son is adored; and here the Spirit is worshipped. All centres in the Person of Emmanuel, God with us.

In the instruction that God gave to Moses when he made the ark He commanded that over the ark there was to be a covering, a Mercy-Seat, wherein were the two tables of the testimony and, upon each end of the Mercy-Seat, the two cherubims. Thus we find David praying like this, "O Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth." Here is a place, then, where the Lord meets with poor sinners who come in the exercise of faith in the blood of Jesus, with nothing else to plead but that sacrifice, renouncing their own works, and putting their trust in the all-sufficiency of the Saviour. There are places where He is to be found and places where He is not to be found. The Church in the Song of Solomon said, "By night on my bed I sought Him Whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not." I would believe that the bed there is the bed of carnal security and ease, and you will not find Him there. You must be stirred up from that bed if you want to find the Lord. You will not find Him in a carnal mind either, for "To be carnally minded is death." If we are allured by the things of this world, they will ever draw us away from the Saviour; we shall not find Him there, but it is our mercy that He is to be found, and He is to be found by sinners too. It is sinners who want Him.

"Sinners can say, and none but they,
How precious is the Saviour."

I am sure you will never pine for Jesus unless you feel sin's bitter sting; but a convinced sinner, feeling the burden of His guilt, and longing for satisfaction, will be thus crying, "O that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat!"

The seat here, we would believe, is the Mercy-Seat where Jesus waits to answer prayer, where He waits to be gracious. "I would come", says Job, "even to His seat." It may be that here Job would mean His judgment seat. He had been wrongly accused by his friends, and knew that God would execute righteous judgment. He knew that the Lord Himself did sit upon the throne judging rightly, and his desire was that his judgment might come forth from His presence. His friends condemned him and his desire was that God should hear his cause and acquit him from the charges brought against him. "I would come even to His seat." He would rather be judged by God than by his friends. God will never misjudge; He alone knows how to execute judgment, and thus the Lord's people at times are enabled to betake themselves to Him and say, "Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence." "Until He plead my cause and execute judgment for me: He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold His righteousness." "I would come even to His seat." This is expressive of a spirit of reverence and yet of a venturing faith, believing that the Lord would receive him and grant him his request.

"I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments." "Order my cause before Him;" not because the Lord was unacquainted with his cause; not because He needed any explanation from Job; but Job's desire was to take his whole case to God, knowing that He and He alone, could manage it rightly for him; and to wait upon Him to know the words He would answer him, to understand what He would say unto him, and Job believed he would come out on the right side too. "Will He plead against me with His great power? No, but He would put strength in me." Job believed that the Lord would not condemn him, rather that He would be on his side and vindicate his cause against those who misjudged his case. "I would order my cause before Him." It is a mercy to have a cause for God to deal with; or as we may express it, a case for God, /case that He and He alone

can manage. If you have a case, take it to the Lord. Do as Job did here: order your cause before Him. O there are times when the Lord's people have to take to God their souls' case, their providential matters, their burdens, their trials, their families, their business, matters that pertain to this life, and to their souls. They have to take them to Him, and when favoured thus to order their cause before Him they can unburden their hearts, open their minds to Him. How sweet it is when the Lord's children are thus favoured. There are times when we try to pray and the heavens are as brass to us. Jeremiah, in his Lamentations, said, "He.....hath brought me into darkness, but not into light. Surely against me is He turned... When I cry and shout, He shutteth out my prayer." He was in darkness) At such a time there is this cry, "O that I knew where I might find Him!" But having access to Him, being admitted to His presence, then the believer orders his cause before Him, lays his case at His feet, commits his way unto Him, believing that He can bring him through and deliver him from all his enemies, vindicate his cause and bring him forth to the light.

"I would order my cause before Him." What is your cause, or your case? What is it presses upon you now? You may say possibly, 'My case is my sins; my burden is my guilt; my trouble is a wounded conscience; my sorrow is this that I have sinned against Him.' What can you do with a case like that? Why, the Lord has made a way whereby you may take it to Him; you may go to Him with your sins. He has said, "Come unto Me;" all those who are labouring, burdened with their sins, "Come unto Me." "I would order my cause before Him." It does not behove us ever to go carelessly into the solemn presence of God. Reverence always becomes our approach to the Majesty of heaven. "I would order my cause before Him." Not that the Lord needs a long prayer or a detailed explanation of the case, but you may order your cause before Him, poor sinner, when, like the poor woman, you go from real necessity and fall at His feet, at His seat, and say, "Lord, help me." That is a very good ordering. He does not need a detailed

