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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at Ebenezer, Clapham on Monday
afternoon, 27.5.72

Hymns 412, 1023, 573

Reading: Psalms 132, 133

Text: Psalm 27.4

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after;
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple".

It is a wonderful mercy to have a religion that consists in
"one thing". We see worldly people going the way of this world and
the "one thing" with them is to get all the pleasure they can out
of this poor dying world. What a sad state to be in, where the "one
thing" does not rise above earth, and all that earth can give; but
the "one thing" of a living soul is not to know all he can about
this poor dying world, but to possess Christ, to know all he can
about Him and, more than that, to be found in Him. If this is the
"one thing" with you and me, if we can feel it is, then that "one
thing" will not eventually plunge us into perdition, it will carry us
up into heaven. Oh to possess a religion that will terminate in the
realms of everlasting felicity. It is true that the Lord's people
may have many desires; but all those desires are like so many
branches of a tree that draw their life through the same root; or,
to use another figure, like so many stones, all of which stand upon
the same Foundation.

I do not know where I might find some of you, but I know where I
find myself, and that is in this "one thing", that I might behold
the Lamb of God, as we read in the first chapter of John, where
John the Baptist, said, when Jesus was walking toward him, "Behold
the Lamb of God". There is no sight to compare with this. Some of
you, it may be, can say, 'I got a glimpse of Him once', and what
was the effect of that, it was this - you will want to see Him again.
Has He not said "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice,
and your joy no man taketh from you". I believe the "one thing"
that you desire centres in this glorious, blessed Person, as it did

with the church, when she was in that favoured spot and could say, "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons". She had "one thing" above all besides, and that was to have communion with her Lord. O beloved friends, I feel it more than ever needful to have a religion that has contact with God, for if there is no contact here there will be no contact there.

"One thing", and it is an important thing. It finds its centre in our eternal redemption; it is - to feel my dreadful load of sin borne away by Him Who suffered, bled and died, to see Him by faith, to see those wounded hands and feet, and to feel as the hymn writer says,

"My sins were the nails and the spear
that wounded his hands and his feet".

It was by those wounds, those terrible wounds, and those indescribable sufferings, that He bore them all away. So we may say here that the "one thing" is to know something of the sacred efficacy of the atonement, to feel it, as the Puritans used to say, terminating in the conscience; and if it terminates in your conscience, then what will you say of Him Who bore them away, you will be like the church in the Song where she says, "He is the chiefest among ten thousand the altogether lovely", "One thing", to read my title clear to mansions in the skies. Perhaps some of you would say,

"If I could read my title clear,
To mansions in the skies,
I'd bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes."

Dear friends, is your religion a religion of "one thing", that finds its centre in a crucified Man? If it does, then I believe that your religion will consummate in the everlasting enjoyment of all your expectations.

"One thing have I desired of the Lord". The Psalmist does not say "I have got it", although he had got it, but he says, "that will I seek after". Now there may be some here, and I believe there are, who may not feel that they can say much; yet, behind the scenes, there is a seeking after realities, a seeking after this one thing, - "that will I seek after". We are exhorted to seek after it, "Seek ye

the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near". This seeking is connected with the promises upon the highest authority that I know, even from the Lord Himself Who said, "Seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you". Many people are seeking after all they can get in this poor dying world, but the one thing that a living soul is seeking after is to be able to say, "My beloved is mine and I am His" and when you really feel that you have the answer, you have in your heart all that you have been seeking after; and this constitutes much of our experience does it not, seeking after what we do not as yet possess. Oh it is a mercy to be seeking after real things. I remember in my youthful days I used to sit up in the gallery, a stranger in Galeed Chapel, and on one occasion I heard the preacher speaking about the things that living souls seek after, and my very soul went out after them. I did not know much about anything except that I was a poor, guilty sinner; but the day came when I got what I had been seeking, although actually it was some years after. What you are really seeking will give you the sweetest enjoyment when you receive it. It is the provision of the Gospel, "I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread".

