

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham on Wednesday
14th November 1956

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. The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, Thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.

Psalm 12. 5,6,7.

I believe we may take these verses

as some of those many "pure words" that the Lord has spoken unto His people, and which we believe He will, in His own good time, surely fulfil. What a wonderful mercy therefore, to be able to feel that the Lord is on our side and that His promise is toward us, under a sense of our poverty and deep and different oppressions in our souls and in the circumstances that may attend us! Here, as in many other places, the Lord speaks to the character; He defines those whom He will arise to defend, deliver and "set in safety" from their oppressors.

"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." This seems to describe then, a very large part of a believer's experience within and without, having oppressions, a painful sense of evil, of need, many sighs, many things to weigh and depress, and bring, at times, the spirit down. So it is that many of us may feel, as David expressed it - to be at the ends of the earth with a heart overwhelmed. Yet even so, and in such a case, and in many other circumstances, the poor have the Lord's word on their side. He has promised to supply their need, to regard them in their poverty, to arise and deliver them and to set them out of the hand and power of the puffing enemy Satan, who does indeed, continually puff at the Lord's people. Sometimes he tries to make a mock at their religion. He may sometimes sneer at those very things that may be felt to be so choice and precious in the heart. Temptations of different kinds are, as it were, a puffing from the enemy. But here is a timely, strengthening word, "I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him". It can, I believe, be for your comfort and mine, to feel that although indeed the enemy is strong, stronger than we, God is stronger than all our foes. He can and will appear, although sometimes it seems to be at the eleventh hour. His ways are mysterious. He confounds us sometimes by His permissions, or at least His purposes, that seem to be so conflicting to us.

If we are the Lord's people, I believe we shall, at times, be greatly concerned in relation to the life that is in us, to know whether

that life is of God or not; whether we have been truly quickened and brought out from a state of death "in trespasses and sins", to possess and feel the power, and walk in the light and exercise of that divine love in the soul that will issue eventually in everlasting peace. We shall be concerned also, in relation to the tribulations that attend us here, for they are many. It is true that many of our forefathers had greater tribulations, both inwardly and outwardly, than many of us feel to have in these days, but still, according to the Lord's appointments in different ways, it is to be proved that the way to the kingdom above is "through much tribulation".

But here it is said, "Thou shalt keep them, O LORD," which seemed to be felt in the heart of the Psalmist in a confidence of faith amidst all these tribulations. Notwithstanding all the puffings we may have from the enemy, that inveterate adversary, notwithstanding the poverty and oppression, still it is said, "Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, Thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." Every child of God then, is in the hand of God, his life, his circumstances, his afflictions, his prospects, his hope, his future and his eternal destiny. They are all mercifully in the hand of a promise-performing God, if we can but rightly feel that "This God is our God," and that He has set our feet in the paths of peace, and has put us upon that pilgrimage that will eventually end in an abundant entrance into His everlasting kingdom. So it has to be said in relation to all that the Lord Himself has said, every "Thus saith the LORD", every statement, every declaration, every word spoken by the Lord, is a "pure word". They are essentially pure words because the Fountain is pure, because God himself is pure, holy, just and good; every word spoken by Him must be, necessarily and essentially a pure word, not mixed with any defiling matter, not questionable, but absolutely pure. This the Psalmist seemed to feel in Psalm 119 "Thy word is very pure: therefore Thy servant loveth it." I believe it will make us love His word, to feel it is, without exception, a pure word. If it were not so, what confidence could we put in it?

