

Sermon preached by Mr.J.Delves at "Ebenézer" chapel, Richmond on 10th. February, 1953

Text: Psalm 38.9

"Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee."

We cannot read this Psalm without perceiving that the author was in particular distress; it is clear that he was brought in the feelings of his soul to the ends of the earth, a condition as extreme in the depressing nature of it as could well be. Even so, although he was experiencing great grief and evidently the painful treachery of those who had professed to be his friends, though his enemies were lively and though he said, "My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off. They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits", yet it is confirming to observe that he was before the Lord in his trouble. I believe this can be marked as an evidence of God's grace in the heart when we are before Him in our trials, trouble and afflictions. Distressing things, as we know, come to all in this life, but it cannot be said of all in them that they are in the exercise of their own souls before the Lord.

The Psalmist here appears to be pleading with the Lord to have compassion upon him and not to afflict him out of measure and consume him altogether. "O LORD, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure". It would appear that certain things so affected his spirit and body as to cause in all probability some bodily affliction. He says, "For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore". It is a great thing when the Lord's chastening are upon us if we can perceive them as the Lord's chastenings and deport ourselves under them in this way pleading with the Lord so to deal with us as not to cut us off but to moderate His judgments and to stay His rough wind in the day of His east wind, so that His dealings with us prove to be effectual for our profit and to confirm us in His word and truth. "I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart". Sentence after sentence here seems to express the deep waters he was passing through, the furnace that he was in. Yet amidst all that there is something peculiarly sweet in it and that is he was before the Lord in it. "Lord, all my desire is before thee", as though he would say, I cannot express all my desires, I cannot give full vent to my feelings. I feel like Job when he said, "My stroke is heavier than my groaning", but it is all before Thee. This appeared to be a relief to his spirit as it is, I feel persuaded, with many of the Lord's people. Are there not times when the people of God have as it were to turn away from everything and everyone and lay their case before Him, and sometimes it may be that it has been expressed just like this, "Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid

from thee". There was something about this that comforted the Psalmist in his distress, to feel that the Lord knew his path and had a perfect understanding of all that pressed upon his heart. This was just how Job felt in the 23rd. chapter where, although enveloped in darkness, he could say, "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold". O there is something about that which can sometimes bring relief, a measure of quieting, "He knoweth the way that I take", that is the way that is with me, the way I am walking in, with all that is involved in it. He knoweth, and sometimes I believe there has been a sweet reality in this, just this, "He knoweth"; this is something different from that divine omniscience that comprehends everything, sees everything, has a perfect knowledge of everything. It seems more to speak of a gracious tender consideration of the case, "He knoweth the way that I take". So it is here, although the author was weighed down with things that must have been painful in the extreme, yet he could say, "Lord, all my desire is before thee".

It is becoming to exercised souls, it is something to be sought, not merely to say they believe there is a God, (which some may do, and yet not know anything of Him mercifully), but this conforming, quieting assurance that the Lord not only knows the case but is waiting and so ordering things as eventually to bring something good from them. Have we ever been in a case like this when perhaps just this has been groaned out before the Lord out of the depths, "All my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee"? And what is the desire? It is a mercy to have a desire that cannot be satisfied except by the Lord's appearing; a desire that reaches out of nature. Many people's desires do not go beyond this world; their desire is for something here, some material good, some prosperity, something they do not possess but covet; a thirst for something that in itself, so far, is good, yet desired wrongly. Such a desire is not before the Lord; there is no real prayer in such a desire as this. We may have a desire for good things from a wrong motive, as I believe this is at times even with the Lord's people who have even desired death because their circumstances have become almost insupportable. There can be an ungracious desire which apparently Job had in some measure when he cursed the day of his birth and longed for the day of his death; but even that in some cases can be of the Spirit of the Lord. All the Lord's people, more or less, have to go into the depths and that is where the groaning is, that is where a burdened heart has to plead with God when perhaps so burdened as not to be able to express anything but just groan it out before Him. Many have been like that, many have groaned out, "Lord help me", and nothing more than that; have laid their case before the Lord, a case that has been too much for them, beyond their reach, beyond their management, beyond their control. It is a sweet place to come to when in our case, (and this can refer to providential things,) in certain matters in our life, we may feel to need the Lord's guidance, may feel to need Him to take all things in hand for us, to manage them for us and to order them in such a way as to be for His glory

and our profit. O it is great when we can fall before the Lord without reserve. Perhaps once or twice in our lives we have been brought to such a place as that, to fall before the Lord and say, "Lord, all my desire is before thee". If you ever had an occasion when you could feelingly say, 'Lord all my desire is that Thy glory and the spiritual profit of my soul may issue in all that I have to pass through. Then you have a single eye to that which would sanctify you, separate from the world, confirm you in your own interest and glorify His great and holy name. Have there been moments when you could say, Lord all my desire is to fall at Thy feet, to have Thy will done in me, through me, by me, and to feel what that will is, to have it revealed to me?

