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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS  
Pastor's anniversary service

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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Monday  
afternoon 28th. May, 1973

Hymns 130, 1097, 981

Reading Psalm 71

Text Psalm 27.9

"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."

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This appears to have been the prayer and desire of David. What  
ever the circumstances may have been, it is evident that he was  
very graciously exercised under and in them, and was favoured to  
feel a gracious trust and confidence in his God, whatever enemies  
might come up against him. His confidence in the first six verses  
or so is very striking, and he affirms what the Lord is to him; with  
confidence in Him, he is able to look above all opposing powers and  
enemies, being assured that the Lord would stand by him and bring  
him through. But before the Psalm is finished we find a timely  
prayer. This was David's prayer and this is my prayer, "Hide not  
thy face far from me". If I am not deceived I hope I can say, "Thou  
hast been my help". I would not lose sight of this, but would humbly  
acknowledge the goodness of the Lord in that He has helped me until  
this day; and notwithstanding all my many fears, and they have been  
many, I do feel I can say, "Thou hast been my help". Some of you  
can say the same. He does not say, 'I shall manage now for what  
remains of my pilgrimage', but he says "leave me not neither forsake  
me, O God of my salvation"; - not of their salvation. The point  
to notice is that his confidence seems to move him to entreat of  
the Lord still to be with him and not to put him away in anger, as  
though he would say, 'Thou art the God of my salvation, hide not  
Thy face far from me, Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither  
forsake me, O God of my salvation'. So it is a personal matter,  
and it must be a personal matter with everyone of us, and an all  
important matter, whether or no God is the God of my salvation.  
It must come as close as that. I would desire now to apply myself  
for a little while to the subject and then I may make a few personal

remarks.

This is a very expressive prayer that may suit us, "Hide not thy face far from me". By His face we understand His countenance. I can see your face, which means that you are looking toward me. This was the Psalmist's desire that the Lord would look toward him and not hide His face from him. Sometimes by the face of the Lord we may understand His anger against those that have departed from His ways, His enemies, ungodly people; but rather more particularly we may understand two or three things.

By the face of the Lord we are not to imagine anything literal; this is a prayer that the Lord would lift up the light of His countenance upon us and not hide His face from us. By this we may understand His favour toward us. As the Psalmist says in another place, "Remember me with the favour Thou bearest unto Thy people". In other words, lift up the light of Thy countenance upon me, for this is the health of my soul. In Psalm 42, He was the health of the Psalmist's countenance, and if the Lord is pleased to manifest His favour toward us in a personal way that will revive us in our own souls and give us gracious encouragement to look unto Him. It indicates His favour toward us and this cannot be said of everyone universally in a gracious way; although He opens His hand and supplies the need of every living thing, He only opens His heart to His dear people.

"Hide not thy face far from me". It may be some of you would have to say that the days of darkness have been many. That will make this a suitable cry, "Hide not thy face far from me." Perhaps you may feel that you will never have a good time again, and almost come to the conclusion that the Lord has withholden His favours from you for the rest of your days; but you have no ground to come to such a conclusion as that. "Hide not thy face". Oh, say some of you, if I could but get a view of Him and have some feeling sense of His favour toward me! Oh that He would look upon me and not hide His face far from me! By His face then we may understand something more than His favour toward us, we may understand His blessing upon us; "Thy blessing is upon Thy people"; and this is the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich and with which He addeth

no sorrow. It is the blessing that the precious Gospel brings into a poor sinner's heart when the Lord touches it, and when he feels something of this secret power, and there is a sight of Christ; when the Holy Spirit reveals a precious, all sufficient Saviour and when you can see the way to heaven through the Lamb's redeeming blood even for such as you and myself. It is a timely prayer. By His face we may understand His presence with us, which is what the Lord said He would give to Moses, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

