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La p 389 Sermon preached by Mr J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham - 3.8.52 - morning"

Hymns:- 6, 749, 833

Reading: Lamentations 3 Text: verse 32

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"But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies".

I have been particularly torn in my mind in relation to this Service and how or what I should speak. Sometimes a word is laid upon the heart with some decision and some profitable meditation is given upon it and the mind is settled so to speak. And I thought mine was with regard to this day but during the night and this morning I have felt to be at the ends of the earth, and indeed that may not be the worst place if we are constrained to cry unto the Lord from it, and to experience some particular sense of His goodness and mercy to us in our tribulations. And I have ventured to read this verse in much dependence upon the Holy Spirit to give me some guidance into it that may be profitable unto our souls and may prove confirming under the disposings of God's providence, through which some particularly are called to pass.

There is no need for me to say that it is an experience of the Lord's people in a particular way to feel grief and it is also their experience to receive that divine compassion in their grief according to the multitude of the Lord's mercies. And is it not a wonderful favour to be brought to feel that sweet mingling of joy in our sorrow and of comfort in all our tribulations so as to enable us to commit ourselves into the Lord's keeping in them and to fall subjectively into His hands.

It will be seen by the reading of this remarkable chapter that the author, the Lord's servant, was in deep grief himself. Beside that, it was a time of grief with many of the faithful of the children of God because of the calamities that had befallen them and because of the grievous desolation of Zion. But here the prophet seems, as it were, to open up a little of what he felt in his own heart. It is not so much a survey of prevailing conditions as a revealing of what he himself was feeling and passing through. And truly it would appear, according to the reading, as though His God had gone right against him, not going before him, opening a way for him, encouraging and comforting him, hearing his prayers and granting him great consolations,

no - but just the opposite. "He hath led me and brought me into darkness and not into light. Surely against me is He turned; He turneth His hand against me all the day." Extraordinary language this, He does not say He turned His hand against me once, years ago. It was a long time ago, I had almost forgotten it', but "He turneth His hand against me all the day." But we need to remember that this was an experience of the man of God, a man whom God had separated from the womb to be a prophet among the nations and to whom He had spoken in the most confirming way. And yet even he went down into such depths as to say "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath". And as in the case of others in the Scriptures we find the prophet acknowledging the hand of God in it. He does not speak as the world speaks but attributes things to the hand of God and to the hand of his God too. There does not appear here to be any question of doubt of his relationship or covenant interest in his God. Well, notwithstanding all these painful, bitter and distressing, perplexing, weakening experiences, yet he says "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul", therefore will I hope in Him". Do we not see a parallel in the case of Job who said when he was in such depths, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Moreover, he does not lose sight of the Lord's mercies, although the waves and billows are roaring over him and though his flesh and skin was made old and his bones broken, though the Lord had builded against him and set him in dark places, hedged him about and made his chain heavy, had enclosed his ways with hewn stone and was like a bear lying in wait, had pulled him in pieces, bent His bow and caused His arrows to enter into his reins and filled him with bitterness. Do you know anything about it in your measure? Have we ever in a small measure walked up and down in this verse? Have you? Have you ever been in an experience where it has appeared as though God, your God, that had formerly shown you such distinct favours, were gone right against you, as opposite to your desires and wishes as He could go, shut up your way, hedged you about like a bear lying in wait, - has it ever been so? But God's ways are past finding out. He lays things upon His people at such strange times - under such strange conditions.

But what I was coming to is this - although the prophet continues like this, he did say "My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord" yet he says "Remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall, my

soul hath them still in remembrance and is humbled in me." There seems now, as it were, in his soul's feelings just a little break in the clouds. He does not say 'My soul hath them still in remembrance and I am filled with rebellion and resentment' no, but "My soul is humbled in me". O, he is coming into a sweet place, he is emerging, as it were from the dungeon of darkness and despair and misery and bondage and death into the light of the Lord's countenance. Then he says "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not." But how can we tone this with what he has said before. You read this chapter up to the 19th verse and there does not seem to be much compassion, does there? Not much mercy, not much kindness apparently. Yet there was far more compassion and far more pity and kindness than ever poor Jeremiah knew. And so it may be with you and me. At the time, indeed, in passing through some things, there seems to be nothing but anger, wrath, judgment, but O, who can say what compassion may be mingled in the purposes of God, with the breaking-up of things with us, the overturning of things, disappointments, griefs, sorrows? Who can tell? I recently heard a friend say that we don't know where we should have got to if the Lord had answered some prayers. Can you understand that? O, what compassion there can be in that withholding at times even of that for which we have prayed. O, and then you see these verses after this, they are wonderful reading. The good man seems as it were to be gradually coming up from the dungeon that he was in "The Lord is my portion ... the Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him... It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." It is as though Jeremiah were looking back and saying 'that yoke, it was hard to bear, it was painful to bear, and yet it was good for me in my youth'. It may be that some more advanced in years would look back to the yoke of earlier days and feel they could not bear that yoke now. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence because he hath borne it upon him." Has anyone here ever been in the 28th verse? Well, you have not had much to say at such a time - plenty to bear it may be, a heavy yoke, a sharp trial, a pricking thorn. And in and under those heavy things all you have had to say, perhaps, was what you said to God, just like this - "All my desire is before Thee and my groaning is not hid from Thee." Such

