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La. P. 389 sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Wednesday evening 6.10.71.

Hymns: 6, 70, 441

Reading: Job 36

Text: Psalm 46.10

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"Be still and know that I am God"

We have read a little in Job of the words of Elihu, that God is just in all His ways although from a natural point of view it did not appear to be so, because Job was one who feared God, a perfect and upright man and one who eschewed evil, and yet all those desolating calamities came upon him which were enough to crush the strongest spirit. Naturally speaking one might say, "Why?" to many things, to some things in our own lives. We may say why should this be, or why should that be, of things which may be mysterious to us, and may perhaps occasion much inward conflict, as some things do. Even so, we find that God has a purpose in all He does or permits, as far as that expression can be considered consistent. Elihu said in the light of all this, "God is great and we know Him not". Even in the reading of Holy Scripture in some circumstances, in the lives of godly men, we may be somewhat confounded by the trials they had to pass through; yet in each case the Lord brought them through, blessed them and made their latter end better than their beginning. It is a mercy when faith holds fast in the face of everything that seems confounding to reason. They are two opposites and can never really flow together. Here we walk by faith not by sight, and sometimes it has been a walking by faith in very dark paths, deep trials, much tribulation, much affliction; yet even so God, we believe, has a wise and tender purpose toward His people in all the disposings of His providence. It is a great thing when rightly we can "be still and know that He is God." This Psalm is very confirming, comforting, strengthening and consoling. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble". It does not say we shall have no trouble for we shall, and the Lord's people have some troubles the world have not. There can be similar circumstances, but the Lord's people have exercises in and under them that are peculiar to a living soul.

"God is our refuge and strength" - this seems to be the language of the church more than a particular person - "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof". Not, God is our refuge and strength, therefore it will always be calm, quiet and peaceful, and there will be no roaring waters, swelling mountains, or the earth being moved and carried into the midst of the sea. Notwithstanding all this, "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High". This seems to bring us into a new condition of feeling; the quietness of a river with its streams quietly gliding along, notwithstanding all the commotions of the earth. There are living communications of divine love and mercy to poor sinners who put their trust in Him. So the author could say, "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge". It is a mercy when we can feel this, it will bring a confidence, a rest to the mind and spirit.

The Psalm is a beautiful one. It begins and ends with the same language, "God is", "the God of Jacob is". "God is" - it is a mercy when we can feel that "God is", not simply that there is some supreme Being but that God is the God of His people, the God of Jacob is our refuge, therefore all our matters, our life and everything connected with it, are in His hand; "all my times are in thy hand". It is a mercy when we can feel something of this, and "be still and know that I am God." I would like to speak of this in three or four particular aspects.

First of all as a warning; for we may look upon it as being a divine warning that seems to come in after what has been recorded in the Psalm of the power of God in making desolations in the earth and making wars to cease unto the end of the earth. The Lord has indeed made desolations in the earth; He has done this all through the ages of time. He has made desolations in the way of solemn judgments that have fallen upon the ungodly, and there have been desolating wars. All through the Old Testament

we can see that the Lord has made desolations in the earth, in the terrible flood, in the burning of Sodom, and in the wars that have cost such dreadful loss of human life; and as far as the children of Israel are concerned, in their captivity, and ultimate dispersion, so that for generations the land was a wilderness and the temple just a mass of ruins. He made desolations; He makes desolations still in the exercise of His divine sovereignty in some ways that may confound us and this is like a warning voice to - "be still" - to warn us against revolting against the Lord's ways and dealings in things that may come upon the earth, or our nation, or the church, or individual persons. It is true they cause much distress and grief, as the things that have just this week taken place in the death of these four poor children. It is extremely sad; but the warning to us is against revolting against the ways of God, however mysterious they may be. This appears to be the case with Elihu in his address to Job. His great point appears to be to acknowledge the justice of God in those things that Job had to pass through. This may seem at times very, very difficult, but this word, "be still" is as though the Lord would warn us against the spirit of rebellion, resentment and fretfulness in view of the Lord's ways and the disposings of His providence. Sometimes these involve very heavy things, they stagger us, they wound us, they grieve us; but grief is different from rebellion. One can feel grief under distressing circumstances and yet not be rebellious, revolting and resentful in our spirit against the ways of the Lord. This is a warning; yet how often there has been this murmuring spirit, characteristic of the children of Israel; although the Lord had done great things for them, yet how soon they rebelled against God and Moses. They continually murmured, this is very solemn, because they suffered much chastening on this account, desolating things sometimes under solemn judgments, though the Lord did not forsake His people. We can be grieved without being bitter, rebellious and resentful. There is a point in this; I believe in the trials of the Lord's people there can be grief without bitterness. It is rather a sweet spot in a way, and there is a stillness in it; although it may be hard to bear with

