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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Wednesday evening 7th. October, 1930

"For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him." Psalm 12.5.

The text makes manifest two things: that there are some people who are oppressed, and who are in a state of poverty, need and destitution, and who sigh in that condition; and also that there is a Deliverer, One who undertakes their cause, who has promised to appear on their behalf and not to leave them to sink in their condition, but to set them in a safe place from the tempter, from his scorn, and from his fiery temptations. God is good to His people. They are a needy people, a dependent people; they are defenceless. They have no protection of themselves against their adversaries and enemies, but they have One who is able to save them and protect them, and One who will never leave them to become a prey finally to the power of the enemy. We are safe in the hands of God. We are not safe anywhere else; we are not safe in our own keeping. However circumspect we may be, if the Lord leaves us we are sure to fall. Why? Because our hearts are deceitful and wicked, and of ourselves we have no inherent power to withstand evil. We have a love to it, and even in the case of the people of God that love remains in a subdued sense. Hence one has said, "Take away the love of sinning." Therefore even the strongest are weak and helpless in this. Hezekiah was; he was a good man, a good king, and he stood by the true worship of God, but, when left to himself, he fell. He had in his heart that wicked thing, pride, and when left to himself it manifested itself painfully. I believe that the Lord lets His people be overcome by some evil, to show them their folly and the deceitfulness of their hearts, how they are by nature depraved. God appeared for Hezekiah, heard his prayer and overturned his adversaries. Sennacherib said, 'The gods of other nations could not save them, and who is your God that He should deliver you out of my hands?' But Hezekiah's God did deliver him. He was able to deliver him and therefore He sent His

angels. God is never at a loss for means. Sometimes He may make use of a wicked person, even of one who may manifest hatred; even a persecutor He may use as a means. He is never at a loss for means. He sent His angel, and Sennacherib was obliged to return to his own country where he met with a bad end. You would think then that Hezekiah would walk humbly all the rest of his days, but no, he did not. Very shortly after that we find pride manifesting itself when the ambassadors of Babylon came and he showed them all the treasures of the temple. O, the pride that was there! We read that, in the matter of the ambassadors of Babylon, the Lord left him to show him what was in his own heart. I believe if things go well with us, often we are in a slippery place; we soon begin to get self-confident if things go easily with us. We get into that state where we think we do not need a God; we get too big for God and then the Lord does something to bring us to His feet. He always deals kindly with His people. He does chastise them for their sin. We read of the Old Testament saints whom God chastised for sin. He will never wink at the sins of His people; if one is left to fall into sin God will visit for it. He will never allow sin to be cheaply indulged in by His people, but O, how kindly He deals. Those whom, at times, He afflicts most, He favours most.

"Know, whom the Saviour favours much
Their faults He oft reproveth;
He takes peculiar care of such,
And chastens whom He loves."

He deals in judgment with the wicked, but with His people He deals as a Father in His chastenings. He chastens only His people.

Now we read in this verse, "For the oppression of the poor." What is it to be poor? It is to be destitute, to lack those things necessary for our comfort, to be deprived of things. The Lord's people are a poor people usually, in a natural sense. Mostly they are of the poor of this world... He says, "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people"; but none are so rich as they. A poor person without a penny in the world, is richer if possessed of the grace of God, than a man possessed of thousands of