a frame fits in well with this sitting alone and keeping silence. One hymn writer has said :-

It is decreed that most shall walk
The darkest paths alone.

But what a sweet view of divine compassion the prophet got, notwithstanding all this! "He putteth his mouth in the dust." Not in the dust of despair, but in the dust of self-abasement. It is a good place to have your mouth in, a wonderful place. O, at such a time you may give some names to yourself you may abase yourself before the ^{Lord} "if so there be there may be hope." "He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him, he is filled full with reproach." You will lie still, not like Peter who drew the sword in defence or revenge and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant. No, not like that. "He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him." Who is it smiting him? It may be the Lord smiting him. Can you understand this? It is like falling into the dust before Him under the stroke, saying "Lord, I deserve this, and a hundred times more than this." "He giveth his cheek"- it is difficult to explain this, but it is, as it were, like opening your heart before the Lord and saying "Deal with me as Thou seest fit, only remember that I am dust." "For the Lord will not cast off for ever." It did seem as though He had cast the prophet off. He looked like an enemy. He appeared by His dealings with him to be as an enemy to him. But how different are ostensible appearances from the real secret of His heart. Although the rod be in His heart, yet mercy is in His heart. What sweet love can flow and mingle with the bitterest chastening! What holy resignation can be given to one under the most bitter disappointment. "He will not cast off for ever - though He cause grief". Not "I have got upset in some way" but "though He cause grief." This is the grief, you see, that the Lord has caused to come upon His servant Jeremiah. You see, it depends in a sense what causes grief with us. But in the case of Jeremiah here it was the Lord's hand upon him. Do you know anything of this grief? Grief is different from anger. One may have grief without any bitterness, resentment, wrath, anger, malice. If I may put it so, there is something sweet about this grief. It is not sinful to be grieved. Grief may arise from the exercise of grace and there is a grief that the Lord causes His children to feel, to feel as being from Him, whatever the circumstance may have been. And this is where faith comes

in. And it was so, you see with Job. Under His deep and heavy grief Job said "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." The Lord's people, and only they have certain things that occasion grief. The world have grief; they have grief at their losses, bereavements, troubles, and some painful circumstances. But the great difference with the Lord's children is that they see and feel the Lord's hand in it. "Though He cause grief".

And this has struck my mind to mention for the moment - not one of the Lord's children has ever felt such grief as their Lord and Saviour felt. And this was a grief that the Lord had put upon Him. "It pleased the Lord", that is His Father, "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. Thou hast put Him to grief." O, if we can contemplate for a moment the grief of Gethsemane and the grief of Calvary, the anguish of His soul, the sorrow, the reproach the waves and floods that passed over Him. O what grief! we cannot understand it. What grief is that the Lord's children feel? They feel grief on account of what they see and feel in themselves. Do we have any grief on account of sin? Could we believe that we have grace enough to say that sin has grieved us more than anything else, like the Apostle Paul, who by reason of the law of sin in his members said "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Yes, and we feel grieved sometimes too, by reason of the things that come upon us. All our times are in His hands, but he causes grief sometimes by sudden and unforeseen circumstances that happen in a moment. Something never thought of or anticipated may befall one of the Lord's children and cause grief - but "though He cause grief," - this seems to be like a preparatory measure, the Lord is causing grief for a reason. He causes grief in order to manifest divine compassion and the multitude of His mercies - as though He would say "You must come into this grief, have grieving things, feel grief, be grieved, in order to experience and be in a suitable frame for divine compassion. " And even naturally speaking is peculiarly salutary to a grieved person. You see one may be in a lot of trouble without any grief. But where there is grief the Lord's compassion is so seasonable and fitting. Many things may cause grief in a secondary way and have done with all of us. We may feel grieved perhaps

