

Sermon preached at Ebenezer, Clapham, by Mr. J. Delves on Wednesday

August 11th 1954

Text: "And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in Thee."  
Psalm 39.verse 7

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Every Psalm of David seems to reveal and open up the state of mind he was in, the path he was walking, the trials that pressed upon him, the burdens that weighed him down, the peculiar exercises of his soul, his great despondency, the comfort that he felt at times and his thanksgivings unto the God of all his mercies.

Sometimes these different exercises, ups and downs, and varied feelings, appear in one psalm. To a point it was so in Psalm 31 which we read this evening; so, to some point it is with the Lord's people in their feelings and experiences. They are indeed not always the same, neither is it intended that it should be so with them; they have to go down into the depths and sometimes labour under very heavy burdens, at other times they may feel some sweet inward consolation, comfort, hope and joy. In Psalm 42 we find David in great despondency so that he said, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me:" yet he was not without faith, for he expostulates with himself thus, "Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." According to the language of this Psalm he was evidently passing through some heavy things, which are not actually disclosed, but it would appear very probable that he was under some sickness of body at this time, because in the last verse he says, "O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more;" as though some distemper of body was upon him that rendered his life somewhat questionable, and he prays that it might please God to strengthen and recover him. This is quite consistent with a gracious experience. for although we know that our times are in the Lord's hand, and at times, too, there is a right conception of His gracious purpose, yet it is, generally speaking, natural to us to desire life and health and strength, and to be raised up from afflictions that may be laid upon us. Sometimes this is the case, I believe in answer to prayer, in some very striking ways even in these days. As to the concerns of this life and our bodies, we know that "Here have we no continuing city", but it is a mercy if, realising this, we can feelingly say that "We seek one to come."

But not only would it appear that David was under some affliction of body, but it is very evident he was in great distress of mind because he says, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not Thy peace at my tears." So whatever at that time, may have pressed so hard upon him, evidently affected his feelings and mind to such a degree as

to cause tears to flow, and evidently tears of sorrow, grief and distress, for he says, "I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." Sometimes both can be with the Lord's people, not necessarily so. I know one can be in affliction of body and in some part of the time at least, feel very comfortable in mind, not actually have any reason to shed any tears, unless they are tears of joy at the Lord's goodness and mercy manifested in the trial. But evidently the Psalmist was greatly distressed and these times will come, more or less, when trouble, affliction or distress of both body and spirit lie upon us, at the same time.

But not only does he appear to have distress of mind, in this Psalm, but he has some very profitable heart musings under it; he says, "My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned:" You see, he had spoken and referred to his silence; he resolved to say nothing, but to be quite silent even from good, while the wicked were before him. How far that was a gracious resolve may be difficult to say. Actually in the Psalm there seems to be a little mingling of repining with the submission; his spirit rises a bit and he says, "My sorrow was stirred.... While I was musing the fire burned." I suppose in times of affliction, when one is laid upon a bed in weakness of body, that is often a time of meditation (when it is given; at least, I know we cannot command it) but according to the word here the Psalmist says, "My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned." There may have been some degree of inward reasoning of the mind, and perhaps some rising up of a rebellious feeling against the Lord's dispensations with him. "While I was musing the fire burned."

If this is taken in a gracious sense, we may say his heart was warmed while he pondered over things, which moved him to speak - he could be silent no longer; he said, "Lord, make me to know mine end." His present state seemed to move him to look around him, to contemplate the brevity of his life here, and desire to know, that he might be made to know his end. Not that he could actually know his end, but rather that he might meditate upon it, and realise how soon it would come, and how uncertain everything here is, while life remains, that death is certain among all other uncertain things. Life seems to be so short, very short. "Behold, Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before Thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity." That is, he is not abiding, he must soon pass away from where he is, he can hold nothing here, for ever; he has actually nothing of his own, but that which is, so to speak, lent to him for a season. Even if he should have some measure of wealth, it is all

comparatively speaking, as "A vain shew....he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them," or what shall be the issue of them, or how they may be used after he has departed from this life.

Not only does he thus muse over things within him, but he appears to be under a consciousness of divine chastening, because he says to the Lord in prayer, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it. Remove Thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of Thine hand. When Thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, Thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity." There does appear to be in his heart some falling under the Lord's dispensations here, for he says, "Thou didst it," Lord. Whatever it may have been we do not know; what the stroke actually was we do not know, but it appears to have brought him down very low, to have almost stunned him, as it were, so that he was like a dumb man. Sometimes this has been the case where things have come suddenly; heavy, unlooked-for things that have come, have had this effect with exercised people, godly people, as before the Lord. "I was dumb with silence." He did not reply against God because of this, whatever it was, neither did he attribute it to secondary causes, "Thou didst it."

It is healthy when we come to this place about it. Job did; although he did show some impatience in certain aspects, yet in relation to his afflictions and the losses he suffered, the strokes, the series of strokes that fell upon him, he said, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord." I was dumb, I was dumb with silence before the wicked, he said, "I held my peace." But here you see, he was dumb before the Lord, and that is a different thing, is it not? We might be dumb before others and yet inwardly rebel against the Lord. We may appear to be silent before others and yet be as the Psalmist, "My sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me." But the Lord knows exactly what the heart is. David says, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it."

