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Sermon preached at Ebenezer, Clapham, by Mr. J. Delves
on Sunday morning, January 23rd 1955

Text: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."
John 8 v.36

Some, perhaps many, may have noticed that in the hymn we have just
sung is a question. (930). In the third verse is this:-

"Lo, here are souls by Satan bound,
And who shall set them free?"

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My text is the answer to that question. "If the Son therefore shall make
you free, ye shall be free indeed". As though the Lord should say, That
freedom, that liberty will be a sweet, blessed, perfect liberty, as it is
in itself in the nature of it, when it is sweetly felt in the heart. It
is the perfect liberty, in that it brings perfect freedom from the bondage
and chains that previously held a vessel of mercy, as in a prison-house.
O, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk,
O LORD, in the light of Thy countenance". But this is a very sweet
verse, is it not? The answer, it is true, is in the same verse:-

"Speak, Lord, there's mercy in the sound;"

Some here, it may be, can understand what that means now, better than they
could in some days gone by. O, it is mercy's angel voice that is heard
in the heart when the blessed Redeemer is pleased to come and remove the
hardness, bondage and guilt of sin, and speak the healing word. There is
mercy in the sound, is there not? Whatever it may be that the Lord is
pleased to bring into a waiting sinner's heart, there is mercy in the
sound. O, it is a heart-melting sound. How sweet it is to be given just
a few minutes to worship the Lord, to be truly humbled in the dust of self-
abasement, and that is just what His mercy does every time. O,

"Sinners are high in His esteem
And sinners highly value Him."

The more the sweet light of His grace shines into the heart, the less we
think of ourselves; the more we examine ourselves, the more do we hate
our sins; yet it is still a sweet love that melts the heart, that moves
the affections to run after Him, as it is in the Song - "Tell me, O Thou
Whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest," Is there anybody here like that,
this morning? Are there some here who see others feeding, and yet feel to
be cast out themselves? not like unto one of the Lord's handmaidens? Many
of the Lord's dear children have felt just like that. But there are some
here who have to say, "Tell me, O Thou Whom my soul loveth where Thou
feedest?" Why do you want to know where the Shepherd feeds His flock? why
are you troubled about this? why is there any concern about this matter?

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." They did not know anything of a spiritual bondage, these children of Abraham - "They answered Him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man." Why did they talk like that? They knew nothing of the secret, had never been brought down before God, had never been shown their true state or had their eyes spiritually opened to the truth in these things. But the Lord said, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever; but the Son abideth ever."

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed," This implies then, that there is a spiritual bondage with the Lord's people. It may be so with some here; perhaps some of you have come many, many times, for years possibly, and have had some concern about these things, sometimes a very deep anxious concern, and yet still remain in a state of bondage. Well, the Lord's time may not have come yet; but there is this, if under your bondage you are helped to pray, confess, wait on the Lord, press your case before Him, urge it through all unfitness, then the Lord will surely, in His own time fulfil His gracious promise and set the captive free. This state of felt bondage, spiritually speaking, arises from the Spirit's work in the heart in conviction of sin; that is what brings a bondage. Sin was there before quickening, but no felt bondage in this sense. But when the conscience is awakened by the Spirit of God, and sin is laid upon the conscience and one is brought in guilty before the Lord, then there is a felt bondage - and a painful bondage too, because when sin lies heavy upon the conscience, you see, there is condemnation felt; one feels to be cut off. You may feel, at times at least, in your own heart, that your sins are still your condemnation and that you will eternally perish and fall under the wrath of God. O sin, sin felt like this, does bring the bondage.

"To see sin smarts but slightly;
To own, with lip confession,
Is easier still; but O, to feel
Cuts deep beyond expression."

