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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday
morning 15.7.73

Hymns 1001, 1034, 392

Reading: Psalm 89

Text Psalm 51.12

"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me
with thy free spirit."

This Psalm is a very sacred one, and has, as you know, a very sad background. They were sad things that had brought David to the confession of this Psalm, he realised how low he had sunk, how grievously he had sinned and how great was his guilt, and yet in the purposes of God undoubtedly this Psalm has been the expression and feeling of many, many thousands of the Lord's exercised people, and I would not give much for anyone's religion who has not some understanding of the language that we have in this Psalm. Without proceeding further in a general way I would desire to devote myself to three points in what I have read for a subject. The first is salvation, the second the joy of it, and the third, the prayer to be upheld by the Holy Spirit of God.

There are millions of people who have no care and no concern about the salvation of their never dying souls. That is a terrible state to be in, and is the consequence of the hardening and deadening effects of sin, but have you and I any real, prayerful concern about our immortal souls? Have we? Have you? Have I? Does it lie as a burden upon your heart where you will spend a never ending eternity? Perhaps you will say, I do not know that I believe there is such a thing as a never ending eternity as you state, but it makes no difference what you think about it. What you or I think about things will never overturn the sacred solemn record of divine inspiration and revelation. It is not what we think about things, it is what God has revealed to us. Where has He revealed anything about eternity, heaven, hell, and the ultimate destiny of all people? He has revealed it in His Holy Word in many, many places. What an awful state to be in, to live and die revolting against divine revelation, discrediting what God has revealed. Where that is really the case there is

nothing but thorns for a dying pillow, there is no comfort that a free thinker or atheist or infidel can find to console him when he is about to breathe his last. I have read where an infidel was dying and one said to him, "Hold on friend, hold on". He said, "I have nothing to hold on to", but the Lord's people have got something to hold on to, and I hope we have by the Lord's mercy.

I do not know how you may feel, probably not as I do, especially those of younger years. You may not feel as I do now; I did not when I was young; but now I am so to speak often dying. I am dying practically every day. You may say, what are you talking about? What I mean is that my mind is much concerned about my end in prayer for a gracious preparation. I do not mean I am physically ill, but my end is continually before me. The Psalmist was something like this when he said, "Lord make me to know my end and the measure of my days; what it is; that I may know how frail I am". I think often of an old friend at Brighton who used to say in his prayer, "Lord when we come to die may we have nothing to do but to die". It will be a wonderful thing to feel a little like that in a gracious way, to feel that our peace is made with God through the precious sin atoning blood of the Lord Jesus, and that we are delivered from the wrath to come that must fall upon the head of the wicked.

Now here is the Psalmist and what does he say? "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation". There then is this salvation, it is recorded in so many Scriptures that we have no reason to question it, here is a provision made for a certain number of people securing their everlasting happiness. Provision is made for it, but when we think solemnly of this we must come to the amazing scene of Gethsemane and Calvary, where the provision was meritoriously made by our glorious and blessed Substitute the Lord Jesus Christ, by His atonement made for the sins of all His dear people that they should never perish. O what a blessed salvation it is! Nothing can be added to it; here, the divine decrees of God are eternally settled concerning His ransomed people. This salvation is said to be a salvation to which the Lord's people are chosen in Christ, they are chosen in Him; not if they like they may make up their minds to accept it; they are chosen. And if you and I are chosen to it in

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the covenant of grace, the day will come when we shall have some experience of it in our souls. The Apostle felt very comfortable about those Thessalonians, he said, "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth". Here they are then, everyone of them chosen to salvation and no opposing power can overturn that choice, a million devils could not overturn it, here they are, absolutely secure. They are secure in a covenant of which I have been reading, and that is why I read that beautiful 89th Psalm because it brings to light the security of all the Lord's dear people in that covenant made in Christ on their behalf, they are in Christ, they are secure in the divine decrees of an immutable Jehovah. They are chosen to it and this is experimental, that is, if the Lord shall be pleased to come and bless any of you in your soul, that blessing is a witness in your case that He has chosen you to salvation before the world was.