Then there is prayer, earnest prayer mingled with these expressions all through the Psalm; he says, "Lord, make me to know mine end", "Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish..... Remove Thy stroke away from me:.....Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry."....."O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more." How this follows, does it not, in the experience of the Lord's people when they are exercised. If we are exercised in our things, though they may be openly distressing and afflictive at times, we shall not go far without prayer; the Psalmist

says, "I will give myself unto prayer" I am in prayer. Is not that one mark of life in the soul and that which distinguishes a vessel of mercy from a vessel of wrath? So it is through the Psalms. Continually we see him praying; expressions go up to the Lord for mercy; expressions go up, Lord, have mercy upon me, be my Helper, deliver me, pardon my sins, all these pleas, brief and expressive, continually rise up. So it is that His people have to do with Him: and it is our mercy if we have to do the same. Probably the lower we sink into things, the higher we get in prayer and faith, living exercise and waiting upon God.

Now in verse 7 he says, "Lord, what wait I for?" What is it? as though he would question the point. Seeing that everything here is vanity, seeing that my days are as an handbreadth, that every man walketh in a vain shew, that they are disquieted in vain, he heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them - what wait I for? Am I waiting for something this world can give me? Is my heart set upon something material? Is my whole bent upon this life and what it may bring me? What wait I for? This seems to be a very close question, does it not? which to some point, may discover where we are. You may ask yourself this question, I may ask myself, What wait I for? Where do I stand in this? What is my one desire, my object? What wait I for? The answer is here. "My hope is in Thee." Therefore you see that he was not just waiting for some material benefit or advantage unto himself, but he was waiting, evidently, for the Lord to appear for him; his hope was fixed and centred in divine mercy, in forgiveness - that was it! It is very closely linked with the verse following, "Deliver me from all my transgressions; make me not the reproach of the foolish." That is what he was waiting for evidently, for the Lord to appear, for the Lord to regard him in his present distress, to heal him if His gracious will, of his bodily affliction, to bring some peace into his mind and to enable him stedfastly to fix his hope in God and more particularly to deliver him from all his transgressions. What wait I for? Why this - for the Lord mercifully to speak pardon home to my heart to deliver me from all my transgressions, so that I am not made the reproach of the foolish, that is the people of this world, so that I am not left to such a case and state, so as to give occasion to the people to reproach me or my religion or the God whom I profess to believe in. "Make me not the reproach of the foolish."

This may be a personal question; it may be a question with me, it is! It may be a question with you, "Now, Lord, what wait I for?" The point is just this, what are you waiting for? Is there some particular matter which you are waiting upon the Lord for? It can consistently be

something concerning this life, but it is not merely concerning this life or temporal advantage. If it be something concerning this life, then it will be mingled with a prayerful desire that it may be good for your soul. Lord, what wait I for?" As though the Psalmist had something laid up before the Lord, concerning which he was waiting for the Lord to appear on his behalf. Waiting appears to have three things in it; it suggests something that we do not possess, because if we possess it we are not waiting for it, we have it in possession and have no need to wait for it or to hope for it. The two graces mingle together in this matter, as the prophet says in the Lamentations, "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." The apostle Paul says, "If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." So waiting and hoping go together in one's experience. If we are waiting upon the Lord for something, it is something we do not at that time possess, and moreover, it is something we have some hope of receiving; it expresses an earnest desire for an answer to prayer - or whatever it may be. This was the case with the Psalmist in Psalm 130. "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait.....more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning". This expresses the urgency of the matter. Real waiting upon the Lord is not a lazy waiting, neither is it a formal waiting or a traditional waiting, but it is a real, earnest waiting for the Lord to appear in relation to the case in hand. I know we are not always in a place like this, but sometimes it is so, and it may be so even with some here. There may be some very pressing matter just now that you are waiting upon the Lord for, desiring to see Him bring it to pass - an earnest waiting. "Now, Lord, what wait I for?"

Not only so but it expresses some measure of confidence that you will receive it. I never wait on a station platform for a train unless I believe that train is coming; I know not how long I may have to wait for it- it may be delayed - but all the time I stand waiting on the platform I have a kind of feeling the train will come in. So with the child of God a matter may be long delayed. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh it is a tree of life." Waiting upon the Lord expresses some confidence that one day the blessing will come to hand. Is that not true? Well, say you, sometimes I get very weary of waiting, I seem to wait to no purpose, and get very tried in the waiting too- in fact, I get very tempted in the waiting and disposed to give up the waiting sometimes. Well I would say this, if the thing you are waiting for is a matter that the Lord has put in your heart, then He will not let you give up the waiting. Perhaps you say, "O, when wilt Thou come unto me?" or may even say as one said to the prophet Elisha, "What

should I wait for the Lord any longer." Is it to any purpose? Is there any point in it? When you get into this dilemma you may often find something cropping up in your heart which strengthens you, and gives a little inward reviving, and sometimes brings a gracious confidence into your spirit that the Lord will answer your prayer and bring the desired blessing. Now, Lord what wait I for?