"Hide not thy face far from me, put not thy servant away in anger". This comes very close to some of us; and for myself I would have to say that it would but be what I deserve. But even though David could say, "The Lord is my light and my salvation" and "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", yet still he comes to this, "Put not thy servant away in anger", and I have felt that it seems to connect itself with what I have read. I do not know precisely when this was in the days of David, but in another Psalm we find the author saying, "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth", as though he would say, 'Lord I have always had great need but now I am old and grey headed'. "Cast me not off in the time of old age". With some of us it is the time of old age and the time of old age is a time of reflection. We can look back upon some things that have taken place in our lives, they are behind us, and now if we are exercised we say, 'Shall I be found to be right at last?' "Put not thy servant away in anger" as though he would say 'Thou hast done great things for me, do not cast me off, Hold up my goings in Thy paths; bring me honourably through, grant me grace; Lord, to hold fast the profession of my faith, cast me not away' and I do not believe He will. David was favoured to feel that the Lord was his God, hence this beautiful Psalm, which is very personal. At the end of the Psalm he seems to take a look back and says, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living". 'If He had not supported me, sustained me in my times of trial, affliction and difficulty, if He had not been my God I should have sunk never to

rise again'; and it may be some of you would say the same. Those of you that have had already a considerable pilgrimage may be able to look back and say 'He helped me here, He delivered me there, He appeared for me in that time of trouble else I should have fainted. I could not have held on. Heavy things have come upon me, I should have fainted', "Unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living". "Put not thy servant away in anger."

"Thou hast been my help", this is where I am this afternoon and that is why I have read it, because I humbly hope I can say, "Thou hast been my help". It is beautifully experimental, is it not? I am sure many of my dear friends here can say the same. Sometimes this has been in a very private way, when you have been in secret prayer; you have felt drawn near to the Lord, and have received strength from Him. You have been helped to bear the trial, you have been helped to walk the path, you have been helped to resign yourself to His will. You may look back upon many things like this and say, "Thou hast been my help".

But still even so he does not leave it there, he is still praying, "Leave me not, neither forsake me", Thou hast been my help until now, but if thou should leave me I should fall, I should go down, I am a poor dependent upon Thy divine support day by day, - "leave me not, neither forsake me".

We do not need to be theologians to pray. Here is a prayer coming from the heart of a needy one, and so it may be with some of you that are now getting advanced in years, you can look back and say, "Thou hast been my help". There have been some heavy trials to pass through, but He has been my helper until now. What then? You look forward to the remaining few days and in your heart you say to the Lord, "Leave me not, neither forsake me". It may be that, Job-like, you fill your mouth with an argument. Job said, "I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments". So you may say "Leave me not", - Thou hast been a faithful God, "leave me not neither forsake me". And what can we link this with?

We can link the Lord's own promise to it, Who has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee". This is how His dear children come to Him with their arguments, not in the sense that we sometimes understand an argument, but with something that may move the Lord in His goodness to regard our case. Thou hast said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee", - and you plead it, you take the promise and say, Thou hast said Thou wilt never leave me nor forsake me. In exercises like this you may find the Lord walking with you, He is walking with you in your things, and sometimes there is a still small voice. You hear a sweet whisper in your heart and it draws you to Him, it draws forth the affections of your soul to Him and you say, "Leave me not neither forsake me, O God of my salvation". This is a very attractive word, it is such an appeal; David does not say, 'O God the Saviour of Thy people' although that is true enough, but "O God of my salvation". It was a personal matter, as though he would say, 'Leave me not; Thou art the God of my salvation' and if we bring this to the blessed matter of the salvation of our never dying souls we may say that when you really feel by the Holy Spirit's witness in your soul that the Lord is your God, that the Lord Jesus Christ is your Saviour, then you can say, "My Beloved is mine and I am His". Under this sweet smile of heaven then, you have the choicest experience you can have here below.

"O God of my salvation", my salvation to register my name in the Lamb's book of life, my salvation to give me a place in that covenant in all things ordered well, when the Father gave His only begotten Son to redeem me, and to deliver me from the wrath to come. As my salvation the dear Redeemer bore my sins away in His own body on the tree. As my salvation that good Spirit was given to open my blind eyes, to convince me of my sinful condition, and to reveal a precious Christ in my soul as the God of my salvation .