gold and silver, because he who has the fear of God has something that will last for eternity; that will be eternal wealth, while all that we possess in this time state we must leave. The Lord's people are a poor people. The Lord has not called many of the great of the earth; even when Christ was on earth His disciples were not the great, the nobility of the earth, He called poor fishermen to preach His gospel; called them from their nets and instructed them and sent them forth; and in the Scriptures, and as we know in our own day, for the most part the Lord's people are poor. But it is not in a natural sense, but in a spiritual sense that I want to treat of what it is to be poor. The greatest state of poverty that a man can be in is to be destitute of and separated from God. Man, as he was created by God, was possessed of riches in this respect, that he had in his natural state and position, communion and fellowship with his God; God walked with him. God made man upright and in that state, before his fall, he possessed wealth, the wealth of the favour of God. He walked with God and God walked with him, on the ground of works; and while the law was kept, God, on those grounds, walked and communed with him. But there was no communion with Adam on the ground of the law after he fell, and man became poor when he fell from his first estate, from that state of blessedness and happiness and sinless perfection. Adam, when he fell from that state, became poor, and man has been poor ever since. Real poverty is to be deprived of the favour and blessing of God. What has made man poor? Sin; and though he does not realise his poverty sin has made man poor. It is the greatest degree of poverty that a man can be in, to be lost before God, to be separated from God, to be under the curse, to be a sinner against God, and yet not convinced of it. Such a state is a state of poverty. Man is in this condition by nature, separated from God, having no love to Him or desire for Him. His language is in the previous verse: "With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?" This is the language of man which expresses his poverty, destitute of all gracious humility, of any desire for God; destitute of faith,

hope and prayer; and he will be eternally destitute of all true happiness, and will receive the just reward of his deeds, if he dies under the law which will pronounce a just curse upon him. The state of every person who dies under the law is one of everlasting, just, penal punishment in hell. This the Scripture emphatically declares. This is the greatest poverty that a man can be in, a state of natural depravity and willing ignorance of his poverty.

Now there is another kind of poverty, and that is the poverty which the Lord's people feel. By nature they are in the same condition as others, but when the Lord calls them by His grace He shows them their poverty. They then become, not absolutely poor, but, having grace given them and some measure of light to see and feel their condition, they become feelingly poor and they are then poor in spirit. Now there are many gracious promises made to those who feel their poverty and their need. He has a supply of infinite riches and grace for them, encouraging promises for those who come to Him for what they may feel to need. He says, "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Jacob will not forsake them." To be spiritually poor is to be feelingly destitute. It is not absolute destitution, but it is our being shown by the Spirit of God what we are and where we are that makes us feel our destitute condition. Now this person, when the Lord gives more grace, is shown what he is. He is shown his poverty, and then he begins to cry and sigh. He is a needy person. To be poor in this respect is a mercy; it is a mercy to be poor in spirit to be sensible of our poverty and to have to pray over it, and to pray that we might have some of the riches of God's grace given us. The Lord's people are a poor and needy people and are given a heart to feel it. This is the first sense of poverty felt by the people of God when they have a spiritual sight of the law and the holiness of God, and of the corruptions and abominations of their nature, when it is opened up to them, and the fallow ground of the heart is broken up, and the hidden evils, the seed of all iniquity that is there. When these things are opened up

to us, when our secret sins are set before us, when judgment is laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet, when we are brought under a sense of condemnation, then we feel our poverty. When we are brought to feel that we have sinned against God and deserve His curse, and fear that we shall have it, then we feel our poverty. Then we see what God is and what we are, and, having sinned against Him, and having some apprehension of His terrible majesty in the law, we feel our poverty. Now these people who feel to be destitute are a praying people, a living people, the Lord's people, but it is painful to feel our poverty. One says, "Marks of grace I cannot show." Do you get as low as that, as not to have a mark of grace, at times? Yet we may be rich." It is a mercy to feel our poverty.

Now these people are oppressed. They will not be left alone; they will have many enemies. If the Lord begins to work, the devil begins to work. There will be in the heart a conflict between grace and sin. "What will ye see in the Shulamite?" The people of God, a poor, defenceless, weak people, are oppressed. In the first place most of them are oppressed by indwelling sin. This is true. If you have grace in your soul you will know this is true. In our measure we shall have to walk this way as the Apostle Paul did. He had the two powers, the two forces meeting in him, so that he says, "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not that I do." There were these two forces meeting in him, and he seemed to be helpless; he could not overcome sin; he was oppressed by it. It was indwelling sin. Now do you know what it is to feel these two powers? It is a great mercy if we feel, in any measure, the power of Christ by which we can battle with the powers of sin. We shall never gain the mastery ourselves. Sin is an oppressing thing, it is a living thing in us. Though we do not, as we hope and trust, live in sin, yet sin lives in the people of God, and it is a terrible thing there, and if grace did not prevent it would have the final victory. There will be this inward struggling, so that the good we would we do not, and the evil that we would not that we do; and we are oppressed. Under the weight of this inward conflict sometimes you cry and groan to the Lord, and fear that you will never survive the battle. You may sink lower and lower under this oppression