Then again, this bondage which is being shut up in your own feelings, a state of darkness and confusion within, arises from the law in its application. The law of God claims obedience to every precept of it. "This do and thou shalt live." The law legally presses its claims upon such, and yet they feel they have no power in themselves to fulfil it. It is like a prison and holds them in a state of bondage. The Psalmist prays in one place, "Bring my soul out of prison that I may praise Thy Name." Some of you may know what this prison is - shut up in this state of hard bondage and seeing nothing but guilt and condemnation, perhaps for a long

time. Yet strange to say, it is not altogether black darkness - there are streaks of light, sometimes a ray of hope may come in, a little reviving may be felt in the heart, a touch may humble you before the Lord, and you may even come so near, so close, as to really hope and believe the Lord will come. Then you go back again and, it may be, feel even worse than ever. All these various feelings are known, more or less, in a vessel of mercy under this bondage, and it will work in all kinds of ways. Sometimes the enemy will try to play upon this bondage with all kinds of suggestions. But do not forget what I said at the beginning - these exercises take place in the hearts of the Lord's people - not in the world; - the Lord's people. Here is this bondage. This enemy comes along and says, You have nothing real in you; if you had you would never feel like this, you would be more lively, more prayerful, more earnest in seeking. He will bring all these things against you and his own suggestions and temptations may seem sometimes to increase the bitterness of this bondage. Sometimes it may work like this - the enemy may stir up in your heart a bitterness, an impatience, an ungracious impatience possibly, Why should I be kept waiting all this time? Here is one favoured and another blessed. You may become, shall I say, almost angry with the Lord that He should pass you by; and the enemy plays on that and says, The reason He passes you by is that you are not one of His children - does He not say "I love them that love Me? and those that seek Me early shall find Me?" And Satan will quote a Scripture as he did even in the case of the Lord himself.

This bondage is sometimes felt when you try to pray; you may try to bring your case before the Lord and present it to Him and yet feel the heavens to be as brass to you. A silent God and a roaring devil is a painful place to be in - and all because of this bondage. Then you come to this conclusion, I will not try to pray any more, I have no time for a religion like this, I have had enough of it, I will go and enjoy myself. All kinds of things rise up in your heart against the Lord and you feel to be, as it were, in "the belly of hell," in your feelings like "bones scattered at the grave's mouth," and you may come to the house of God again for weeks and months still this bondage lingers. Time forbids me to enter into many other things connected with this bondage. Yet strange to say, there is something in your heart in spite of this bondage, that is reaching out for the Lord to come, in spite of the bitterness and resentment of old nature rising up within you. O the turmoil that goes on sometimes in the feelings of the heart of one under this bondage! But what then? Why, here the Lord says, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free

indeed," and when the Lord comes you will believe that. I remember the time when I believed it, and I really walked in the light of it and said, O it is a sweet liberty, it is a sweet joy, I can call the Lord mine now; I could never do that before, but now I can say, "Abba, Father", He is my Lord, He is my God. Well, it is a sweet liberty, is it not? Perhaps you say, I have never come there. No? but that will not cut you off, if you have not. Where do you want to come? If you are exercised under this bondage, you will say, O if I could but come there; O if the Lord will bring that blessing to me, but I fear He never will. I have tried to pray so many times and am still disappointed; I am about ready to give it all up. And some have come to chapel, as they have felt, for the last time and have almost resolved never to come again. I do not know that I have ever felt just like that myself, but I know some have - and some here have too. They have said, I will not go any more. O the conflict, the fighting that may go on in your heart. It can wear your body down and bring your soul to such a pass that you know not what to do. What then? Why, if the Lord looks upon such a case as this in its state of bondage as the Psalmist when he prayed, "Bring my soul out of prison that I may praise Thy Name", that is what you need.

Now how does this liberty come? If you take one under the bondage and burden of guilt and sin, I say the liberty must come through the atonement, because that is where the curse was put away. You have no ground to stipulate certain words, but the blessing itself can only flow into your soul through the merit of atoning blood, because when the dear Redeemer shed His precious blood, He did bear away our sins in his own body on the tree, and when the sweet healing balm of the precious gospel flows into the heart, it flows through Calvary's blood.

"Peace by His cross has Jesus made."