for what we have thought or said or done, for some of our actions, for the spirit that we have felt in ourselves and toward others. O the grief! And yet it is a wonderful mercy when the Lord uses that grief as a fitting condition to reveal His divine compassion. What is compassion? Compassion is the Lord's tender pity towards his afflicted people. It is very sweetly illustrated in the Scriptures. Take the case of the leper who came to the Lord Jesus, and said to him "If Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean." And it says that the Lord was moved with compassion. He did not say "Well, that is nothing to do with me. You bear with it the best you can." No, He was moved with compassion not in words. Tender feeling words can be wonderfully helpful, but it was not compassion in words with the Lord Jesus. He was moved with compassion, He put forth His hand and touched him and said "I will. Be thou clean." Wonderful compassion! And it is illustrated rather sweetly by the instance of Pharaoh's daughter, who went down to the river to bathe and saw part of the ark that was in the river and directed her attendants to get it. And when they brought it to her the babe in it wept, and she had compassion on him, saying "This is one of the Hebrew's children". Take for instance, too, the parable of the prodigal son. O this wayward son that demanded of his father his part in the estate and then went this way and wasted his substance in riotous living and eventually coming to himself said "I will arise and go to my Father and will way unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son". And so he went, after he had filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat. He went back and when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and ran and had compassion upon him. It is a wonderful word, and is a word that seems to come nearer, I think, than any word in the verse to the tender feelings of the heart. "Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion" upon one that is grieved. And O, what compassion the Lord has shown toward His people! Here in the 22nd verse the prophet says "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not," as though he would have said "If those compassions had failed toward me when I was in such a state as this, if those compassions had failed toward me, I should have been where hope and mercy could never come, in the bottomless pit, in abject despair." But O, His compassions

failed not. There is something profoundly sweet here, you know. It is like as it were, not a little compassion but the Lord's compassion holding one up in the midst of the floods and storms and under all the trouble and grief and affliction. There is something that holds one up from utter despair and that is the Lord's unfailing compassions. They fail not. It is a striking thought, is it not? It does not say 'The Lord had compassion upon me when I was a young man, and when I grew up He went against me.' No, but notwithstanding all that he went through, all these extremes, yet even so, he could say "His compassions fail not." It may be some of you can look at a spot in your life and say of that spot "I believe I should have sunk never to rise again but for His compassions that failed not toward me." He causeth grief, yet will He have compassion. And what compassion—the dear Redeemer has shown toward His people, I say what compassion to take their nature upon Him, what compassion and condescension! He passed by the nature of angels and took upon Him the seed of Abraham. O has His compassion toward you in this ever brought a tear into your eye, broken your heart, softened your spirit, humbled you in your soul's feelings, melted you for a moment? To think that He, the Eternal God, the sovereign Lord of all, who has heaven and earth at His command, should have compassion upon a poor unworthy creature like you! It is wonderful compassion, not only to take our nature upon Him, but to take our sins upon Him. Surely this word compassion is seen in its deepest sense in Gethsemane. O what compassion to groan and bleed and pray and struggle in Olive's Mount! What compassion to stand in the guilty sinner's place and bear his sins away. What compassion to take the curse upon Him, the curse of a broken Law. He took it all upon Him. This was compassion. Say you were in debt, and likely to become a bankrupt, say you had a debt of one thousand and had nothing to pay and were torn and afflicted in your mind about this debt, realising that it was impossible for you to pay it, and a good friend came along and said, "I will relieve you of all that debt, and pay every penny of it" That would be compassion, practical compassion. And this is the kind of compassion that the Lord has shown His people. He relieves them, removes from them all their liabilities, cancels the mighty sum, out of compassion towards them. O there is something profoundly sweet about this. What compassion to shed His blood as He did. He lay down His life that His

children might eternally live.

"Yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies."

O you might feel much compassion for another in your heart in their affliction or trouble or difficulty, - yet not be able to do much for them. But the Lord has compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. There is no limit, as it were, to His compassions, so that all we have we have as it were, by the Lord's compassion toward us - all we have, every mercy, every blessing, all the multitude of His mercies. It is of His mercies that we are not going with the giddy multitude, that we are not going the broad way, headlong to hell. It is of His mercies - nature would go that way; flesh and blood would go that way, we should go that way but for the multitude of His mercies. We should be living in open, bitter rebellion against God but for the multitude of His mercies. We should be saying "We will not have this man to reign over us" but for the multitude of His mercies. When we think of the multitude of His mercies, as of His compassion we must go to Calvary. That is the place to see the multitude of His mercies. And then are there not His mercies in Providence? We find the Psalmist in one place saying "I will sing of mercy and judgment unto Thee, O Lord will I sing." Have you ever been able to sing of both of them? The prophet Jeremiah said "O Lord correct me, but with judgment: not in Thine anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing." O the multitude of His mercies!

Well it has been a very rambling sermon, but still that won't matter much if it be our mercy to feel a touch of the Lord's compassion and if we do, then we shall want to put our mouth in the dust if so be there may be hope. Amen.