Now the Psalmist says here what he would desire to be seeking, and it is this, "that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life". There are many instances in the Psalms and in the history of David, that reveal his sacred delight in the worship of God. I have heard some of the Lord's dear people say when they have been much blessed in the sanctuary, that they would like to stay there, and die there. If you get a blessing from heaven in your soul in the sanctuary you will not be in a hurry to get away from it. But what are we to understand by the house of the Lord? Well, I understand in the first place that the house of the Lord is where the Lord Himself is with us, and communes with us; that constitutes it to be as the house of the Lord. I have been thinking this morning about dear old Jacob. After he left his parental roof and was out there in that waste howling wilderness, when the suns set he laid him down in that place to sleep, and he dreamed and

saw a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the Lord stood above it addressing Jacob as his covenant God; saying "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father and the God of Isaac". He assured him that He was his God. But what then? We read that he built an altar, and anointed it, and said, "How dreadful is this place, this is none other but the house of God and this is the gate of heaven". There need not necessarily be a material building. It is in those places where you and your Lord come together, wherever it may be. I know of one whom the Lord met with in a workshop, and revealed Himself to him, and it made that workshop as the house of God and the gate of heaven for a few minutes.

But by the house of the Lord in another sense we may understand the Lord Jesus Christ. He is that "tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man", and He is the house of the Lord, because it is really in Him His people dwell. He says something like this, "I in them, and Thou in Me".

Going back for a moment to this "one thing have I desired of the Lord", we find in the Psalm that I read this afternoon it is said "For the Lord hath chosen Zion". What then? "He hath desired it for his habitation" - "here will I dwell", so the desire of the Lord is the same desire that is in the heart of a poor sinner - to dwell in Zion - and this in a Gospel sense is to dwell in Christ. "Here will I dwell" - that is in Zion - but there is something more than that; by His blessed Spirit He dwells in the heart of a poor sinner who is an inhabitant of Zion. "Here will I dwell", He says. This is the house of the Lord then, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The Apostle must have felt something of this when he said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain". He is the house of the Lord, a beautiful house indeed incorporating all that is connected with the redemption of His people. The Apostle speaks of the Holy Spirit indwelling the hearts of the Lord's people, and to what purpose is it that the Holy Spirit indwells the hearts of poor sinners? It is for this one thing, to

take of the things of Christ and reveal, shew them unto us. To these poor, sin-convicted ones who have felt something of the arrow of conviction wounding their conscience, when that same good Spirit brings some revelation of a wounded Saviour what a healing that brings! Nothing can heal the wounds of sin like a sight of a wounded Saviour. He is the house of the Lord, His people dwell in Him by faith, abide in Him. This is what He would have them to do, He says, "Abide in me, and I in you", and in another place, I in them, and thou in me". How sacred it is to have a religion that is set upon Christ and that fights through hosts of devils so to speak to get a glimpse of the Lamb of God. He is the house of the Lord.

There is another feature of the house of the Lord - the house of the Lord is heaven. The Apostle says so, "If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens". This is the house of the Lord. Do you entertain a hope that one day you will enter that house? Sometimes I get so confused in my poor bewildered mind about some of these things, they are so mysterious to me, and the devil assaults me at every turn; but if I get a word from the Lord, that beats the devil more than anything else. Some time ago I believe a word from the Lord early in the morning was this, "All is settled" and that made the devil skulk away, and what did I say to the Lord then? I said, "And my soul approves it well". There were no mysteries then. No, as I thought of my end, it was just like this, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord." I know a hymn writer says, "Borne on angels wings to heaven"; that may appear a little fanciful but if I am ultimately favoured to dwell in that house of the Lord, I can leave everything else.

The house of the Lord is heaven. What beautiful language we have in the Revelation concerning those that are there, they cast their crowns before the throne. They do not say, "Well done, I"! No, no, what do they say? "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain". "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation". Oh what must

it be to be there? Now and again, if you feel your heart softened with the sweet love of Christ, you can say,

"Jerusalem, my happy home!
Name ever dear to me;
When shall my labours have an end
In joy, and peace, and thee?"