But what are we to understand by the words of the Lord and their purity? I believe in the first place, by the words of the Lord we may understand the revelation of Holy Scripture as such. Indeed it is in many places affirmed to be "the words of the Lord"; the Scriptures are said to be the word of God. They are that divine revelation He has given unto us; They are His word, and they are essentially pure. It is true that in the Scriptures we have not only a "Thus saith the LORD",

that is, the word the LORD speaks in the first Person, but we have also the words of His people. We have at times, too, the words of wicked men recorded; but every record in the Holy Scripture is a divine revelation, revealing, discovering, opening up the depths of sin, the truth of God, the character of God, the mystery of His divine providence and the glory of His grace in the salvation of His people, all in the record thereof essentially beautiful and perfectly pure. So it may be said of the Scriptures that they are the words of the Lord "as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times," therefore perfectly pure! They have never been destroyed by a furnace, but have come forth to shine with brighter lustre through the furnace. They have endured through all the generations of time, as no other book has ever endured, and have been preserved unto us, unto this present generation, notwithstanding all the bitter persecutions, burning of Bibles, preventing of people reading them by the priests, when the Romanists had their power. In spite of all this, the word of God has been preserved and continued and the more they have tried to destroy it, the more it has spread abroad.

They are pure words then, as silver tried in a furnace of earth. We need then, to be careful how we handle the word of God; every minister, every teacher needs to take great care as to how the word of God is handled and spoken. I feel my personal need of this, because of how the canon of Holy Scripture closes - in an unusually solemn manner. In the word of God through His servant John, He says, of the Scriptures, "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." It seems to me to be a very solemn consideration to hold any position that involves expounding or opening up or preaching the Holy Scriptures. How solemn and how blessed they are! Moreover, in so far as grace may be given to speak of them rightly and profitably, whether indeed it be in pulpit labour or in labour among those in more tender years, whatever it may be, it is important and solemn. And yet it can be very blessed and edifying, very confirming, very strengthening, when the Lord is pleased to shine a little upon the sacred page and make it life and power in the heart. After all, what a wonderful gift to us is the Scripture. Here we have the mind of God, the revelation of His divine will, of His holy character, of His immutable purposes, of the awfulness of sin, the greatness of His mercy, the manifestation and revelation of the gospel in the Person of His beloved

Son, a full and free salvation for poor and needy sinners who are made graciously conscious of their need of His great salvation. Moreover, in the Scriptures we have that revelation of the Godhead which lies at the foundation of all that follows, the doctrine of the blessed Trinity, of the person of Christ, of the law and of the gospel, and we have also an account of the experience of the Lord's people, the things they pass through, the burdens that lie upon them, the crosses that weigh them down and many other things. We have also the precepts to guide and direct us, as we may have grace to follow them in the spirit of the gospel. What a wonderful revelation the Scriptures are then! Here they are in our hands. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

Not only do the pure words of God refer to the revelation of Holy Scripture, but there is another point that comes even closer home, as far as we may be personally concerned, and that is, the words of the Lord as pure words, even those words that He may be pleased to speak to the heart, or apply with some gracious power and efficacy to His people. It is one thing to read the Scripture, and this is good and proper indeed, but to feel a personal application of the truth to the heart, is very blessed. After all, it is that which the Lord by His good Spirit speaks to us, that we really feel in the unction and authority of that word. We believe in what is termed application. We believe in having things spoken home to us in a distinct and particular way. Some may feel they can speak of this as being quite a frequent occurrence, whereas others cannot, and have to confess it is very rare with them that they can feel to have a word clearly, as they hope, and definitely spoken in their own heart. This, I believe, may be attended with differing degrees of power. Sometimes a word may be applied that may be a confirming word in your matters in your soul, in your circumstances, and yet not be with outstanding power, but like "a still, small voice" - yet graciously effective in your heart. At other times it may be with greater power, and as clear and definite as though it were audibly spoken. We have no reason to deny the fact that at times it may have been audibly spoken, but usually the Lord's words are known by their effect in the heart. Sometimes this can be in soul experience in the case of one walking in darkness, burdened with sin, or uncertain of his state and case, who may feel to be under condemnation, fear that the Lord is against him, feel that the law

holds him in its claims and he is shut out of God's mercy. When the LORD is pleased to speak to such a case, what a relief, what hope, what light, what comfort it can bring!