some things, as it is now with us, yet even so they are all in the Lord's hands. It is true that we are grieved, yet grief is not sinful in itself; but rebellion, pride, bitterness, resentment, is the uprising of our poor old fallen nature. Yet we feel it sometimes, do we not? This is then a warning against revolting.

How sad are some things with us now, we all feel sad and grieved; but even so with the Lord's dear people there is a spot into which they can be brought and can feel as we have been singing,

"My Father's hand prepares the cup,
And what He wills is best"

To come there is very sweet, then we can feel a little stillness. It is one thing to read comforting words; we can easily read comforting, quieting words in the Scripture; but what we are not able to do is to bring them into our hearts, so that we can feel the consolation of them in a gracious and spiritual way. When we do, we can feel a little stillness. How does the Lord do this, then? Why, sometimes the Spirit of the Lord may bring a fitting word with some power into the heart that brings a quietness with it. "When He giveth quietness who then can make trouble?" Sometimes it can be without any word at all. It can be a sacred influence that you feel upon your spirit, although it may be more than you can seem to understand. The Spirit of the Lord can bring a quieting influence into the heart when one is perturbed and distressed, and then there is a little stillness. If we could command of ourselves what is in this Psalm, we need not be perturbed about anything really, neither need we when we can feel in our hearts this gracious stillness. It is not a fatalistic attitude; it is a gracious stillness; but here is the warning, "Be still" as though it were a word of warning to a rebellious, fretful one, "Be still". It is nature that rises up, but it is grace that falls under. Nature will never fall under the disposings of God's ways in an acceptable manner. It is grace alone operating in the heart that can bring a stillness to the comfort and peace of mind of a troubled one. Here is the warning then and this is the first point - a warning against the possible consequences

of fighting against God, of revolting, rebelling, resenting the ways of the Lord with us.

A second point consists in what is involved in this stillness. It is experimental, it is the Lord speaking here, "Be still and know that I am God". It is the Lord speaking, and the Speaker must give the blessing, it is beyond our command, naturally speaking; but there is something very sweet in it. One of the ingredients in this stillness is faith. Does not this link up with what I referred to on the past Sabbath day when the Lord said, "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me", it is faith in exercise that can see a Father's hand toward us in His dispensations, painful as they may be, that can bring a stillness. It is confidence in God, a sacred confidence, which seems to rise above all the frettings of our poor nature, this brings a little stillness. Faith is a wonderful grace, especially when we are enabled to feel it brought into exercise upon the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ as we view it in the Gospel in what the Lord suffered for us, especially when we contemplate Gethsemane. This can make our own sufferings appear comparatively light, as light afflictions which are but for a moment; this can bring a little stillness. I believe this fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ in His sufferings can be very sacred, it can bring a spirit of confidence, faith can view what He suffered for us, the curse that He was made for us, and feel some hope that we are thereby delivered from it. This can bring a little stillness, and some consolation in the path of tribulation here. It is when we realise that He has conquered sin, death and hell for us at a higher cost than we can conceive, it is that view of a suffering and now exalted Redeemer by precious faith, that sight of Him, that lifts us above the things that drag us down and confuse us, grieve and stumble us, that brings a little solemn stillness.

Perhaps you have felt something of this just now and again even in the night seasons when the Lord has visited you and given you to feel the comfort of a word or promise, possibly

been enveloped in trouble. This brings a stillness, and you can believe and feel that all is ordered well, and that as we read, "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Then there is a little stillness when we are taken away from self and the reasonings of our poor depraved nature, and faith becomes as an anchor in the soul that holds us to Christ. It is when you get just a little communion with your best Friend that you can feel a little stillness.