This is the house of the Lord. Truly, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard", but there is this house of the Lord and here is the desire, "That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life". It is a very solemn thought that in quite a few places in the Revelation we have this expression "for ever and ever". What a glorious prospect it is for those who dwell in the house of the Lord here below, for one day they will dwell in it for ever, to go no more out, where the former things will have passed away. What do these people that have this "one thing" desire to do in the house of the Lord? It is "to behold the beauty of the Lord". What beauty is this? Much might be said about this, but in the view of faith there is the beauty of His sweet compassion. How beautiful it is in the view of faith. As some of my people will remember I was speaking at some length about this yesterday, of the Lord being touched with the feeling of our infirmities - not just touched with our infirmities. You might go to see a person who was very, very ill and suffering great pain, or in much grief and sorrow; and you might sympathise with them; but you cannot be touched with the feeling of their infirmities unless you have experienced the same grief, sorrow, trouble and distress. With the Lord Jesus there is a beauty in His compassion, He knows what sore temptations mean for He has felt the same. So He Himself, being tempted, can succour His tempted followers. You cannot have grief, sorrow, pain or suffering, but that your blessed Lord is touched with the feeling of your sufferings and infirmities; for He suffered for you, and His was greater suffering by far than anything that you and I can suffer. How attractive is this compassion. His people behold the beauty of the Lord in His suitability. He is such an High Priest as became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. Well dear friends, whatever trial you may be in, He can

come into it with you, He is touched with the feeling of your infirmities. We read of that good Samaritan who went to the poor man who fell among thieves, bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, that he took him up and set him upon his own beast - he was touched with compassion.

There is a beauty in His love, it excels all other love. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"; and when was His love greater than when He was groaning, bleeding and dying? The same love that is in His heart flows into a poor sinner's heart. It is the same love, as we read in John 17, "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them". What a beauty then there is in His love. There is such a beauty in His Word. "My sheep hear my voice". Has He ever spoken to you? There is an attraction, a beauty, in His voice, I believe it is like a whisper that comes right into the heart, when we are favoured to hear it. Many years ago the Lord was very kind to me in rebuking me concerning a matter. I was in some trouble at that time, and early in the morning I heard this word, it seemed just like a whisper so to speak, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten". As I began to think about this and the trouble I was in it came again, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten" (with a little more emphasis on the first part). My heart began to soften, and I was shown my own sin as well as the sin of another, although that had troubled and distressed me. Then it came a third time with still more emphasis on the first part "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten", and I fell at His feet then, my heart was broken and contrite, I had to leave the one who had been the cause of the trouble, it was my own case before the Lord. How sweet it was. There is a beauty in His Word, even in reproof, He knows just how to speak and when.

It is recorded here, "and to enquire in his temple". Living souls are continually making enquiries, not of other people so much, but they are enquiring of the Lord. They make enquiries of Him so to speak when they come into His temple, that is in the appointments of the sanctuary, they come with a case, with enquiries

concerning their own case; and sometimes the Lord comes and a light is thrown upon the case. It is good to enquire in His temple. This can be in the public means of grace, and it can be in private devotions; His people make enquiries of Him about their own case. "One thing have I desired of the Lord". If your religion is inside this verse you have a religion that will take you to heaven, to behold the beauty of the Lord for ever.

Well dear friends I do not want to say much about myself, but this is a Pastor's anniversary, and the Lord in His great mercy has helped and supported me unto this day and supplied my need as your Pastor for 37 years. When I came on probation, I did not know how I could possibly continue for the three months probation, I thought the people would be weary of me. But they have borne with me for 37 years; and have shown me much kindness. Many that were here when I first came have now been taken home. I think I have buried about 60 and quite a congregation have moved away through the years; but we are still maintained, and we have many mercies. It was very nice to me on Saturday night to hear our brethren thanking the Lord for His mercies to us, and in connection with this I would like to pay a humble tribute to the continued kindness I have received from my people as their pastor. And where am I now in my feelings? I am in the 9th. verse of this Psalm, "Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger; thou hast been my help; leave me not; neither forsake me, O God of my salvation". That is my prayer; and I do not believe the Lord has left us either; I am sure He has not; for if He had we should not have that sweet sense of worship that we sometimes feel in this place. Now I shall have to leave the subject. May the Lord very graciously help and bless His servant, our dear friend this evening. Amen.