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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at Ebenezer, Clapham on Sunday morning
10th. June, 1951

Text: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted
in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the help of
His countenance." Psalm 42.5

These are very familiar words to Bible readers, and particularly to those who are the subjects of God's gracious dealings with them in their own souls personally, and in the circumstances of their lives. I had not anticipated earlier speaking from this verse; in fact, I have had very considerable conflict of mind about the service altogether, but this appears to be like a voice speaking, at least to me, saying, "Hope thou in God". Perhaps I could hardly feel to have the confidence of the Psalmist (although I would have it) where he says "For I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance"; yet, I trust it may be so, not only in my own case, but with many here who may, at this time, feel to be walking in some darkness and under some despondency of soul.

It was never intended that the people of God should always have comfort, peace, joy, and live unmolested, uninterrupted, untroubled, quiet and easy in their souls; but that they should have ups and downs, go down into low places, dark places, difficult places, hard places, be shown hard things, be dealt with, shown what they are in, shown what the Lord can do to bring them up out of them, groan under their burdens, cry out of the depths to get answers, be refreshed and strengthened again, get deliverances and go on their way rejoicing. I doubt not some of you have read this Psalm and have felt to enter into it in some particulars. The Psalmist was in a good place, although not in a happy or comfortable one. He was not in a careless, indifferent state of mind about things, but was lively in his soul in desire to God, his heart longing for communion. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" Is anyone here feeling like that? Has anyone come to the service under these particular feelings of soul, longing to hear

something from God, to get something from the means, to have some testimony, some hopeful sign that you are not cut off and rejected? It is a wonderful thing to be hungry for God, to have a religion that will not be satisfied without God!

The Psalmist was in great trouble, not some little thing disturbing his mind, but something that weighed heavily upon him, taunting enemies here, continually saying to him, "Where is thy God" and saying it daily too. Their tauntings were 'like a sword in his bones' their reproaches were hard to bear. "As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?" You need not have outward enemies, you may often hear the voice of unbelief in your heart, saying that, "Where is thy God?" and it can be a powerful voice too, and can have a great effect upon your spirit, bring you into much tempest tossing, much disquietude of mind. "They say unto me" - the enemy, the devil, unbelief - or there may be people saying, "Where is thy God?" 'What do you think of a God like this, that allows this or that to happen?' "Where is thy God?" 'Why does He not come and deliver thee and appear for thy help?' O what a struggle sometimes goes on in a poor, believing heart and how helpless he appears against these assailments of the enemy. What a question it is! "Where is thy God?" Perhaps you may hear that voice in the night season or at other times when brought under great pressure; you try to pray and can no more pray than you could make a world. You are so helpless, you could not produce anything of yourself to any purpose, and yet you can feel these opposite workings, the workings of sin, the voice of the tempter and the voice of others saying, "Where is thy God?" 'To what purpose is it to have anything to do with Him? Why do you think He will come to your help? You will have to get out of your troubles the best way you can, it is no good to look any higher.' All these things, that cruel enemy voice, you will hear. If you are a child of God you will hear the enemy's voice sometimes, but what a mercy it is when a poor thing shaken, emptied, torn this way, torn that way, disquieted, cast down, at the ends of the earth, fainting, is enabled, by a peculiar power which he cannot produce of himself, to betake himself

to his God, with all his helplessness and felt worthlessness too, and cry, "Lord, help me". It may be often your prayer gets no further than that, and there is no need for it to, in one sense, because it just expresses your personal need and the fact that you believe God can, and that He will, help you in your difficulty and in your trouble.