explanation, for He has a full understanding of the case, He knows what presses upon you. "I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments." This was what Job would do could he but find God, and it is our mercy when the Lord allows His people to do this, to come into His solemn presence and to plead with Him; and the Lord condescends even to reason with His people. "Come, now, and 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." What a wonderful word! You see, the Lord invites His people to reason with Him, to draw near to Him, and if indeed they are favoured to find Him, to come into His sacred presence, He invites them to reason with Him, as though He would say, 'You have your view of the case, I have Mine. What is your objection? What is your burden? let us reason together.' Has the Lord ever thus favoured you? What about your sins in such a case? Why, you say they are red like crimson, as blood, so to speak. What does the Lord say about them? "They shall be white as wool, as snow. That would appear to show that the persons who thus come, though they themselves feel to be defiled from head to foot with sin, shall have it all taken from them and stand white, clean and spotless through the blood of the Lamb; white as snow.

"Let us reason together." Here then, we have the two parties coming together in what would seem to be a kind of argument, a reasoning; the Lord reasoning with the sinner and the sinner reasoning his case before God. Later He says, "Put Me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou that thou mayest be justified." "Put Me in remembrance." Why? The Lord never forgets anything. No, it is not because He has made an oversight, but it is because He will have His people remind Him of His own word and promise. "Put Me in remembrance." How condescending of the Lord thus to admit His people, thus to reason with them! Now Job says, "I would fill my mouth with arguments." Not that a sinner would dare argue with God in the usual sense of that term, suggesting wrong on the other side. No, this is expressive of a poor sensible sinner pleading his cause at the foot-

stool of divine mercy. "I would fill my mouth with arguments." So he has something to say; he has nothing to come with, but something to ask for. The Lord brings His people to the rock-bottom sometimes, to the place expressed by Toplady.

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace."

But still, though they have to come empty-handed, they come with their hands full of the merits of Christ, the sacrifice of Christ; come with the hands of faith full of that incense, and thus they have words in their mouth to plead with Jesus. "Fill my mouth with arguments". Not to argue in a way of self-justification, though Job sought here to be vindicated of the charges laid against him by his friends; but when a poor sinner comes into the presence of God he does not argue in a way of self-justification. No, his mouth will be closed as to any self-justification in the sight of God. He will not go and say, 'Lord, I have lived a good life; I have kept the law and paid twenty shillings in the pound; I ought to have as much right as anyone to be favoured.' It would not be favour then; it would only be what was due; but self-justification has to come down.

What is the argument then? or what are the arguments that sinners may use when they come before God? Why, I believe one argument is just this, the argument of faith in the free mercy of God in Christ; mercy and mercy alone. You can argue that way. You cannot argue with something in your hand, with a penny to pay, but "When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both;" and such characters can argue best before God, because when they are absolutely insolvent themselves, they have nothing to plead or argue but the free mercy of God in Christ, and they argue, or plead this mercy, free mercy. This was the theme of the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner." That was his cry, and God is pleased to exercise mercy towards poor sinners through His own blessed Son. What is mercy? Mercy is the free favour of God to

offenders, miserable people who have broken His law, have offended justice, sinners liable to the outpourings of His wrath. Mercy! Why may they plead mercy? Because God is a God of mercy, a God Who delighteth in mercy, Who is abundant in goodness and truth, because He has declared Himself to be a merciful God; otherwise, we would not dare plead or argue thus. This is the ground, when one, conscious of having broken God's law, and knowing what he has deserved, being ruined in himself, has his eyes opened to the way to heaven; he stands on the ground of free mercy, and thus he comes to the mercy-seat, and he succeeds then.

"Mercy through blood I make my plea.
O God, be merciful to me."

We read that, "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him." O how encouraging this is for us, could we but believe it. This is one thing that a poor hell-deserving sinner may argue before God, His mercy, free mercy. How can mercy come to him? Through the wounds of Jesus, through that blessed Man who hung upon Calvary's tree. This Sacrifice has opened the way for mercy to come.

"'Twas Jesus my Friend when He hung on the tree,
Who opened the channel of mercy for me."

O that is a good argument, and it is an argument that can be used only by a poor sinner sensibly lost, one who has no good works to plead, although he would keep as far from sin as he could in the practice of it; one taught by the Spirit of God, one whose eyes are opened to the spirituality of God's righteous law, one who will come to the Throne of Grace and say, 'Nothing but mercy, Lord, free mercy!' It is a very successful argument, because mercy will take a sinner to heaven. Argue that then.

