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ON preached by MR.J.DELVES at "Rehoboth" Chapel, Swindon, on Thursday evening, 15th February, 1968.

Text: Psalm 27: 13,14.

"I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."

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In the 13th verse the author describes an experience, and he refers to it as a personal one; not just something that another person had passed through, but his own experience, as was the case with David in the Psalms; and it is somewhat noticeable that there is a striking contrast between his language in the beginning of the psalm and his language at the end. In the first three verses particularly he speaks with an unusual confidence, as though he had no fear whatever of any enemy or whatever might rise up against him; although the wicked might come upon him to eat up his flesh, he says, he has no fear; "they stumbled and fell", and "though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;" and so on. Because "the Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" The canopy of divine love and power seemed so spread over him that all his opposers were just as nothing to him. And yet in the close of the psalm he refers to coming to such an extreme condition and state as to be ready to faint, and says that he would have fainted, unless - that is to say, if there had not been something great supporting him and holding him up, he would have fainted. He says so. "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living;" - that is what kept him from despair and from fainting.

And so, my friends, it must be while we are here in this earthly pilgrimage that we are subject to changing conditions, both providentially and spiritually. It has never been designed that a child of God should have uninterrupted joy and never have his peace marred by anything; neither has it been designed that he should always be down in the depths, ready to faint. But it is an amazing mercy to know our God. I have often thought that even when David was down in the depths of dejection and trouble and distress, and well nigh in despair, yet he still seems able to claim a relationship; he does not appear to question his interest in his God, whatever his circumstances may have been. And we know that in the life of David, as we have it recorded in the Book of Samuel, there were a number of things that might well reduce a man to a fainting condition, so to speak. As you know, he had some exceedingly painful things to bear with from the time that he was anointed by Samuel till the crown was placed on his head, and after that, even to the end of his days. So it is very truly that he could say, "I had fainted", and many times, many times, "unless" It is such a sweet word, a word which seems to open up something secret, which is a particular privilege of one who believes in his God. Something held him up. Is it not more or less, though not in the same degree, the experience of a child of God to come sometimes to such a pass as this, to be ready to faint, and to give everything up and make shipwreck of it all? Have there not been such times with some of you when certain things have brought you to such a pass that you have felt you could not go on any longer? And yet you have proved your God to be faithful to His word and promise, though it may have been at the eleventh hour that He has appeared and brought you through?

The experience in the holy scriptures of certain other characters reveals this; in fact it appears that every godly character in the scripture had to pass through a trial of his faith, and that the trial in itself brought them to this extremity of being ready to faint. I wonder if you have ever known what this is. Could we not take the case of Abraham who received that command from the Lord to go and offer up Isaac, that child of promise, and to offer him up as a sacrifice; after all that he had been through concerning him, and all the waiting that there had been for him, and the trial that came upon the promise, - yet now he must offer him up. Well, it was enough to bring a heart-faint, was it not? And yet it is so evident, and so beautifully clear, that Abraham believed in his God, which kept him from fainting, or resenting the divine command:

"counting that God was able to raise" even his beloved Isaac from the dead if he had made the final thrust; "from which also he received him in a figure".

So also with Jacob, when he was in such distress, when his sons returned from Egypt, and two had been held, and now there was a claim upon Benjamin, - he must be taken; he says, "All these things are against me; these things will bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave"; and I suppose he meant it. You can almost hear him saying, "I am sure they will; I shall never endure it; I do not know how to stand up against it". Neither did he when it came to Benjamin; but even so, although he may have felt ready to faint, still there was a secret power that held him, and he lived to see a remarkable and wonderful deliverance, so that he nearly fainted, not through the sad reports, but for joy, when he saw the wagons and realised that his son Joseph was still alive. And so it has been with others. It certainly was with Joseph, though he must have felt a heart fainting sometimes when he was in irons; as we read, "his feet were held in irons", and when he was in the prison. In fact it says of him that until the word of the Lord came, the word of the Lord tried him.