The Psalmist appeared, according to the language of this Psalm, to have one trial upon another; hardly had one passed away before another came upon him, heavier than the one before, and he is not the only one of the people of God who has had things like that. Perhaps there have been times when you have said, 'This is as much as I can bear, I should be crushed completely if anything heavier came upon me', and the Lord has sustained you and brought you up out of it, and yet the Lord has brought you up out of it to come into one heavier than the one before. That appears to have been the way with David. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts: all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me". "Yet" there is something wonderfully sweet, notwithstanding all; he never lost sight of God at any time; with all the opposite phases, all the distresses, all the loneliness, all the tears which kept falling so that they became his meat and drink, he never lost sight of God, but said, "Yet", notwithstanding these water spouts, "Yet, the Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me." It may be the Psalmist had known wearisome nights as Job did when he said, "Wearisome nights are appointed to me". Many of the Lord's people know what wearisome nights are, not only through infirmities of the body which prevent sleep, but disquietude of mind, inward conflict, circumstances, difficulties and things which may well nigh overwhelm the spirit. "Yet" says the Psalmist here, "In the night His song shall be with me"; not His frown, not His anger, but His song, which is the comfortable sense of His favour, His countenance, His presence shall be with me. It is great faith to be able to say what the Lord will do; it does not need great faith to say what the Lord has done, although it is a wonderful thing to be able to speak of what the Lord has done, a wonderful thing to have

had anything done; it is a wonderful thing that God should do anything for sinners, especially for such as we - but it is great faith to speak of what the Lord will do, as the Psalmist does here. "The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime", as though he would say, 'He will not fail me, after all, I do not believe He will forsake me, how could He? for He is faithful! How could He for sake me? and beside all that He has said, "I will not leave thee, no, nor forsake thee"'. Faith hangs upon the promise sometimes; lives upon a promise sometimes, believing God, even when things look as black and gloomy as they possibly can.

Faith is in the verse I have read, on the author's part, notwithstanding all the trouble he was in. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?" This is like an expostulation; he interrogates himself, Why? Is this despondency justifiable? Is there a justifiable reason for all this disquietude and this casting down? We get there sometimes, but is there always a just reason for it? Perhaps you say, 'There is plenty of reason for it, this trouble, that difficulty, this burden, that heavy need.' Yes; but still the Psalmist questioned whether or not it was justified. Why? "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?" He does not say, 'I have every reason to be and I shall be, there is no wonder that it is so', but he says, "Hope thou in God": and that is the best remedy for all our despondence and disquietude. While you look at your things and your difficulties, they may seem to rise more and more before you, until you are overwhelmed, but when faith is brought into exercise (and I am disposed to say it must be brought into exercise and we cannot bring it into exercise ourselves) it goes straight to God every time. Have you not found **that** to be true, when perhaps things in your soul and circumstances have been as dark as midnight? You have felt to be overwhelmed under them, yet a peculiar power that you could not produce is wrought in your spirit and you find yourself taking this path, this difficult thing, this weak body, or that trouble in the family, this burden, that

trial, taking it to God and - hopefully - too. Hopefully!

"I shall yet praise Him", he says, "for the help of His countenance." Not, 'Lord, I will try and pray about it, but it will not be of any use, it will not make any difference'. That is what nature will say and that is as far as we go if left to ourselves, but when the Spirit of the Lord works in the heart renewed by divine grace, the matter does not rest there; you will have to do with God about these things if you are one of His children, because He will see to it that you cannot manage them yourself. He will see to it that you cannot manage them yourselves, and this, after all, is our mercy; all we do, the Lord over-rules and we are brought to a sweet place when we can get a little access at the mercy seat and commit our way unto Him. The Psalmist was cast down here; there is no question about that, for he says, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me"; it was really the case with him and it will be the case with you, if you are a child of God, because of the path of tribulation which is appointed to you. There will be sure to be sometimes a casting down, even if there is no outward trouble. If you are exercised in your soul and the Lord is silent, absent, and you cannot get anything from Him, it will cast your spirit down. But there is something very sweet about this; he says, 'Because I am cast down like this' "Therefore will I remember Thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." There is something very sweet about that; David seems to refer there to what the Lord did for His people in the land of Jordan. He brought them through Jordan in a wonderful way, wrought several signal deliverances for them in the land of Jordan, made the valley of Achor to be a door of hope, and brought deliverances there that were remembered; and David had his Hill Mizar too. There was some place he had in mind where God appeared to him and probably you have your Hill Mizar. "Therefore will I remember Thee". 'This is a reason why I should.' "Therefore will I remember Thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the Hill Mizar." Why art thou cast down? Is there no God to help you? Why are you cast down? you? some of you here,

if you are, is there no God to help? no promise, no light, no prospect? Is God unable to deliver?

Many things may cause this casting down of the Lord's people; the burden of sin may cause much casting down; when sin lies upon the conscience heavily and guilt is a burden there, it will cause much casting down.

