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Sermon preached by Mr.J.Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham
on Wednesday evening 10.4.63

Hymns:327, 571, 933 Reading: Luke 24.13-to end

Text John 16.22

"And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again,
and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

The Scriptures show here that the experience of the Lord's people below consists very principally of two things, namely of sorrow and of joy. Often these two things, though somewhat extreme, are intermingled, so that some joy is felt in sorrow and at other times sorrow comes into the joy. Even so, whatever changes come, the joy of which we have read is of such a nature that no man can take it from those who possess it. It is altogether a different kind of joy from that which the world have, which is often of very short duration and of little value. There is a joy that is known in the heart by the Lord's mercy and is only known to His own dear people who stand in a covenant relation with Him and have communion with Him.

This sorrow is sometimes spiritual and sometimes natural in the Lord's people. Many things may come to occasion sorrow here and there, which can be quite circumstantial in their character and could not be looked upon exactly to be spiritual, for they consist of things which come more or less to all mankind, but under a particular providence to the Lord's living family. You know better than I can tell you about this, by what some of you have passed through yourselves in times of sorrow. The time spoken of here was a time of sorrow: "Ye now therefore have sorrow." But there is a very different kind of feeling, even in natural sorrow, with the Lord's people. For instance, if we take the case of those who are taken from us, whom we may have loved, valued and esteemed, it is true we may painfully feel their loss, and it is according to nature that we should sorrow on this account. There has been much of this through the last year or two, through the removal of godly men and ministers and the Lord's people, not only in our own circle or denomination, but in other bodies. But the Apostle advises against being unduly sorrowful with regard even to this. Writing to the Thessalonians he says: "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope." So here is a sorrow, even though the occasion may be the same, which is somewhat different in the case of the Lord's people. They sorrow not as those that have no hope. There is a comfort, and even a joy, intermingled with the

sorrow, that moderates it and brings some degree of consolation, by which they are supported, by the Lord's mercy; which is altogether different from just making the best of it. And indeed worldly people speak very carelessly of these things. With the Lord's people there is this sacred privilege in times of sorrow, to take even their sorrow, whatever may occasion it, to the Lord, where at times they feel some relief and perhaps are favoured to hear the Lord's gracious voice which brings a measure of quietness and submission to His divine will; however hard it may be to nature to bear it.

There is a sorrow, however, which is peculiar to the Lord's people, wherein they have some fellowship with a sorrowing Saviour. Concerning the great Redeemer Himself, when He was in the garden, we read: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." That was not a sorrow occasioned simply by the fact that corporal death awaited Him. It was not that which occasioned sorrow. There was something besides that which made His sorrow greater and heavier than any human sorrow could be. "Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." The occasion of His sorrow was sin, not His own sin, but your sins and mine, if we have any part and lot in the matter of eternal redemption. And in the case of the Lord's people there is a sorrow that is after a godly sort, or is a godly sorrow that is on account of sin; not so much because of the possible consequences but because of the grief and sorrow it caused a suffering Saviour who bore our sins away. It is a consciousness that our sins were the occasion of this suffering that produces a sorrow for sin, although there does not appear to be much of this in these days, as far as we can tell.

There are other things which occasion sorrow with the Lord's dear people. The Lord's silence and His absence from them occasions sorrow; not of course the absolute absence, but the absence of His enjoyed presence in the soul or in our assembly, or in our attempts to worship. If we have grace, if we are lively, if we hunger and thirst after Christ, then His absence will be a sorrow to us; and yet that is a godly sorrow which evidences a love to Him. As you may observe with the Lord's people there is a measure of sorrow allotted to them in their lives and this is of a spiritual and also of a natural order and yet both so mingled in their experience that it is peculiar to them. Indeed the Lord's people pass through much sorrow that is altogether unknown to worldly people, though they have their troubles.

In this chapter, as can so clearly be seen, with these disciples it was a time of sorrow. "Ye now therefore have sorrow". This is mentioned two or three times in the chapter. In verse 6 the Lord says, "Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart". So we can see quite clearly what it was that occasioned the sorrow at that particular time.