until you come to the place the Apostle Paul himself came to, when he said, "O, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The body of sin and death is an oppressing thing and sin that dwelleth in our members oppresses us. It is as a great weight upon us that we cannot lift in our own strength. What then? Must the poor sufferer, the poor fighter, be finally defeated and crushed? O, no! There is an Almighty Deliverer, One who has said that He will arise. "Now will I arise, saith the Lord." He may let you labour and labour until you are spent, and then He will arise at the eleventh hour. He will not let you fall finally. Sin shall not have dominion; it will have a great power and will oppress you, but, "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law but under grace."

Another cause of oppression is a tempting devil. He oppresses the Lord's poor people. Some of us know what this is. It is a real thing to the people of God to be oppressed by a tempting devil. I would not like to express some of the things that are thrust into the minds of the people of God by a tempting devil, with respect to God Himself, with respect to themselves, and with respect to eternity. There is nothing too evil, too subtle, too wicked for a tempting devil to beset the people of God with. He may come by violence, or as an angel of light; he may come even with a passage of Scripture and endeavour to convey it to suit his own purposes, as he did in the case of the Lord Jesus. He oppresses the Lord's people. What it is to be oppressed by some temptation, some of us know; some are oppressed heavily, and oppressed by infidel temptations, and unless the Lord is pleased to deliver, these temptations may get such a hold upon them that they may come to that place sometimes where they feel that it is of no use praying, for there is no God to pray to, there is no eternity even, and there is no hereafter. The devil may so oppress and tempt the Lord's people with infidelity as to drive them almost to distraction. This may go on for weeks and they may labour under this terrible temptation. What then? Will they fall by it? No, the time will come when the Lord will deliver. He will arise at a set time; He will arise and set them in safety from him that puffeth at

them. He will arise in His own time, and when He does He will deliver. He says that He will command deliverances for Jacob, and God is stronger than the devil; God is stronger than sin.

Sometimes the Lord's people are oppressed by the wicked and they are persecuted by the enemies of truth. Many of the Lord's people have had to suffer severely and have been oppressed, grievously oppressed, in this way; and, having sinful hearts, being fallen, these oppressions that the Lord's people may unjustly receive at the hands of others will, if they are left to their own spirit, discover to them much that is evil in them. We soon rebel at the Lord's dispensations if He lays a cross upon us. But though some are oppressed in this way, the Lord is watching over them; He has the hearts of all in His hands. He may permit them to be oppressed, but He can turn that to a good issue and bring them to see His glory in it. It may be permitted to go on for a long time so that you say, 'I shall fall by this; I shall never endure in this fire.' When the time comes when your strength is gone, the Lord arises; He says, "I will arise and set him in safety from him that puffeth at him". He may permit an enemy of yours to persecute you, but He can stop it. He may permit a wicked man to open his mouth, but He can close it, "He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." They are all under omnipotent power, and whatever evil may be brought against you can be only by divine permission; and if you are one of the Lord's people and He permits you to be oppressed by another, He has a purpose in that, though it may be hard to bear. He has the hearts of all in His hand, and turneth them whithersoever He will.

We are often oppressed by our unbelieving hearts. How hardly do we think of God! If the Lord lays some affliction upon us and that continues, we soon begin to think hardly of God and think He deals hardly with us, though He may, by means of affliction, manifest His love and mercy to us. If the Lord crosses our path we soon begin to reply against Him in our spirit; we would not have a straw to be in our path naturally, but that is not the way. The way is to be a life-

and-death struggle with hell. There are to be devils that will constantly beset, tempt and buffet the Lord's people. There are many enemies in the wilderness and they will not be silent, but God is over all and above all and has supreme power, and He can deliver from the power of the enemy when He will. The children of Israel were in a strait place when they came to the Red Sea, and the Egyptians were pursuing them from behind, and there was no way of escape either forward or backward; they were in a strait place but the Lord arose for their help and made a way for them. He divided the waters and those waters, divided as a way of escape for His people, were the destruction of His enemies. There is nothing too hard for the Lord.