So we have to see that there has been sometimes a sharp trial of faith that has brought many to what may be termed a fainting condition, a great test of endurance. Has not that been so? And are not the Lord's people brought to such a pass as this? Yet we find with David that when he returned to his city and found it a smouldering ruin and everything carried away, and his own company threatening to stone him, for "they wept until they had no more power to weep", yet even then he "encouraged himself in the Lord his God", and did not faint.

Many things can bring us to what we may term a fainting condition; many things in the experience of the soul, apart from outside conditions. When the terrors of the law enter the conscience of a sinner convinced of his sin and guilt before a holy God, it may bring a fainting condition, a terror, a fear, a dread; a dread of the judgment day, a dread of what lies before, a shrinking with a kind of terror at the thought of eternity and what it involves, in case we should be condemned for ever and fall under the curse of a broken law. O, this can bring to a condition of fainting, spiritually speaking. Many have been brought to a condition of fainting even physically when they have been under the terrors of the law and under the power of Satan's temptations, when the enemy has so assailed them as to bring them to a distracted condition. Not only so, but when, with all the attempts to pray and to cry for mercy, there seems no response, when everything seems all to no purpose and the sentence of death lies heavy upon the conscience, this can bring, and has brought many, to a fainting condition. And when the days of darkness are many, when the Lord hides his face; - David says so here: in Psalm 28 he says, "Be not silent to me, lest, if Thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit." He does not actually say that he will go down, but he says, "I feel to become like them that do." The Lord's silence under certain conditions can bring one to a fainting condition; and many other things besides this.

How different is this language from that in the first verse: "The Lord is my light and my salvation". There is no darkness there, no questioning anything there. There seems to be a sweet satisfaction there; his hope is firm and steadfast, he is lifted above all his enemies. He views divine omnipotence and an interest in an almighty God, over and above all the threatenings against his life and his persecutors and all things. But still there were times with the good man when he came to a pass, as here, "I had fainted, unless..." It would appear that the particular circumstances that occasioned this fainting condition are described in the twelfth verse, for he says, "Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty". "I had fainted under it", he says; "I had fainted under it, unless"

What a beautiful word this is! This is a word that comes into the experience of a living soul. There is something that holds him up. Although he may feel sometimes as though he will sink and never rise again, yet still he proves the truth of what we read in the book of Deuteronomy: "The eternal God is thy refuge; and underneath are the everlasting arms." So that even if we feel like fainting, we

cannot fall through them; they are the arms of divine love, and the arms of divine power. Arms usually indicate power in the scriptures; and David felt this, you see; for he could say to others, "Wait on the Lord". Do you feel ready to faint? If that is so, "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage", fainting heart. "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart". "You cannot strengthen your own", he might say; and neither can we; but he directs to One Who can. "He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord".

"I had fainted, unless...." This expressive "unless" is used in a later psalm where David says, "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence", or, "quickly dwelt in silence" (margin). "Unless" - here is the secret, then. And is it not a real one with a child of God, this "unless"? something holds us up. There is something secret, there is a divine power which preserves us from despair and from making shipwreck of faith. And what is that which was such a help to him at this particular time? What was it? He says, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living". That is what kept the good man from fainting; and that can keep you and me from fainting, although sometimes we may feel that we shall.

He says, "I believed to see the goodness of the Lord; and that kept me from fainting". Now there is something about the way this is expressed; he does not say, "I had fainted unless the goodness of the Lord had held me up;" but "unless I had believed to see it". It was believing to see the goodness of the Lord that held him up; and there is something very beautiful about this. He does not just say, "Unless I had seen it"; but, "unless I had believed to see it". He had ~~two~~ things, faith and sight. "Unless I had believed to see it". He had a faith's view of the goodness of the Lord, although he felt to be in a fainting condition; but he had something even more than some view of the goodness of the Lord; he felt his interest in it and could believe in it. He felt a confidence in it in his soul, and that kept him from fainting. "I had fainted, unless....."