That is where it was made, that is how it was made, and that is why it comes into a poor sinner's heart, purging his conscience, bringing a taste of forgiveness, causing him to flow out in love to the Lord Jesus, making him a wonder to himself that ever he should be favoured with such feelings as these. O it is a sweet mercy to feel and realise, even just for a few minutes, a taste of pardoning love. The Lord is not dependent upon any words, necessarily, either of Scripture or of a hymn, but often He does use one or the other. What we need to realise is, the power, the unction, the sweetness, the savour, that flows through the merit of His own blood. O, one said,

"Dear dying Lamb! Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,"

neither will it!

"Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved, to sin no more."

Then again, if we take, just for a minute, one under legal condemnation, under the law, how can liberty come to such a one? Why, by the Son. "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." How can the Son make one free from legal bondage? Why, by bringing His own blessed obedience and righteousness before the view of faith and imputing it. The Lord Jesus Christ is "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." We can never go to heaven without the law being honoured. It is not by the law being abrogated that we may get to heaven, but only the law being honoured, obeyed and perfected. How can this be? Why, by the obedience of the dear Redeemer. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." Say you, you have said that many times. Yes, but if you are favoured with a sweet view of this righteousness and feel it imputed to you, there will be such a sweetness in that Scripture that I could not repeat it too many times. O the wonder of it! the mercy of it! the grace of it! "Though He were a Son yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered."

The apostle Paul, in the epistle to the Romans, after describing what he had passed through, said, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" That describes the bondage that the Lord's people, at times, feel to be in - but then, in the next breath, so to speak, he says, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." This is it, thanks unto God. He seems to get a ray of light. Then in the beginning of chapter 8, he says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. Why not? Because He has made them free. How has He made them free from this condemnation? By His blessed obedience to the law, His own righteousness wherein every precept of the law is perfectly honoured and fulfilled, and thus it is that He is "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" and that that righteousness is imputed to us; that is, when you are favoured with a sweet sense of it, you will say, He is the Lord my righteousness - and this will set you free, "make you free". It is the Lord that makes you free. It is the Lord that sets the captive free.

"Ye captive souls, in fetters bound,
Who feel your misery;
The way to liberty is found -
The Son shall make you free."

He made the apostle Paul free, did He not? because in Romans 8 verse 2 he says, "The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (that is the gospel) hath made me free." In the first verse he says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" but in the second he says, this gospel, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death." This was the legal bondage that held him, that gripped him as in a vice. There is no sin in the law but when the

law is applied it brings sin to light, guilt, condemnation, terror, bondage. Bondage! But now he says it has made me free. O some here in this chapel can say, "It has made me free from the law of sin and death. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

Then there is another point. Where this comes it sets one free from all these resentful feelings about the Lord's ways and dealings. Why, when He comes and blesses your soul all your opposition falls to the ground as the walls of Jericho that fell down flat. He sweeps it all away and His wonderful love flows into your heart and enables you to say, "He hath done all things well." Some of you here may say, O I wish something like this would come to a poor thing like me. If you feel like that, you may be the very one to whom it will come; it has come to some.

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Not only does it make us free from legal terrors, darkness, bondage, guilt, the curse, but it brings a sweet liberty in one's experience in communion with the Lord. It brings worship into your heart; it makes the dear Lord so precious in your heart, more than words can express. You would say, Well, sometimes I hope I have loved Him a little, but now, His love fills my heart. How tender it will make you too. Lord, keep me, you will say, do not leave me to myself; do not leave me to these bitter, resentful, hard feelings I have had before. O, when He comes He can break down every barrier, remove every cloud, and bring you to the "posts of His doors". "Come, My people", He says, "enter thou into thy chambers". He comes in. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door", - it is faith that opens the door. Why, when the Lord is testing you like that, knocking at the door, faith in response, in your heart says, O Lord, do come, do come Thou much expected Guest, and in He comes, that is into the affections of your heart and fulfils His word and says, "I will sup with him and he with Me".

Then there is a sweet liberty too, a liberty in communion with the dear Lord as though He were a personal confidant - and so He is! May the Lord grant a little of this favour in our souls! Amen.

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