Sometimes this can be in the circumstances of our lives in the Lord's providences to us, that may be very particular and important to us, although they are, properly speaking, secondary to eternal considerations. But they are very close to us. Our movements, our changes, our daily matters and things that come, have a very important bearing upon us. How good it is then, when the word of the Lord is felt to be heard in such a way as to confirm, to bring a measure of quietness and inward hope, that He has shown to you a good and right way to walk in. How confirming it can be! It can allay the storm, subdue the conflict, and enable you to go on from day to day, although things may still be difficult, and to put your trust in Him, believing He "will never leave you nor forsake you." Thus we may conclude that every word is a pure word. Sometimes it may be difficult, I quite agree, rightly to ascertain whether we may have taken something to ourselves, or may have perhaps read something which fits the case, which we have tried to lay hold of, because it may have been relevant to this or that particular circumstance. But, I believe myself, we can usually tell whether or not a word has really come from the Lord into our case, because if it does come from Him, it will be sure to take us to Him, and in all probability humble us before Him, soften our heart under a sense of His goodness, and sometimes, produce a little worship and make the Lord Jesus Christ precious in the heart. O it is good, it is so strengthening to faith, it does help us to continue on our way, when we can feel that the Lord has spoken to us. So sometimes, it may be a word of promise. What a wonderful word that was the Lord gave to Jacob when he was there in the desert on that memorable night when he had that wonderful vision. "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." It was a pure, a wonderful word, a confirming word to him. It did not mean he would never have any trouble, that everything would go easily, that providence would always be smiling and he would have nothing to weigh him down. It is true the Lord prospered him, but even so, he had many disappointments and hard things, but after all, if the Lord drops a word in your heart, He will not take it back again. You will find it to be a pure word. You may find it to be a pure word in another sense, that it sanctifies your heart; and it has a particular effect in your own heart when the Lord speaks. It is a pure

word to sanctify you, that is to say, to bring forth a desire in your heart to live nearer to Him, to walk closer with Him, to have more conformity, to be more deeply led into the precious things of the gospel and to hold the things of this world loosely. It has a sanctifying effect in the heart when the Lord speaks. In this sense therefore, it is a pure word.

"The words of the Lord are pure words." What gracious promises the Lord has given, has He not? Sometimes it can be a comforting word that the Lord may be pleased to speak. Comfort is a relative term and has relation to pain, trouble and misery. For instance, when one is in great bodily pain and suddenly finds or feels relief from the sharp, piercing pains he has had in his body, he will say, This is comfort! So it is in grace when the Lord is pleased to speak a comforting word to a poor and needy sinner, who may be in distress, pained by his sin, and perhaps in painful circumstances too. What a mercy to have a comforting word from the Lord. This is a pure word. In the prophecy by Zechariah we read, "The LORD answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words." So it is in the experience of the Lord's people, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem." This, of course, refers to the need of that comfort, not to lull one to sleep or suggest an easy kind of religion, but comfort seasonably spoken and seasonably received too. So it is said of the Lord's people of old, "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her." That is in the wilderness; that is where the Lord does speak comfortably unto His people - in the wilderness. Sometimes you feel to be in a wilderness state in your own soul too.

Sometimes it can be a directing word. "The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." When the Lord is pleased to speak a directing word - if He does speak it - you will feel the influence of that gracious direction in your heart, and that will not give rise to a natural, brazen kind of confidence, but it will give rise to a humble confidence that the Lord is directing you in a way that is right in His sight and has His approbation. It is a mercy to have a directing word! We read in Isaiah, "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." Moreover, He says He will guide His people with His eye, suggesting His eye is upon all their circumstances, all the concerns of their lives, everything that attends them. It is great to receive a right direction from the Lord in our matters. It can confirm you more than anything else. Your