Again, may not a poor weak sinner, when he gains the ear of God, argue the power of God? I believe he may. What power? Not omnipotent power exactly, though he may plead that, but the power of Christ to save. He would plead that the power of Jesus may be put forth on his behalf. Notice the enquiry in Isaiah's prophecy:

"Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in His apparel travelling in the greatness of His strength? I that speak in righteousness, Mighty to save."

"Mighty to save is Christ the Lamb."

"Able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." Mighty to save, able to save. Now you argue that, and I believe that will be acceptable in the sight of God when you are favoured with nearness to Him, when you are brought thus into His presence, when you can find Him thus at the Mercy-Seat. The power of God in Christ is a great thing. "All power", the Lord Jesus said, "is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." Therefore there is no cause for a weak sinner to despair in regard to his soul's salvation, nor in relation to his enemies that he may have to meet, for every child of God will be made an overcomer in the end. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree of Life." "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony", and it is the power of Christ that a sinner can argue at the footstool of divine mercy. The power of Christ can save him -- all-sufficient power. It is a great help if we can rightly realise that; a great help.

"All-sufficient is our Jesus,
Though our sins are black as hell."

"Fill my mouth with arguments." Then again, another argument that we may take to the Lord is His faithfulness. We may plead that, argue that. "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Our strength lies in the faithfulness of God to His Word.

"His Word shall stand, His truth prevail,
And not one jot or tittle fail."

It is helpful sometimes to a child of God when he can plead, argue, or reason the faithfulness of God. Power and faithfulness in God go together, but they do not always go together in creatures. A man may have power to do many things, but may not be faithful in the exercise of that power. "But Christ as a Son over His own house; Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing

of the hope firm unto the end." The faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God is an effectual argument for a poor sinner. He is faithful to all His covenant transactions. "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David My Servant." He is faithful to all His covenant transactions; and not one precept of that covenant can ever fail, and O how helpful it is sometimes to a poor sinner to plead and argue thus the faithfulness of God. Fill your mouth with it.

Then again, may we not argue His promises? How all these points blend together, do they not? Fill your mouth with them, argue His promises. "All the promises of God in Him are Yea! and in Him Amen! unto the glory of God by us." Plead them. Did ever one of God's promises fail? Did ever a poor sinner seek Him in vain? Was ever one turned away, lost?

"In the world of endless ruin,
Let it never, Lord, be said,
Here's a soul that perished suing
For the boasted Saviour's aid."

Plead His promises; there is a good argument here. It is a kind of arguing that a poor sinner may, in all reverence and humility, exercise before God, and the Lord will not withstand him. He will never go against His own blessed perfections, or ever turn back upon His own Word. No, He is abounding in mercy; He has all power; He is faithful to His Word and will fulfil His promise. He will fulfil His promise to every coming sinner; "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."

Then lastly, and perhaps I might say chiefly, the ground of argument a poor sinner uses for acceptance with God and for salvation is the argument of the efficacy of Christ's precious blood to save him. The plea is the plea of the atonement, and the argument is the sufficiency of that sacrifice. How wonderfully the Apostle opens up the doctrine of the atonement and the efficacy of it in the chapter we have been reading (9th. Hebrews). Here is a ground of argument. Thus we come, sometimes, do we not?

"Just as I am without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me."

Fill your mouth with arguments and be constant therein; wait upon Him in faith, for you will surely receive in due time if you faint not. "Wait on the Lord;... and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait I say on the Lord." "I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me." Job knew the words wherewith his friends answered him; they condemned him; but he said, "I would know the words with which He would answer me." He knew that the Lord would answer him in a different way from that in which his friends answered him. "I would know the words which He would answer me", so that he would say, I will betake myself to the Lord and fill my mouth with arguments and I am sure of what the issue will be. "Will He plead against me with His great power? No, but He would put strength in me." I believe sometimes, if you are enabled to argue thus with the Lord, or rather plead with Him, if you can plead in faith, you will find in your pleading the Lord will put strength into your soul and enable you to plead and argue with more fervency until the blessing comes. You will be like prevailing Jacob and say,

"Lord, I cannot let Thee go,
Till a blessing Thou bestow."

"I would know the words." He would wait upon God to hear His decision of the case; and so it is with the Lord's children sometimes; they say, Lord let me hear Thy voice, and the desire is that it may be favourable. Job believed it would be; he did not believe that the Lord's word to him would be a condemning word. "Will He plead against me?...No, but He would put strength in me." The Lord help us with our own particular cases thus to do, to fill our mouth with arguments. If the Lord brings you nigh you can plead; you can,

"Urge thy claim through all unfitness;
Sue it out, spurning doubt,
The Holy Ghost thy witness."

Amen.