"With my burden I begin;
Lord, remove this load of sin".

Have your sins ever cast you down? Have they ever been a burden upon your spirit, a load that you could not remove? Sometimes there are unanswered prayers which cause great despondency of feeling to the Lord's people. It is true the Lord may sometimes delay to answer prayers; that does not mean He will never answer them, but these delays, O how hard it makes it, at times, and how it seems to open the door to the enemy! When you pray, as you feel, to no purpose, (although that is not really so; some of you may know what it is to pray, and pray, and pray again, and yet still no response) it may cause great despondency and may produce great disquietude of mind. The Lord's silence is hard to bear with the children of God because when they are really in a lively frame of mind, communion is their sweetest privilege. Communion! It is wonderful to have a little real communion with God, but when the Lord is silent it is hard travelling. David seemed to dread this as much as anything. "Be not silent to me" he said, "lest, if Thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit;" not, 'I shall go down into the pit' but 'I become like them in my feelings, feel as though I shall!'

Sometimes the lack of fruitfulness may cause despondency of mind to the Lord's people. O, this barrenness, this barren heart, no fruit seems to appear, does it? You would not have it so, you would sit under His shadow with delight, you would have the spices to flow forth by the south wind. Yet O, the dearth, this famine in the soul, this painful distance, this barrenness, everything parched and dried up in your soul's feelings! "Why art thou cast

down, O my soul?"

Moreover, the ways of God in providence at times, may cause a great despondency. How strangely He works; He overturns things; He says, "I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it:.... until He comes whose right it is." Has the Lord overturned things in your circumstances, in your life, in your home, in your family, in the Church? O, He has overturned your things and yet 'He is too wise to err, too good to be unkind.' He never stirs up the nest without He has some purpose in it, and some purpose for good to His people in it too! "Why art thou cast down, O, my soul?" Is this despondency justified? O but there is still this path of tribulation, and all of us at times have probably come, more or less, to the last extremity, come to that place where the soul is fainting within us, when the heart is overwhelmed and we feel to be at the ends of the earth. "Why art thou cast down O my soul, and why art thou disquieted in me?"

You can be cast down without being disquieted. Disquieted! You may have a burden pressing upon you, yet feel very quiet in it, no disquietude in it. It may be very hard to bear, but there it is, and your spirit may be reasonably quiet; but sometimes there may be things of such a nature as to cause great disquietude of mind, inward turmoil in your feelings, like a whirlwind taking you up, and casting you down, O that inward tempest tossing, turning over of things, the mind working and coming into things where you know not what to do for the best in them! Your mind works and works within you, and you are filled with tempest-tossings, disquietude and turmoil that is very wearying even to the body. "O why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God."

The scales seem to turn here; the Psalmist knew what was the best remedy for him, so he exhorts to this end, "hope thou in God"; not in yourself, not in your own power or judgment but in God. Actually we have to be brought down very low often before we have really come to this.

"Few, if any, come to Jesus,
Till reduced to self-despair."

O how long we try to do without Him and make Him the last shift, but it is very sweet when a little hope springs up in the heart that God is able and willing to undertake your case. Hezekiah got into a very low state when he said, "Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove:.... O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me". And I believe, myself, that the Lord will bring us to that place to say, "Undertake for me". "Hope thou in God".

Well, have you something that is beyond you? "Hope thou in God." Take it to Him. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass." - Not you; "He shall bring it to pass!" It is a great thing when we can 'look on, while the angel of the Lord doeth wondrously.' "Hope thou in God", and this is not in bare omnipotence, but in the power of God in Christ.

Now consider His attributes, and this applies where faith is raised up in the heart, to hope in God in a feeling way; take His omnipotence, He is the Almighty God. "I AM the Almighty God"; He said to Abraham, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." The Almighty God says, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" "Behold, I AM the Lord, the God of all flesh:" He said to His servant Jeremiah, "Is there anything too hard for Me?" It is very sweet when amidst all this, you are favoured with a little opening up of this power of Christ. "Who is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." There is a power there, a power in God that is above all your weakness, a sufficiency that rises above all your necessities; your case cannot be too great for Him, or your need, or your difficulty, or your burden, or your trouble. "Hope thou in God." This is a peculiar exercise of faith in a vessel of mercy, who has some personal experience of an all-delivering God. Hope in Him, and hope in Him alone! Hope in that God, "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us."