This stillness consists in a submission to His divine will. A submission to it does not mean being callous about it, This submission is a particular experience, when just at that time you can be passive in His hands and know no will but His, this is very sweet, but nature cannot produce it; the Lord only can bring that stillness into your heart, and then you would not have anything altered just at that moment; your will is swallowed up in His, as you will remember when the dear Saviour was there in the Garden He said, "Not My will but Thine be done". When the Lord is pleased to bless you in your soul, and favours you to feel a union with Christ and some fellowship with Him, in some small measure, in His own agonies, then you can say the same, "Not my will but Thine be done". This is very opposite to saying I must put up with it, I must try and be brave, I will stand up to it as well as I can, others have - no! - this is when the Lord is with you, when you get some glimpse of His amazing compassion, and that He was made sin for you, when you can feel that your soul and body belongs to Him and that one day you will be with Him for ever, and will leave all your troubles behind for ever. Then you can be still. This is a very sweet spot; I know we cannot produce it but here it is, "Be still and know that I am God".

This stillness has in it a patience. Some people are naturally impatient but now and again the Lord comes over our natural resentment and imparts a gracious patience; not a natural but a gracious patience. Then you can submit yourself to His divine will and accept the bitter ingredients in the cup, feeling that it is as we have been singing what the Father has prepared. This is an

injunction then, "Be still and know that I am God".

Now there is a third point - there is also the consolation. Wherein does the consolation consist? It is in the text, "Be still and know that I am God". The consolation, comfort and strength of the stillness consists in a knowledge of God. The Lord says so. "Be still and know that I am God". He does not just say that there is a God or some kind of supreme being; for that may not bring you any sweet consolation. What brings a stillness is the knowledge of God as our Covenant God, as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, your covenant performing God. When you feel that sacred relationship to Him then you can at times feel a little stillness. He was the God of our fathers though they had their trials, some sad and heavy things, as did dear old Jacob so that he said they would bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Job must have felt a little stillness after he was stripped of practically everything, of all his possessions, and even his sons. He must have felt a little stillness when he said, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." What an amazing thing to say. Here were these three friends sitting there seven days and seven nights in absolute silence, but Job must have felt a little stillness, to say the Lord has only taken away what He gave, and He has as much right to it and more than I have. There must have been a little stillness there. This was just the opposite of what Satan predicted; Satan said, if you touch his property he will curse You to Your face. What a liar he has been in the experience of the Lord's people! Here is a stillness then that consists in the knowledge of God as a covenant God. When you can feel that that covenant made with Christ incorporates you, that all those covenant blessings are yours, (although your house be not so with God,) it can bring a little stillness; then you can feel that He is your God and Father in Christ, not an abstract God, but your heavenly Father. If that is true you are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ; and to have some feeling of this brings a little stillness. How much sweeter is this than the murmuring and revolting spirit which will often rise up. We find

one saying,

"My God, my Father, blissful name!

O may I call thee mine?

May I with sweet assurance claim

A portion so divine?"

When you can feel that spirit of adoption in your heart, that He is your Father, it will bring a little stillness, and a very sweet stillness too. Your heavenly Father is over all your providences, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things". Not only so, but it is when you can feel that this God is your Saviour and Redeemer in Christ. "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." We can read it, but if it comes into your heart you will feel a little stillness. In fact you will feel broken down in spirit before Him, amazed that He should show such mercy and compassion to such a poor wretched sinner. This brings a little stillness, then you can feel that God is your refuge. "God is our refuge and strength". When you really feel the consolation of this, when you feel you have His divine protection, being sheltered under the Rock of Ages; especially when you feel a taste of His pardoning love in your heart; then you can feel a little of this sweet stillness. Why, say you, why should I murmur or repine? He has pardoned my awful, guilty load of sin; He has given me an interest in His amazing love, has prepared a heaven for me. As you realise this you will feel a little stillness.

Well, I have said a few things, but there is a sweet spot here, and although some things are making us feel very sad just now I hope we may come into this a little, and feel a touch of the Father's love in our hearts to us in a sense of what He has done for us, in the prospect that is before us, and the hope that we have of eternal life, and feelingly sometimes in the prospect of heaven. This will greatly help us to "Be still and know that I am God". Amen.