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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday morning, 3rd. August, 1969 (after a month of sickness)

Text Psalm 17.15 "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness".

I have not come here intending to preach a sermon but to speak as the Lord may help me of a few things that are essential to our everlasting salvation. It is, I know, a feature of the Lord's people to look back upon some things in their lives, both in providence and in grace, and this can be very profitable. We have more or less concern about things that we are now passing through, or are walking in, but after all, dear friends, the more important and the all-important matter is where shall we spend eternity? Very soon we shall have to leave everything here and face a holy God, and it will be a mercy of all mercies if what I have read should ultimately prove to be our experience, as evidently the Psalmist felt convinced that it would be his experience; hence he says, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness". O would it not be an amazing wonder if you and I could feel when we lay our head upon our bed tonight that we could really say this feelingly, not presumptuously, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness"; because after all friends, as we know, it must be a personal matter. We have to face God; no creature can escape Him.

We have to face three things, or rather we have three things before us, and the first of these is death. It may be somewhat gloomy to speak of this but if we have a gracious exercise our great concern will be to be prepared for it, and if we can feel we are, then that will be our sweetest consolation, that is true, is it not? The other day I had a letter from a dear friend and in that letter he referred to Rutherford when he said, "O sweet, sweet cross of Christ", and my friend said, "I would rather have that cross than all the sweet delights of a million worlds"; and he is not a man to speculate in fancies, (he has prayed here at

this table) and I believe he meant what he said.

Secondly, we have to face the judgment day. I know a lot of people do not believe this, but that makes no difference to the truth. If they live and die in unbelief of divine revelation they will sink into the bottomless pit for ever. "It is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment". We have enough to make us tremble in the prospect of this, and it will be a mercy if there are some here who have never trembled, if the Spirit of the Lord should make them tremble.

Then thirdly we have to face a never-ending eternity. I know there are many people who discredit this, but what concerns us is what God has revealed concerning the eternal happiness of the redeemed of the Lord, and the eternal misery and punishment that will be the awful portion of the ungodly who live and die in their sin.

Now this brings me to my subject, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness". It is noticeable that this mode of expression "as for me" occurs in the Psalms more than once. We find the Psalmist using it in Psalm 5.7 "But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy". This expression appears to have several different implications. In the case that I have read it is a gracious resolve of the Psalmist. "As for me, I will come into thy house". That was the desire of his heart, the delight of his soul, to enter into the house of the Lord. Here then we have a gracious resolve. In Psalm 73.1-2 the Psalmist says, "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped". "As for me". In this case, we see the dear man under intense conflict; he is looking out upon a prospering world and he becomes confused in his mind; temptation prevails relative to the ways of God. The enemy appears to prevail, with the sad result that he says, "As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." Many have been in that place, but how sweetly did the Lord deliver him, so that he could say, "as for me" in quite a

different sense to the way he said it in the opening of the Psalm. When the Lord appeared to him he could say "whatever the wicked may have, let them have it, if they want the world they will go after the world, but what is the world to me, "as for me"; "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee". That is a beautiful "as for me" is it not?

Now in the verse that I have read we have this expression in a sweet and glorious anticipation. "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness". This is indeed a sweet "as for me". It is noticeable, friends, that in each of these references there is a background that refers to the ungodly. It is so in Psalm 5 "Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man. But as for me...." So here the Psalmist prays to be delivered from his persecutors and from them which have their portion in this life, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness". What can you say about this? Can you look out upon the world, can you look out upon the wealthy, can you look out upon those who achieve great fame and say, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness"? That surpasses by far all the pleasures of this world, all the fame of this world and all the wealth of this world. Oh, it is a sad day that we live in. We have to see the Sabbath-breaking ways of men, the wild, mad rush for the pleasures of this world; and there are those whose heart is covetous to accumulate wealth; there are those who seek fame and achievement; but if we had all the pleasures the world could give, all the wealth the world could give, and if we could run about on the moon, we believe some of us could say, I believe I could say hopefully, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness". That will be more to me than "prancing about on the moon", or possessing all the wealth of this world or all the pleasures of this world. Is that your case? It will not be your case unless the Lord has emptied you from vessel to vessel and brought you to feel that He Himself is the one thing needful.