Then again, are there not times when you feel you can hope in His wisdom? He is the all-wise God, but we do not hope in the wisdom of God usually, until we come to the end of our own; then it is we

have to fall before Him, to teach us, to guide us, show us what course to take or what to do. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." It is very sweet and a real experience at times, and so strengthening to your soul when you can enter into it; it seems to bring relief at once. "Hope thou in God" because He is the God Jacob saw above the ladder, saying, "I AM the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac"; all power is in His hand and all wisdom too.

Again, is it not good to have a hope in His grace? If you have a thorn in the flesh, God is sufficient for that, although He may not remove it. It was quite reasonable for Paul to pray, and pray hard, for the thorn to be removed, quite reasonable, though God had an even better way of answering, when He did speak to him. He did not say, 'I will remove it and see you are not troubled with it any more', no, "My grace is sufficient for thee", truly a wonderful answer, and he proved it to be true. We often find him, in his epistles and in his discourses, saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee". "Hope thou in God."

Again, are there not times when you feel you can hope in His Word and His promise, when they are as a rod and staff to sustain, support and protect you in this wilderness? "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." I admit my personal experience of these things is very slight, compared to some, but I believe I know what that wonderful quietness is when one feels helped and enabled, not of himself, but by the Lord Himself, to put his trust in Him. It is wonderfully sweet! "Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a Refuge for us." "Hope thou in God". Why, it is like a mighty pillar, a great strength to the soul when faith faces overwhelming odds. "Hope thou in God."

Look at the victories gained by Israel when they put their trust in Him. "Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance." What does the Psalmist mean by the help of His countenance? By the Lord's countenance in the Scripture, we understand His smile, His approbation. You can often tell what is in the mind

of a person by his countenance. Here the Psalmist says, he would praise Him for the help of His countenance or as in the margin, His presence, His salvation. His countenance then, really means His presence, the help, the strength, the comfort, the peace, the joy, of that presence when it is felt, "I shall yet praise Him". In another Psalm he says, "Who will show us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us." No one else can help me but Thee! This was faith, believing that the Lord would deliver out of the trouble the Psalmist was in. It was a great trouble, one that cast him down greatly, but he says "I shall yet praise Him." That might seem hardly possible to some of you, who have been so long in darkness and bondage under the Lord's silence, but you will yet praise Him. You have done before, have you not? You have had good days, times when you walked in the light of His countenance, when He favoured you, nourished your soul and indulged you, but now, maybe, there is casting down, things are so different from that time when the candle of the Lord shined upon your head, and when by His light you walked through darkness; but David said, 'I shall yet praise Him. He is a faithful God, He does not change. My feelings have changed, I have darkness for light, trouble where joy was; but I shall yet praise Him'. Faith holds on to divine faithfulness. It is very sweet when you can feel a confidence of that nature, notwithstanding all the present darkness, even though you are enveloped in it. "I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance. What is the help of His countenance? Why it is that strength put into your soul when you hear His voice speaking comfortably, when faith sees His smile, when the darkness disperses and the light of His favour is felt, when the Sun of Righteousness arises with healing in His wings upon your poor, dark soul, when He becomes "as the light of the morning even a morning without clouds" "I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance." It is when He appears and comes, as it were, through intervening darkness, and permits you to see Him again, so that your faith being revived, you can say, "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?"

Do you know what the help of His countenance is? Have you been at times under great despondency, gloomy fear, bondage, darkness, temptation, under the Lord's silence and then, having faith wrought in your heart, you have suddenly felt the cloud to be lifted and the still, small voice has followed the wind, the earthquake and the fire? You have felt like Elijah when he came to the mouth of the cave and covered his face with his mantle. When the Lord has come again, and filled you with the tokens of His grace, have you not felt ashamed of all your misgivings, fears, wrong conclusions and despondencies? O what a wonder-working God He is!

I trust that amid all things that may at times press upon you, you may never lose sight of God in them, but be enabled in the power of faith, to believe even against overwhelming odds, to believe Him to be a delivering God, and in faith say, "I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance". Amen