"For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy". Needy people sigh to God. To be needy is to want something, to have an appetite for something. This is our state spiritually. We are needy; we need many things, and when we feel our need, it will cause us many an inward sigh. "For the sighing of the needy"; and at times there may be in our souls a sense of need. We may feel our destitute condition, and if we do, it will cause many a sigh to come up from our hearts, and yet the Lord has promised to hear the prayers of the prisoners, to "regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." He will arise for the sighing of the needy. His people are a needy people, a dependent people. We need grace and have to sigh for this at times, when we feel to have so little grace. We feel sometimes at the close of the day to have been living, in our spirits, in the world and the things of the world most of the day; perhaps some days we have very little thought of God during the day, and night comes, and the time comes at the close of the day when we think, where have my thoughts been today? That will bring a sense of guilt upon the conscience and bring you to a needy condition, and when you feel your guilt it will make you sigh unto the Lord. A sense of guilt will make you sigh, but the Lord has promised to arise for those who feel their need; He will arise for their help. We are needy as to our circumstances. We are dependent

upon God for our sustenance both naturally and spiritually and we may be brought into some circumstances of particular need, and when this is the case, often a sigh goes up. A sigh is a prayer that is not expressed. There are many who sigh and never utter a word, and yet there may be more prayer in a secret sigh than in many a long petition. Do you know what these sighs are? When you have a weight, it makes you sigh. Now in soul exercise the spirit sighs before God. No words are expressed, but it is as though the very soul is drawn up to God in a sigh, and in that sigh the very soul is laid before God. It is as though you say, "Lord, Thou knowest"; and when you are brought into an extremity, into a state of particular need, you come to this, as the poor woman did when she had no answer to her cries, and she fell down and said, "Lord, help me". Many a sigh goes up from the Lord's people in these three words. He has said "I will arise for the sighing of the needy", and if He says it He will do it. He has promised that He will command deliverances for Jacob, and He does deliver His people.

"I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him". He will set His people in a state of safety. We are in a state of safety if we are united to Christ. If we are of those whom God has eternally chosen in the covenant of electing grace, we are in a safe place. If we are in the covenant we are safe there; the Lord has put His people there. He has chosen them in Christ and their state is secure, but in their experience they may feel very insecure; dangers beset them on every hand, and at times they may be very uncertain whether they have an interest in the covenant. But there are times when the Lord delivers His people from the power of Satan and sin, and sets them in a safe place and gives them rest. He may deliver His people from a natural trouble, deliver them from someone who may have been oppressing them, deliver them out of his power and set them in safety; and He can do this spiritually by working a deliverance in their souls and setting them experimentally in safety. This is really, experimentally, to feel that we belong to the Lord Jesus, to be united to Him, to feel that we are "bound in the bundle of life

with the Lord our God", to be set in safety. "I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him". There are times when, having been under the powers of temptation, the Lord may give you a period of sweet rest, when you may enjoy that rest in your spirit and not be tormented by fear, by that fear which hath torment; not be beset by temptations; and you may enjoy a season of rest, and you say, as the Psalmist says, "The Lord hath dealt bountifully with me", "I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them". The Lord watches over His people. There was never one of the Lord's poor ones lost, and there will never be. There will never be a praying sinner in hell. If he really prays the Lord will answer that prayer. He will never leave one brought to feel his poverty a need, one who has sighed and groaned under a sense of his sins, and has been brought to God; He will never permit him to become a prey finally to the enemy. Never!

"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."

It never will. The Lord will arise and deliver all His tried, afflicted and tempted people, and He will set them finally in a place of safety where they will never again be buffeted by Satan, and never be oppressed by indwelling sin. That place of everlasting safety will be heaven, where there will be no conflict, no going out, but one uninterrupted state of everlasting felicity. To see God and be made like him will constitute heaven, and there His people will be in a state of safety and everlasting happiness.

"For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him."