One evidence of a real religion is to have contact with God in our things and sometimes, perhaps not very often, but on some occasions, such a contact with Him in them as to feel able to cast them upon Him, commit them to Him and leave them with Him. What a quietness it can bring when we are really brought to such a place as that. Why, you know, it can be in the morning of a day you feel to be at the ends of the earth, bewildered, confused and brought to such a pass as not to know what to do, disquieted in your spirit, tempest tossed and shaken upon the billows; and yet before the end of the day feel such a change come over your spirit, such quietness come into your heart as to enable you to cast it all at His feet and to be still and know that He is God. "Lord, all my desire is before thee". It is an evidence of life in the soul to have desires, although we are not saved by desires, but if the desire is real it can only be satisfied by having it granted. The Psalmist said, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness". What is your desire? Does it reach beyond yourself, your business, your home, your family, the concerns of this life? Is there any desire that reaches beyond the borders of the grave? Is there any desire in the heart beyond that which nature can supply? It is grace that brings one to a pass like this and to say, "Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee". One of the desires, living desires, of a child of God is for communion with the Lord. It is a mercy to have living desires in this particular and if the desire is before the Lord then it is a living desire and that is a point to consider. If it is before the Lord then it means that the Lord alone can satisfy that desire. Is there a desire in our heart for closer communion with Him? This appears to have been the desire of David in an earlier Psalm where he says, "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 inquire in his temple." (Ps.27.4) Have we got anything of that in our religion? Do we come to a service with a desire in our souls to see the Lord, to see His power and His glory so as we have seen it in the sanctuary? O to have a desire after this manner, to behold the beauty of the Lord, to dwell in His house, that is

to be in the holy sacred exercise of worship, to be favoured with communion, nearness, communications from the Lord. Communion is wonderful; to get something in your soul from God is profound; to feel the sweet reality of a word or a promise with some efficacy in your spirit is very precious.

"All my desire is before thee" Another desire is to have a knowledge or witness that we are in that covenant in all things ordered well. This was the one desire of David when he came to the end of his remarkable life; he could say, "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, (could we say that?) although he make it not to grow." (2 Sam.23.5) Have we got this desire, that is a feeling, real, earnest spiritual desire to read our names there, to be confirmed by the witness of the Spirit of the Lord of our interest in that everlasting covenant. This is all before Thee, Lord, and what ever the nature of it may be, however trying the circumstances, it is before the Lord, that is, it is all open to His view and His control and subject to His directing. "All my desire", all my desire is to feel rightly persuaded and confirmed that I am one of Thy children, that such a poor, insignificant mortal, such a hell-deserving wretch as I am, was eternally loved, chosen, appointed to obtain salvation. Can we say, 'This is all my desire, Lord, to be numbered among them, to be one of them now and eternally; all my desire, Lord, is to have and feel that token which Thy Spirit alone can give that I am born of God. All my desire is before Thee. All my desire, Lord, is to know my sins forgiven, to know that they are washed away in that fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. Have you got a desire? Perhaps you say 'I have got a hard heart'. Is there underneath that hard heart a desire for the Lord to soften it? Do you long for Him to come and bring a little softening into your heart, break it down, touch you with His love, raise you up? Perhaps you say, 'O but I am out of the secret altogether'. Who said so? If you feel to be out of the secret altogether, is there a desire underneath that painful conclusion for the Lord to bring you into the secret? If you feel to be outside of these things is it the desire of your heart to be brought in and to manifest in your soul His mercy, grace and love? It is all before Thee, it is all before Thee, these pressing things, this inward difficulty, bewildering things. You have to take them there. 'O but my sins, they are before the Lord'. You must take them to His mercy seat. What can you do with your sins? 'O, say you, they condemn me, wear me down and bring guilt upon the conscience, burden me.' What a mercy it is if they do, and if that is the case, what is the desire of your heart? If it could be really expressed it would be just this, 'Thy blood alone can wash this guilt away, nothing but Thy blood, O Jesus, can do helpless sinners good'. Is there a desire in your heart to get a glimpse of Him? 'O, say you, how the darkness and bondage that continues with me drives me almost to despair and fills me with fretfulness and bitterness'. Yes, but what is the effect of all that? 'Well, say you, when I come to myself I am filled

with confusion and shame'. Then underneath there is a desire for the Lord to come and take your case in hand and come to such a sinful mortal and remove the hardness of that unfeeling heart that you cannot soften. If you could soften it you would not need the Lord to do it; but we have to prove that of ourselves we cannot soften it; we can harden it, we soon become rebellious and fight against God in our feelings; but even when that is the case, underneath is a desire for the Lord to intervene and remove the guilt, to shine into your soul.