friends may say you have taken a right step, or they do not think you have, or they cannot understand, as the case may be; but if the Lord is pleased to speak a directing word, you can feel to go in the strength of that word in your heart; it can bring a quietness and enable you to return unto your rest. After all, it is His own approbation that counts. because that will bring into your heart a satisfaction, a quietness, an assurance that if He has so directed you, He will be with you and will bring you through, although He may sometimes try by opposite things, that very word that He may have spoken. So, I believe, many of the Lord's people have found it. They have felt, maybe, to have a directing word that may, as they feel, have made this or that matter clear to them, and yet later on, the Lord has seemed to turn the whole thing upside-down, everything seems to go wrong, which puts you to great confusion and you may have a real battle with the enemy. He says, 'The Lord never told you that, you took it to yourself, it fitted your case, you wanted to do this or that and such a word fitted in. It is what you wanted, naturally speaking, but the Lord was not in it at all.' So you may have a real battle till it can bring you down and cause you, at times, to feel you do not know whether you have anything right or not. Even so, He may put you about and cause you to pass through deep waters, but if He has given you that word, He will be sure to stand by it, He will not let it go; If He speaks a word He will not take it back again - He will stand by it. It is all settled in His mind and purpose, although it may seem to be upside-down with us. It is a sweet thing for us! "For ever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in Heaven." So it is His people have to go through a chequered pilgrimage and hardly seem to know their right hand from their left; whereas at other times things seem so nicely settled, you can go on and feel a measure of peace in your mind, feel a measure of the Lord's approbation, all seems to go well, and you have comfort in this and that. Then something comes and you wonder after all where the scene will end and whether or not you have been deceived. All this is, more or less, usual with the Lord's people in the winding, twisting path through which they have to walk in their pilgrimage to the heavenly City. And all the time His word is a pure word. He never makes a mistake, goes wrong, or misunderstands anything. His word is pure every time. But O, the Lord's people find and feel the days of darkness to be many. But it is a pure word.

"The words of the LORD are pure words." May not this also be sometimes a reproving word? May He not speak something in your heart to cause great searching? It has not always been a pleasant, happy word,

has it? It is always a wholesome word, always a seasonable word, although it may not always be what we should like. But at the same time - there it is! a seasonable word; it is the Lord's word; it is a pure word.

Some years ago a friend came here on a Wednesday evening, and I read a certain chapter; she was in very great exercise with regard to a certain matter in providence, and she felt the Lord had spoken to her but it was in such a way as she did not want. She did not want really to hear such a word as she did hear, although she felt it was the Lord's word. I did not know anything about it at all, but I read a certain chapter quite opposite to what she wanted, and as I read, she said, Lord do not let him preach from that verse, but that was the very verse I had to preach from; so it proved to be. It was not the way I wanted nor she wanted, although I knew nothing of it at that time. But the Lord directed undoubtedly, and moreover, confirmed her that she must take the step. How mysterious are His ways!

Sometimes it may be quite different from that. You may hear the Lord's voice so comfortingly, so reassuringly - but we are not always to hear it thus. He may come with a solemn searching reproof, and turn you about, and show you something which may be as a searching light in your conscience. Many things we may have to experience in this way, but after all, He makes no mistake. They are "pure words of silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." This is a metaphor, then, to show that every word of the Lord is tried and proved, using the figure of a smelting furnace, whereby the metal, the silver, the gold, or whatever it might be, is entirely purged of any mixture, dross or earth purified by the furnace, "as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times." In the expression "seven times" a definite principle is taken for an indefinite; that is to say to denote perfection - a complete circle, as it is in Job, where it is said, "He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee."

"Purified seven times." This seems to illustrate then, if I may so put it, first of all, the abiding nature of these words. They have been through the furnace, and stood the test; they will not just burn up with a little flicker of heat. They have been through the furnace, they are tried and proved in the furnace, therefore they are abiding words. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," saith the Lord "but My word shall not pass away." Not only does this illustrate their abiding nature - that they will stand - but it sets forth also, their priceless

value. They have all been tried and proved in the furnace, and are all that much more valuable to us, because of this. As Peter said to the Lord, "Thou hast the words of eternal life". They are of inestimable value. Not only of inestimable value, but this being tried in the furnace, illustrates their absolute reliability. "God is not man, that He should lie, neither the son of man, that He should repent; hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken and shall He not make it good?" So it is!

"His word is this (poor sinners, hear);
"Believe on Me, and banish fear;
Cease from your own works, bad or good,
And wash your garments in My blood."

This sets forth their absolute reliability, their inestimable value and abiding nature.

May the Lord help us, and often favour us in our hearts to hear the "still, small, voice". May He preserve and keep us, as it is here referring to His people. "Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, Thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever."