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Special meeting for prayer and thanksgiving at "Ebenezer" ,Clapham
on Saturday evening 27th. November, 1971

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Hymns 420, 421

Reading Psalm 23; John 17 from v.23.

Dear friends this is as you are aware a special occasion for thanksgiving to the God of all our mercies Who has been pleased to spare me your pastor to attain the age of 80 years, and I trust the Lord will be with us this evening, that we may feel the sacredness of worship, a little of the sweetness of this 23rd. Psalm, and to realise as we can that, surely goodness and mercy has and shall follow us, all the days of our life. I shall not take up your time longer just now, because I desire to ask as many of our dear brethren to engage in prayer as time may allow. May the Lord grant us that true spirit of prayer as we realise that we are indebted to Him for every blessing temporal and spiritual, and that it is of His mercies we are not consumed. May the Lord graciously help each one.

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The following then engaged in prayer; Mr. R. West, Mr. S. Collins, Mr. A. Levell, Mr. S. Sayers, Mr. D. Relf, Mr. F. Burbridge, Mr. A. Allen, Mr. J. Davis and our Pastor.

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Mr. West

Dear friends, may I detain you for a little while as I perform a duty and privilege? Dear Mr. Delves, it has been our desire in meeting to render thanksgiving to the Lord for His wonderful mercies to us as a church and people in sparing you and Mrs. Delves to us to the ripe age of 80 years. Where a pastor is qualified and given to a people, as we believe you were qualified and given to us, it is a very great blessing. Alas! if we often treat it lightly. Now in this part of the meeting it is the wish of your people to show that, notwithstanding our failings and shortcomings, we still love you. We love you for your work's sake and for your many labours over the many years you have been with us. We realise in some measure the sorrow you have in the

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depletions and the empty pews as compared with former times, but is there not encouragement in the suggestion that it is better and more comfortable for you in your old age to have a small devoted flock who love you very much, than to have the responsibility of a larger people perhaps critical, perhaps divided, many of whom may have lost most of their earlier affection and become indifferent? I feel sure that many of us are sorry to be so reticent in letting you know of helps received under the ministry, but may it not be that the Lord's intention even in this is the same as it was when He gave Paul a thorn in the flesh? The Lord has given you a good measure of fruit to your labours, but He has - and uses - means sometimes to keep down the natural pride of the instruments He is pleased to use. However, your people must not take advantage of that and excuse our faults and we do not.

So though we deplore our own sad shortcomings and would seek grace to be of more spiritual comfort to you as our pastor, we ask you to accept this token of our affection in the form of a cheque for £137, and we hope you will be able to use the money or part of it for your comfort in your home. The Greetings Cheque Card reads, "To our dear Pastor and Mrs. Delves from Ebenezer Chapel friends with love."

Now, before you respond, may I read you a poem which was composed by you some thirty years ago and was sent to me due principally to my forgetfulness? (I must explain, friends, that I omitted to include in the pastor's magazines the Friendly Companion so I had to send it to him later with a few lines of apology, and this is the answer I received.) It shows the state of your exercise in 1941 and it may be that your feelings and exercises are much the same today, and if so I hope it will encourage you to feel that the Lord, notwithstanding your own felt weakness, has supported you all through these years.

Just to let you understand
The "Friendly" safely came to hand.
The verse enclosed was fitting too,
For which to you my thanks are due.

I've friends around on every hand,
A true, devoted, loyal band.
But, solve the mystery if you can,
I still remain a lonely man.

Yes, though it may be hard to see,
It's ordered that it thus should be.
And though kind friends in part atone,
'Tis needful I should walk alone.

A pastor's is a lonely life,
But much exposed to inward strife,
More private in my life and walk,
More public in my word and thought.

My bread comes in a different way
From those who labour every day,
Yet, though I sow the gospel seed,
My God supplies each temporal need.

I have the greater need to cry,
For I have sins of deeper dye;
Those sins are known to One alone,
Oh that the Fountain may atone!

How oft, alas, does pulpit stain
Upon my heart with pain remain;
And oft I pray with one of old
To say the thing that's right of God.

To take the precious from the vile
Without hypocrisy and guile,
To use the shovel and the sieve,
Needs grace which God alone can give.

Strong men need meat both rich and good;
Weak babes need nursing with their food,
Our sons should be as plants well grown
And daughters shine as corner-stones.

That poor and halt and lame and blind
May in His time true mercy find,
And earnest seekers after God
Rejoice in sin-atonement blood.

These points, as we may look them through,
Engage my thoughts and prayers too.
They cause one many a secret sigh,
When Sabbath days are drawing nigh.

Perhaps 'tis not so hard to find
Or solve the mystery in the mind,
And read the "Friendly" though I can,
I still remain a lonely man.