Here then is, first of all, that faith's view of the goodness of the Lord that is strengthening and confirming to a waiting and a living soul. It is not only that faith's view which may be given, but it is that confidence and assurance and experience of this goodness; not only some sight of it, but an experience of it. "I believed to see it", he says; "I saw it, and I believed it, and I felt the power of it in my heart, and it kept me from fainting". Well, has it not been with some of you that when you have come to a pass, something, mysteriously, it may be, - something has just borne you through, so that you have not fainted, given up, made shipwreck, sunk to rise no more? Something secret, a secret prop, held you up. And what could this be? - this goodness of the Lord? Well, it can be several things; but I will take it like this particularly: it was the goodness of the Lord in His word and promise; it was that rod and staff that supported him that he speaks of in psalm 23: "Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death". He felt a sweet peace of mind in that deep, dark valley. Why? "Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me". Now this was the goodness of the Lord to him.

Well then, have you not known this, some of you, to feel the confirming and comforting power of a divine promise that has been a support to you and has held you up, strengthened your faith and hope in a covenant-performing God, and so you have been brought through?

"I had fainted, unless....." Not: "I had fainted, unless there had been something good in me, some power of mine, some inherent strength that I possessed, or some great effort that I made". No, it was the goodness of the Lord that he felt. Yes, and I believe I have known what it has been to be brought through a period of trial under a sense of the goodness of the Lord to me in a promise that has lifted me above the trial, although I was in the depths of it, and that kept me from fainting; so that I am not speculating or imagining something when I say that the sweet efficacy of a divine promise in your heart as the goodness of the Lord to you will keep you from fainting and enable you to do as we have been singing in the hymn, to cast your care on Him. O, friends, it is a wonderful mercy to have a religion in which there is some contact with God! If there is

not contact with God it cannot be a real religion. Anyone can profess to be a Christian, but contact with God in our soul's experience is that "goodness of the Lord" to us in His coming to us in a time when we are ready to faint; and to support and to deliver - to deliver! I have known the time when I was in the depth of trouble, in the days of the first war, but I knew what it was to believe to see the goodness of the Lord in a promise that He brought into my soul when I was as near to fainting as I could be, so that I was completely lifted above all, and in a moment or two it was as though I had no trouble at all.

Well, the Lord can soon transform things in your soul's feelings, although there may be no difference actually in the circumstances. But maybe the Lord has brought His people out of a condition of fainting by certain providences that have come upon them to try their faith; and it must be so while we are here below, because "faith, though the smallest, must surely be tried". But if the Lord in His divine wisdom brings His poor, dear people into certain providences to instruct them and to bring them to a fainting condition, He will not leave them to sink in it. He will support them in it, and bring them through it; I feel sure He will.

Further, the "goodness of the Lord" here I may take to be the goodness of the Lord in the gospel. If a little of the precious gospel comes into your heart when you are in trouble, it softens you, brings you down, produces repentance, humility, faith and love, and you will get as far down into the dust as you can before His holy Majesty, and yet feel the sweetest worship there. I feel sure it is so. O, what words can express or describe the goodness of the Lord in the redemption of His poor, dear people who, in themselves, are sold under sin and are in a hopeless condition, as all of us are? What a revelation of the goodness of the Lord we have in the Trinity, in the eternal Father in making choice of His people as an act of His sovereign will and purpose, and adopting them as His Own before they were ever born or before the world was! His dear people were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, - chosen in Christ unto the adoption of children; they were predestinated and brought into a relationship in the covenant of grace before they were born. O, what a revelation of the goodness of the Lord is this blessed covenant of grace!

And then the eternal Son of God, what a manifestation of the goodness of the Lord we have in Him! The eternal Son of God, Who, in the fulness of time assumed human flesh and was made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons. Although they were adopted in the covenant of grace from eternity, yet when a precious Christ is manifested to the soul, and an interest in His redeeming love and grace is felt in the heart, then you receive the adoption of sons; you receive it, and you can look up to the heavens and say, "My Father! Abba, Father!" I know when I could, and when I did. O, it is something to have the goodness of the Lord fill your heart so as to break it to pieces!