Are you waiting on the Lord for some personal manifestation of His favour or the lifting up of the light of His countenance upon you? You could not wait on Him for anything better than for this! In John 14, you find Judas, not Iscariot, saying, "Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" He never manifests Himself unto the world in the way He manifests Himself to His people; that manifestation is a manifestation of His grace, indicating their interest in Him, and which fills them when they receive it, with "joy and peace in believing." So the apostle Peter has it, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:" "What wait I for?" It is a question, is it not? Sometimes, as I have hinted, you may say or feel, Is it to any purpose waiting? Will there be any issue to it? I have waited a long time and feel as far off as ever. Well, though you may be feeling like that, you may be much nearer to receiving the blessing in your heart. David said, I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul, but he was on the verge of deliverance. So it often is when the Lord's dear people feel to come to the last pass, as though they can hardly wait any longer, when their tongue faileth for thirst, and their soul is sinking within them, then it is that the Lord appears.

Moreover, we are assured in the Scripture that this waiting upon Him will not be in vain, for it is said, "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me." Well, say you, then my waiting must be a wrong kind of waiting. It is not a wrong kind of waiting at all, because though now it may be waiting in a trial of faith, in intense conflict, in much darkness, none will be ashamed. Why, is it not said, "Blessed are all they that wait for Him?" And there is this point too, if you are waiting for God, God is waiting for you. "And therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, ....blessed are all they that wait for Him." There are two parties waiting and the Lord hath set the time. The trial of faith shall last no longer than He shall set, and in due time, "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me." "What wait I for?"

What wait you for? Well, say you, there is something in my life in which I need the Lord to guide me, direct me, show me what to do. Well, in this case what can you do better than still to wait on Him?

for He has said, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with Mine eye." The Psalmist says, "Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle," to keep it back.

O how we need the Lord to guide us!

"With caution we should tread,  
For as we sow we reap,  
And oft bring mischief on our head,  
By some unwary step,"

Well, say you, I do need Him to guide me. I have something (and you know what that something is) in which I particularly need the Lord to guide me, settle it for me, manage it for me, help me to walk in it, show me what to do. What a mercy it is to have a God to take your case to, a burden you can cast on Him, a care you can commit to Him! Now Lord what wait I for? Another may be waiting for deliverance out of some trial, to have matters cleared up. Perhaps there is some peculiarly intricate thing that just puzzles you, things which may seem to be so upside down. "Who can make that straight which God hath made crooked?" We cannot make it straight. If God makes something crooked, then the same God must make that crooked thing straight, and He can, and sometimes He does in a wonderful way. Now Lord what wait I for?

According to the following verse here, the great point with the Psalmist was to be delivered from all his transgressions, to know and feel assured that the Lord had pardoned all his sins; and is not this a great and important point, to know our sins forgiven? "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered". While this may refer, and probably does usually, to sin in itself and to the earnest desire that our consciences may be purged by His sin-atoning blood, yet there may have been some particular sin that the Psalmist had in mind. The prophet says, "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy Name's sake: for our backslidings are many." What wait I for? Is there anyone here waiting upon the Lord for this touch of His love, for this indication of His mercy, for this token for good? Are there any here waiting upon the Lord like this?

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

"Now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in Thee." that is, my hope is in Thee to "do it" for me, what I am waiting upon Thee for, to "deliver me from all my transgressions". My hope is in Thee, that is in Thyself, not in me or in something I can do, or would do, or in any merit of my own - no, my hope is in Thee. And when it comes to the salvation of our

souls, the pardon of our sins, the sweet sense of interest in atoning love and blood, we have to say, "My hope is in Thee", for we are lost in ourselves. We have to be brought to the place expressed by Toplady,

"Nothing in my hand I bring  
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

My hope is in Thee, my hope is in that precious blood that was shed on Calvary to purge my guilt away; my hope is in Thy grace to sustain me and hold me up, for that Thou hast said, "My grace is sufficient for thee". Do you need wisdom, guidance, strength, grace? My hope is in Thee, Lord for these. I need it and I cannot produce it. Though indeed we should use the faculties God has given us, in the right conduct of our affairs, yet when grace is in exercise, in all these difficult problems that press upon us, the sin upon our conscience, the burden of guilt, the need of His upholding hand, we have to say, "My hope is in Thee".

"Now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in Thee" to bring me through honourably, to confirm my interest, to cause me to endure to the end; my hope is in Thee to receive me one day into Thine everlasting kingdom. That will not be long with some and truly, as the Psalmist said here our days are as an handbreadth and our age is as nothing before God, the eternal God - it is as nothing before Him. In Psalm 90, we read, "We spend our years as a tale that is told" - as an handbreadth. What a wonderful mercy then, to have a hope of eternal life, a hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Object of hope with all His dear people, that "good hope through grace" of which we shall never be ashamed; and one day to realise the fulfilling of all our hopes here, in the full enjoyment of His rich blessing, where sin no more defiles.

"And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in Thee."

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