"I will behold thy face in righteousness". David was able to speak with more confidence than you and I may feel able to speak. We may have to say, "It is my one desire that when I die and enter eternity I may behold His face in righteousness. We must say this, that everyone will behold His face in righteousness, without exception, all people will, but with some it will be the righteousness of His holy law to their eternal damnation. If He shall say to some in that great day, "Depart ye cursed", it will be a judgment of righteousness. Now, what David says of himself, will be the experience of every living soul one day, I feel sure of this; and many a poor thing who may not feel to get beyond the publican's prayer when he said, "God be merciful to me a sinner" too.

What will it be to behold His face in righteousness in a gracious way? I believe it will be this, friends, I believe it will be to behold His face in the righteousness of His beloved Son the Lord Jesus Christ, that will be to behold His face in righteousness with joy. We know that God is righteous, inherently in Himself, and He is righteous in all His dispensations too, but this is the most blessed righteousness that I have ever heard or read of or seen in all my life. When I say that I have seen it, I just mean that I hope I have had a sweet view, very sweet, of that righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord our righteousness. Now if the Lord has a purpose of mercy toward you and me, and if He has awakened our conscience to the solemnities of eternity, if He has, and has brought us to cry for mercy, then one day when we die, after we have left this poor, dying world we shall behold His face in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus upon the ground and merit of the perfect obedience of a precious Redeemer. We shall behold His face. O what a blessed prospect this is, as we have been singing in the second hymn (1135). "I shall behold thy face in righteousness' not in an awful, unspeakable terror, but under the smiles of a Father in Jesus Christ, covered with that spotless, beautiful robe that hides all sin from the eye of justice, and in which we shall be presented in that day without spot and blameless. Now and again in the silent watches of the night when I think of this and realise

that this is the evening of my life, I try to pray that I may not be deceived about this. I believe I can say that I have got a glimpse of the Lord Jesus Christ once or twice by faith that has drawn my soul's affections after Him as "the chiefest among ten thousand and as the altogether lovely."

"I will behold thy face in righteousness". By His face we understand His smile, His countenance, His favour, His approbation. This is His face. There are some who will behold His face with a frown and an awful terror but the Psalmist could say, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness".

"I shall be satisfied when I awake, with thy likeness". If I kept preaching all my life I could not fully unveil what is involved in this, "I shall be satisfied". There is a satisfaction that the Lord's dear people feel while they are down here below, there is a satisfaction! We find the Psalmist saying that the meek shall eat and be satisfied. They shall be satisfied; and in a later Psalm it is said that "they shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house;". What do we understand by the fatness of His house? I understand the precious blessings of the everlasting Gospel as they are applied to poor hungry souls through the merit of a precious Jesus. "My soul shall be satisfied". "O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the Lord". This to my mind appears to carry us to the great morning of the resurrection. I know it has a personal bearing with each redeemed one that when they die it is "absent from the body, present with the Lord", then that redeemed soul will know what it is to be absolutely satisfied.

It says here, "when I awake, with thy likeness", when I awake, this links with the Apostle in speaking of the resurrection when he says the Lord shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body. O I shall be satisfied then. It is a comforting thought that in the Scripture death is referred to as a sleep. So says the Apostle, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump, and this mortal must put on immortality". We shall be satisfied then. Moreover it is said that His dear people shall be caught up together with the Lord Jesus in the air. We shall be

satisfied then; also that this body of ours will be fashioned like unto His glorious body, that is the glorified human nature of the Lord Jesus, not His eternal Godhead, but there will be a conformity to that risen glorified body that is now in heaven, where he is, having completed the work of redemption. O we shall be satisfied then.

One hymn writer says: "A Man there is, a real Man,

With wounds still gaping wide,

From which rich streams of blood once ran,

In hands, and feet, and side"

I shall be satisfied when I see Him without a veil between, absolutely satisfied. Then the former things will have passed away; there will be no more clouds, as we have been singing, no more threatening storms, but we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. Then we shall be perfectly satisfied. We shall not want something better, something different, we shall not have to say, "Heaven is not what I thought it was"; we shall be satisfied. It will be a mercy to possess a religion that will take us to heaven - to be stopped in our wild career. I know that mercifully I was not left to run in the ways of outward sin as some of the Lord's people have been, that was the Lord's mercy, but when I was a lad sitting in the gallery once at Galeed Chapel I remember feeling a particular sweetness in this verse,

"Preserved in Jesus when

My feet made haste to hell;

And there should I have gone,

But thou dost all things well;

Thy love was great, thy mercy free,

Which from the pit delivered me."

Oh, when those pearly gates open and we enter in to join that everlasting chorus "Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood", to Him be honour and praise and glory for ever and ever." Then we shall be satisfied for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymns: 216; 1135; 1085

Reading: Isaiah 25 and 26