Then, too, what a manifestation of the goodness of the Lord we have in the substitution of the Lord Jesus Christ, in His sufferings in the garden and on the cross! Contemplate His agonies, which were more than our minds can conceive; and all for His poor, dear people who, in themselves, were enemies, and who were under the power of Satan and running the broad way to their destruction. O, it is a mercy to know something of the gospel. I have not so very much longer here, I know, but I do want to feel more and more of the precious gospel in my soul to keep me from fainting. For there are plenty of enemies within and without.

Then again, contemplate the goodness of the Lord in the Holy Spirit, in quickening the elect of God into life in due season, convincing them of sin, and in revealing the Lord Jesus Christ to a poor, sin-convicted sinner, and in applying the atonement in a taste of forgiveness. "O, how great", we may say, as it is in another psalm, "O how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up". Where was it laid up? I would say it was laid up in the covenant of grace, and wrought out. Where was it wrought out? In the Person and work of the Lord

Jesus Christ on the cross. And where does it become effective? In the conscience of a poor, guilty sinner, when the Holy Spirit takes him in hand and awakens his conscience, and brings him to feel his condition.

"I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living". That is, presumably, David means, while he is here upon this earth as a living man; although he may also contemplate that better land that is to come, which is in truth "the land of the living", because there is no more death or pain, or sorrow, or crying, for there the former things are passed away; and death has passed away. That is the land of the living; and that is the land that His waiting people hope to enter one day, if it may be His gracious will. So it is, beloved friends, now, whilst we are here, David gives us a timely injunction, "Wait on the Lord". O, but you may say, "I am ready to faint". Yes; but he says, "Wait on the Lord". "O, but things all seem to go against me". Yes; all the more reason why we should wait on the Lord! "But I feel to be in such darkness and bondage". Yes, I know; but even so, wait on the Lord; take your darkness and bondage to Him; take your trials to Him; take everything to Him, sins and all, and lay them before His blessed throne. "Wait on the Lord". Why, the Lord is good to such! The prophet says so in the Lamentations: "The Lord is good to them that wait for Him."

We read a great deal about this waiting, do we not? In the prophecy it is said, "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me". O, this waiting is a large part of the exercise of a living soul who longs to find his God, and who may feel to lack something that his soul needs; and so it is that, although your standing may be secure in God's account, yet you are uncertain on your own account until the Lord comes and bears His blessed witness with your spirit. O, how often it may be that prayer is timely,

"Assure my conscience of her part
In the Redeemer's blood;
And bear Thy witness with my heart,
That I am born of God."

There is such encouragement in the scriptures to wait on Him. So says the psalmist here, "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage". And you will need some courage. This is what the Lord said to His servant Joshua when he was appointed to take the people through Jordan into the promised land: "Be of good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, He it is that doth go with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee; I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." "Be of good courage". O, but it is a struggle, isn't it? It is a struggle sometimes. But it will be worth the struggle. I remember as a boy hearing my dear father say that it would be worth a lifelong struggle to be right at last. And so it will; and while we are here we shall be struggling with the powers of hell, till Jesus bid us go. O, wait on the Lord! Has He not been better to us than all our many fears, often? "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart. Wait on the Lord".

May the Lord help us, then; for these are dark days in which we are living, and the power of the precious gospel is sadly withholden in these solemn times, and the days are unspeakably sad. But still the Lord reigneth. The Lord reigneth. Wait on Him. You wait on an omnipotent God. You wait on that God Who has said, "Is anything too hard for Me?" And He will not fail thee. O, may the Lord help us, then, and favour us with this experience; for - I do not know - some may be in a fainting condition even now; but the psalmist says, "I had fainted, unless" And don't forget that word, "Unless". It is a beautiful word. "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living".

Amen.