These poor disciples appeared to be very confused in their minds in relation to the Lord's sufferings and death. That they loved Him is without question, and it was their love to Him that made them sad and sorrowful when He spoke of being parted from them. He spoke about going away from them for a time so that they should not see Him, "A little while and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me". This was a mystery; they could not understand what He meant; so they said, "What is this that He saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me, and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father?" Their love to Him was such that any indication of His being parted from them occasioned sorrow. There is something about this. Do you feel to love Him enough to be saddened by His absence? Does His absence cause grief in your heart because of your love to Him? This appeared to be the case with these disciples though it was so necessary that He should be parted from them for a season. It was not very long, but a little while, only three days before He appeared to them again after His resurrection and intermittenly on several occasions after that for forty days, until He ascended up into heaven. Although the first indication of parting, which was but for a very short season, filled them with sorrow, when He ascended up into heaven and was parted from them and finally disappeared from their sight so that they saw Him no more at all, they were filled with joy, and returned to Jerusalem. Although He was parted from them, that did not occasion any sorrow. But many things had been cleared from their minds by then and more things were to be cleared from their minds by the coming of the Holy Ghost on the great day of Pentecost. But this was a time of sorrow: "Ye now therefore have sorrow."

There have been times of sorrow often occasioned by heavy trials in some way or another, as was the case of Jacob when he had such distressing trials in his family; as when they brought the coat all covered with blood home and said, "This must be thy son Joseph's". Jacob rent his clothes and was filled with the deepest distress. Later he said of these things that they would bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. He had his times of sorrow and so did David and Job and Hezekiah and a number of others who might be mentioned. So have we. "Ye now therefore have sorrow." But it would be a mercy in one sense if there were more sorrow because of the Lord's absence, more godly sorrow such as David gives expression to in Psalm 51.

"Ye now therefore have sorrow; but I will see you again". This, as I have mentioned, was literally true. After three days from His decease He rose again from the dead and appeared to Mary and the women and the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, and to the eleven; and as the Apostle Paul says on one occasion He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once;

and then he says, "He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles." So there were many appearances of the Lord to His disciples after the resurrection, but only to them, not to the world in a general sense. They saw Him no more as He says in John 11, "Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more, but ye see me. Because I live ye shall live also." He appeared to them and demonstrated to them that He was the same Jesus. And indeed in these chapters are very many gracious, comforting, confirming words to His disciples; but yet there was that which made them sad and sorrowful; but to comfort them here the Lord says, "I will see you again".

"I will see you again", and so He did. This may be a timely word to some of us. Perhaps there have been better times with you than this and it may be that since the Lord's last visit to you the days of darkness have been many. Here it was but a little while before He saw them again, but with you it may have been many days since you had a visit from Him and enjoyed His presence with you, heard His voice and were favoured with a little sweet communion with Him; and it may be that Satan plays upon this and says, He will never come again and worse than that he may say, What you think you had before was just something in yourself which anyone might have, some little inward emotion of your spirit. He can say all kinds of things and he can try us upon what we have had before. Even so, where a precious Christ has once visited us and made Himself precious in the heart He will be sure to come again. He will come again. "I will see you again." This of course was but a little while. They did see Him again as a risen Saviour. They saw His wounded hands and feet and that turned their sorrow into joy, when He proved to them that He was the same Jesus. We read that they believed not for joy, or rather they were overjoyed, could hardly believe it, were like the returned exiles of whom it is said "When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing"-not carnal laughter but joy (Psalm 126) So these disciples could not believe for joy but they did believe and were favoured to know without any question, as when the Lord appeared again to Thomas, that there was no doubt about it. He fulfilled His Word, "I will see you again".

Has the Lord ever been? Can you look back upon a season here and there when He visited you? Was it a long time since? Have you been into deep waters since then? Are they dark days with you now? What does He say? "I will see you again". Is not this according to His promise? He says, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee", that is utterly; but still there is a feeling sense of absence that occasions sorrow with those who have in

their heart a love toward Him. And if His absence occasions sorrow, so then His presence occasions joy. What joy can be compared to this and do we not sometimes have to say with one,

"More frequent let Thy visits be,
Or let them longer last;
I can do nothing without thee;
Make haste, O God, make haste."

Do you feel anything like this? Do you long for His coming? Do you say in your heart, "O when wilt Thou come unto me?" It is a mercy to have a personal case. He says, "I will see you again". This is a comforting word in a time of sorrow, "I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice". How sweetly this was fulfilled, as I have mentioned, with these disciples when the Lord appeared to them again. They rejoiced, they were filled with joy; so I believe it ever is with the Lord's children when He does come again; the sorrow occasioned by His absence is turned into joy and the joy compensates for all the sorrow that may have been felt before. Can you feel like this? Have you grace enough to mourn His absence? If these disciples had no love to their Lord they would not have been made sad by His being parted from them for a while. It was all such a mystery to them - they could not understand it. Many things are a mystery to us but when the Lord comes He comes over the mysteries and mountains and darkness and everything else and this is what the church prayed for: "O that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence"; so they will if the Lord comes, if He fulfils a word like this, "I will see you again", then He comes as in the Canticles "leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills". He comes like a roe or a young hart, although He may have waited long, as it appears, yet when He comes He comes quickly, "I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice".

Some of you know how true this is although you may have been in circumstances of sorrow or of a distressing nature and the Lord has not always waited for these circumstances to pass, to fade away. People sometimes say time brings its own relief in certain ways which I suppose has a point, but the Lord does not wait for time to bring its relief, He comes sometimes in a time of sorrow and He comes when His people are in the depth of trouble and affliction and gladdens the sorrowful heart. "Your heart shall rejoice and your joy no man taketh from you". This makes the joy of a believer to be of quite a different nature from the joy of the world. It is altogether a different kind of joy from a carnal joy or a joy that people may have through some indulgence in worldly things. There is no joy like that which the Lord's people feel when the Lord is with them and their heart is filled with the joy of His presence. "In Thy presence is fulness of joy". The world as such know nothing of this, neither is this the joy of the hypocrite; it is

the joy of a believer. The joy of the world may soon be taken from them, but the joy of believers will never be taken from them as to the matter of it or the source of it. It is true we do not always live in joy or joyful feelings, far from this, but the source of the joy remains just the same. It is a joy in a risen Saviour, it is a joy in a personal Saviour, it is a joy in an ascended Saviour, it is a joy in Him that is peculiar to those who love Him and the fountain of that joy remains although we may change ourselves.

The world cannot take our joy from us; they cannot take from us what the Lord gives to us. If the Lord fills your heart with joy, the world cannot take it away. "Your joy no man taketh from you". In some of the letters of the godly martyrs we read of what joy in the Lord they had in their sufferings, in their imprisonment. If you read some of the letters of the martyrs in imprisonment, of such as John Bradford and others you may see what joy in the Lord they had, although they were in prison for His name's sake. Their persecutors could not rob them of their joy. They robbed them of their earthly comforts but they could not rob them of their joy in the Lord. Some of them were very greatly favoured of the Lord in their imprisonment and sufferings. They had a joy that no man could take from them, so have we. This is demonstrated by the fact that the Lord does often come to His dear people in times of need and gives them a joy in believing and this is the joy, that no man can take away from us. It is in the heart, it is not in the flesh; it is in the soul. It is in the soul of a believer and no man can take it away, no not even Satan himself - this is everlasting joy. "Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads", it is said, and no man will be able to take that away.

It is an abiding joy in the source of it, it is an abiding joy in the communication of it, and it is a joy that will be known more sweetly and blessedly with us, if we are His, when time shall be no more. When those who live and die in their sins will be under a divine judgement and punishment, those who believe in Him and whose hearts are touched with His love will enter into eternal joy, a joy that will never, never be taken from them. Here is the Lord's Word which may be fitting. "Ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you". Amen

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