So, dear friends, here we are upon another annual occasion, and I would desire to be humbled before the Lord that He has maintained me hitherto, and supplied my need, although often I have felt and do feel to come very sadly short; but I have endeavoured in my ministry to lift up a precious Christ, and to show how a poor convinced sinner may be saved through His precious sin atoning blood, and that

justice can be honoured and His holy Name glorified in delivering such from the wrath to come. "Thou hast been my help". I have been looking back over 38 years since I came here and can humbly say, "Thou hast been my help"; and going back even further than that, in times of real need I can say He has been my help. This reflection can go back with some of you here as with myself to the days of the first war, to the struggles of those days, and the dangers that we were in; and yet the Lord helped us through those very heavy days. I have been thinking of those days a little lately, and of our business trials in the first war and can truly say "Thou hast been my help". He was the help of my dear wife during those heavy days and troublous times. I have been thinking of a circumstance when I came home on a short leave just before going to France, I went up to see my dear pastor in the morning. It was my duty to go back to the camp at Swanage that afternoon, and I was very strongly tempted to overstay my leave till morning as we were going overseas the next day, but while I was with my pastor he said, "When have you to go back?" I replied, "I am supposed to go back this afternoon". Then very decidedly he said, "Then you must go", so I had to go, but going back that afternoon affected the whole of my future career in France. But there is something else attached to those days I might mention, I was in great distress when I knew what was pending. I thought of my wife, the business, and whether I should survive the terrible war, I was walking on the Downs at Swanage when it was just as though the heavens opened to me and a voice said, "I am with you always" it took all my troubles away, and I felt I could cast myself on the good providence of my God, for life or death, I was able to commit my wife, business and future into His blessed hands. That was a time ever to be remembered, and what was rather striking was that at the very time that that word was given to me at Swanage, my pastor was preaching in Galeed Chapel from the very same words.

"Thou hast been my help". When I commenced to preach the Gospel and had related my exercises to the church at Galeed I was brought very low under the strain of it all so that I was quite weak and ill, and the next day my pastor was taken unwell and sent a message to say that I must take his place at Galeed the next Sunday. This was like

a stunning blow to me, for I thought I might be able to speak to one or two people in the country somewhere, but to face from 400 to 500 people and so many whom I knew seemed an absolute impossibility and I can assure you I felt like this, "Leave me not neither forsake me"; I ventured to go in the evening, but I was so weak my legs would hardly carry me up the hill to the chapel; I went into the vestry, the deacons were very kind to me. They did not stay there but left me alone, and soon I heard the deacon give out that hymn, "Lamb of God we fall before Thee". I opened the pulpit door, and there was a chapel full of people, but the Lord mercifully supported me, He brought a quietness into my heart, I went into the pulpit, and sat down as though I had been doing it for years, I believe the Lord gave me a word to speak and I will tell you what my subject was, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection" and truly it was a remarkable time. The Lord helped me through, and after the service was over, instead of feeling a poor weak thing as I did when crawling up the hill, I felt strong in body and quite well.

"Thou hast been my help". Just for a moment in regard to my pastorate here. The first indication I had of anything was a letter from our dear old friend Mr. S.F. Stevens of blessed memory, in that first letter he said, "If you are favoured to come, may the Lord come with you, and touch with compunction and sprinkle with blood." That was what touched me; I came for one Sunday and they engaged me to come again for another Sunday and for a third Sunday; and so from that time I can say, "Thou hast been my help, leave me not neither forsake me, O God of my salvation".

Who has been our help? An unchanging God, an Almighty God Who is the same yesterday, today and for ever. More than that, He has said, as He said to Joshua, "I will not leave thee nor forsake thee". Neither did He, as you know Joshua led the people through Jordan on dry land, and the feet of the priests stood firm in the midst of Jordan bearing the ark while all the people passed clean over Jordan. They did not get stuck in the midst, any of them, but they all passed clean over Jordan. What followed? There were the walls of Jericho! "Thou hast been my help". Have you ever had any of these walls of

Jericho? What happened to the walls of Jericho after they had marched round them a few times? They all fell down flat, and there was not one stone left upon another. I must leave it now and I leave it with this, "Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation".

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