"All my desire is before Thee". Is there a desire to be brought honourably through to the end? How often is your prayer, "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." (Ps.17.5) We read of those witnesses in the 11th. Hebrews that "They desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God". Where is your desire? Is it in heaven? "All my desire"; what is your desire? If the life of grace is in your soul, then the Lord Jesus Himself will be your desire, He will be the desire of all nations in your heart, "ALL my desire". Can we come to this and say, Lord all my desire is to feel that Thou art mine, to have Thee formed in my heart the hope of glory, to possess Thee. O, where there is this pressing after Him the desire is for Himself; if we get a religion like that can we say, "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips".(Ps.45.2) O, say you, 'If I could but get Him then I should have heaven in my soul.' You would; but, say you, 'What hope have I of this, what prospect have I of this for I have long sought it and yet still I seem to be deeper in the mire than ever'. Yes, but often the darkest part of the night is just before the dawn, "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." (Hab.2.3) There is something in your heart at times stretches itself out like this, 'All my desire centres in Himself, to be able to claim Him as mine, to feel persuaded in my soul that He died for me. All my desire is in this, "It is finished".'

"All my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee". These groanings - I do not suppose any of the Lord's people are strangers to these; they were not in the Bible all those thousands of years ago. There were people who groaned under the weight and burden of things. Even the children of Israel when they were in Egypt groaned by reason of their bondage, and some of you have groaned by reason of your bondage. But we find that when the Lord's time came to bring them forth He said, "I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant" (Ex.6.5) But hear their groanings! I wonder whether there is anyone here who has sent a groan into heaven; a groan before the mercy seat that has moved the Lord's tender compassion? It is said here that David moved God to take compassion on his pitiful case. The apostle writing to the Corinthians speaks about this

groaning, "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened" (2 Cor.5.4). You will not groan unless there is a burden; but what makes you groan is that the burden is of such a nature, presses so heavily that you cannot give expression to it but by groaning before the Lord. Many and many a one has had to groan their way to heaven and "my groaning is not hid from thee". This darkness, this hardness, this unfeelingness, how different you would have it would you not if you could; and yet here it is, the clouds that cover us at times and that appear so threatening cause bitter groanings. It is just like when one pressed out of measure squeezes out a prayer; when these prayers are squeezed out of a burdened heart they are often more effectual than many prayers that are well expressed. Likewise "The Spirit itself helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (Rom.8.26) "My groaning is not hid from thee". O when things go hard and heavy, when the Lord's people are shown hard things, when it seems as though the Lord has gone out against them and when prayer meets no regard manifestly, then the groans go forth, "Lord help me"; "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee". Have you ever had to groan? Have there been occasions in your life when in secret you have just groaned out the feelings of your heart before Him, "All my desire is before Thee". Contact with God is wonderful to feel, to hear the Lord's voice by His Spirit in the heart, that still small voice that calms the troubled breast; to get near Him and to feel a little of the lifting of the light of His countenance.

"All my desire"; and this desire in a living soul will not be fully satisfied until we are in heaven. "I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness". It is a prospect before us, it is that which the Lord has revealed. Help me to endure to the end, "All my desire". May the Lord grant that where there is any groaning there may be with that groaning an opening of the heart before the Lord; laying the case before Him, pleading with Him, believing that nothing is too hard for Him, that He can break up the hard, stony heart, make the eyes a sluice and bring that sweet token of His mercy and love. Then the groanings are turned into praise and thanksgivings unto Him for His great mercy; that can change the language and enable you to say, "Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless His holy Name". May the Lord help us in our things. Some of them may be very heavy, but it is our mercy if we can lay them before Him, commit them to Him and believe that He will order them well for us whatever that may mean. "Lord, all my desire is before Thee and my groaning is not hid from Thee". Amen

For further copies please write to:

I.Fuller and Friends, 9 Sibella Road, SW4 6JA