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Mr. West's reply

My Pastor's lines gave me much thought
I thank him, for they came unsought.
Therein he kindly draws aside
The veil, which otherwise would hide
Much secret exercise and care,
A burden he is called to hear.

A lonely man? yes, he needs be,
Oft with his God on bended knee.
Ah, blessed posture! May the Lord
Oft speak home then the living word,
Cause him to know that mighty grace
And power suffice in every case,
And when he feels the tempter's thrust
Oh then, Lord, be his shield and trust.

And does he pace the study floor
In search of food from heavenly store?
Lord, give him large supplies of bread,
That his loved flock may still be fed.

But let him not discouraged be
By loneliness; grant him to see
His Master tread the lonely way
From Bethlehem to Calvary.
Oft turn his mind to Olivet
Let him those labours ne'er forget;
Think of the nights the Saviour spent
Beneath the stars; the prayers He sent
With fervour to His Father, God,
As He the path of obedience trod.

Thus, though I at a distance stand,
And scarce advance to shake his hand,
Thus I would pray with free access
That God may still my pastor bless,
His constant prayers and exercise!
They call from me grief and surprise,
That I, one of his flock, should be
So fruitless and oft slovenly.
O God, once more with power descend
To rouse Thy sheep the heavens rend!

R.W. 1941

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Though not with a view to exhorting you Mr. Delves, I
would finally read from 1 Timothy 6, verses 11,12, 14-16

Mr. Delves

My dear deacons, members and friends, I feel quite unfit to make an adequate response to all your kindness. I have long forgotten about this poem and also Mr. West's pithy reply, but there are truths in it that remain as real today as they were then, and in some aspects even more so. My dear friends, I do desire humbly to acknowledge your practical kindness. I feel, as the Apostle said, it is the savour of a sweet smell. It is not so much the cheque, although that I appreciate, but it is what is behind the cheque, the love that has moved you practically to consider me and my dear wife in this way. I would also publicly acknowledge many very kind greetings that I have received from you here, and also from quite a number of friends abroad, whom I have visited in my ministry. It has humbled me to feel that the Lord has given me a place among His people. I have to say with good Rutherford that they do not know me as I know myself, otherwise I should have no cheque tonight; but I do feel it very sweet to have a place in your affections, it helps me greatly, and although we are not so many now as we have been, yet still I do believe and feel that the Lord has not forsaken us.

In the wonderful providence of God my dear wife and I have been favoured to live together united in the marriage bond for nearly 57 years, that will be in a few days on 7th. December. As I look back it recalls many things that I could not mention just now relative to the leadings of God's providence in my life from my birth in Rushlake Green, a remote country village in Sussex, until the time I went in the providence of God to Brighton, which made a great mark in my life; there we lived together in Preston Drove for about 23 years until you invited me here as your pastor. There are circumstances connected with this invitation that are still very fresh in my mind, especially that savoury letter which I received from the late Mr. S.F. Stevens, a former deacon, in 1929; and it was in that year I came here to preach for three Lord's days which Mr. Stevens had not been able to fill. Eventually in the Lord's providence I became your pastor, and I have had the favour that not all pastors

have enjoyed, I have had the blessing of your prayers, affection, loyalty and devotion to me as your pastor through all these years, and this has often amazed me. When I came here I was forty four years of age and now I have passed my 80th. year. During this time I have buried a congregation, many that some of you have known and with whom I felt a sweet communion; but the Lord has replenished us as the years have gone by, and has brought in our younger friends. I remember so well when Mr. Collins, Mr. Levell and Mr. J. Stevens (who was brought up here) were brought amongst us, and others as well, how the Lord built us up, gave us to see some good days, and although now we are numerically diminished very much, yet I would desire to thank you for your loyalty to me, deacons, members and friends, which has been a wonderful help to me over these many years.

I thank you also for that very beautiful sheaf of carnations, that was brought to my house last week, which we have enjoyed in our dining room; on behalf of my wife and myself I do ask you to accept our appreciation of all your favours and especially your prayers. In reference to the future we do not know what the Lord's purpose may be, but I cannot expect to be with you very much longer now. I have gone ten years beyond the allotted age of man, and though for my age in many respects I am favoured in my health, I feel certain infirmities upon me now, and I shall have to ask your kind forbearance and patience with me in the comparatively few days that remain. May the Lord bless and be with us together and still grant unto us His merciful presence as I believe He has done, and as is often mentioned in the prayers, that He may add to us as a church such as shall be saved; may the Lord favour them in their souls, so that they may have some good things to come with, and may feel like the Psalmist when he said, "I will run in the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart".

Will you please accept my acknowledgements of your continued favours, each one of you here, and absent ones as well whom we miss from our company this night. And now perhaps I may venture to suggest that we conclude this thanksgiving meeting with the doxology.

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