There is something else besides being chosen to it and that is they are appointed to obtain it, this is in the same epistle to the Thessalonians, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ", he does not say the Lord has appointed you to be saved simply, although that is blessedly true, but He has appointed you to obtain it. This is very sweetly experimental. It is as though the Apostle would say, in other words, the Lord has appointed you to watch, pray, and press your case hard at the throne of grace, that you or I may know that we have an interest in it and to be favoured to feel something of the joy of it, so that though we are chosen to it and are appointed to obtain it I wonder how many of us can feel to come in here. Are we striving to obtain it? It is already obtained in and by Christ; but are we striving to obtain a sweet assurance of our personal interest in it, for this is an evidence of being chosen to it. This is a blessed salvation. Are you and I appointed to obtain it, are we waiting upon the Lord that we might be favoured to feel some sweet earnest of it in our hearts and consciences? In other words is our language as the hymnwriter expressed it,

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

This is striving to obtain it, and this is a divine appointment. If the Lord has designed a heaven for you and me we shall be striving to obtain it, though we are appointed to it; and this means that often in our secret moments we shall be praying the prayer of the Psalmist "Say unto my soul I am thy salvation". This striving to obtain it experimentally speaking is not meritorious in this sense it is obtained already. We know that the dear Saviour shed His precious blood to redeem His dear people, we know He shed His blood but how can we know that it was shed for us? This is the exercise of a living soul, not one dead in trespasses and sins, this is a living soul, striving to obtain it.

But the Scripture also states that these people are heirs of this salvation. You know what this means; one can be an heir to an inheritance by donation, generation, or by some legal right, so in this sense all the Lord's dear people are heirs of this salvation. They are heirs to an inheritance, the best inheritance I have ever heard of. Suppose we were millionaires, or had come into an inheritance worth millions of pounds, we should soon have to leave it all; but the inheritance that the Lord's people are heirs to is heaven. This is that heavenly inheritance that fadeth not away and is reserved for all that are heirs to it, are appointed to it, and are striving to obtain it. Not only so, but in the Scripture it says that these people are clothed with it. In Isaiah's prophecy the prophet says, as the mouth of the Lord, that these people are clothed with the garments of salvation. What can this mean? I would take it that to be clothed with these garments is to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ whose obedience on our behalf, and as imputed to us, renders us justified persons in the eye of divine justice. Not only so, but they are cleansed and washed in the precious sin atoning blood of our dear exalted Redeemer, washed and clothed. As you know some people take great care about their

clothing and dresses and how they look in the eyes of others, and so far it behoves us to appear respectable, but are we as careful, or more so, as to how we look in the eye of the Majesty of heaven and how He sees us? When we lived in Brighton my dear Mother used to sit in the front room upstairs watching people pass, remarking about their appearance which sometimes shocked her, what would she say today? But how deeply are we concerned about what we look like in the sight of heaven's Majesty? Have we any hope that we are washed in the precious blood of Christ, and are clothed in His righteousness? "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation".

There is something else about this salvation and that is referred to in the Romans, "For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed". He goes back to the time when their eyes were opened, when they were convinced of their need and then on to the time of which he is writing, which may have been some considerable time after and says, "now is our salvation nearer". That can be considered in two ways. It can have an experimental bearing as to how one may be exercised about their interest in it. Perhaps you say, If I am not deceived I have been exercised for several years about the salvation of my soul, but I do not get any nearer. That is simply your conclusion; but you are getting nearer to it every day, that is you are getting nearer in the exercise of your soul to the sweet experience of it, you are getting nearer to the joy of it, which will be in the Lord's appointed time. But more particularly, evidently, the Apostle refers to the Lord's second coming. Time passes swiftly, and there will be a climax one day when the salvation of all the ransomed of the Lord will be consummated, when their bodies will be raised from their graves and caught up to meet the Lord in the air, to be for ever with the Lord, and this is getting nearer and nearer to its consummation.

"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation". This salvation is a complete salvation. It has not to be touched up by the merit of poor fallen mortals; it is a complete salvation; everything is provided. If you are a praying soul, if you are really waiting upon the Lord to appear for you, to assure your conscience of her

part in the Redeemer's blood, then your salvation is in heaven, it is already completed, you have not to make up something to finish it off, it is finished. What a ray of heavenly glory may be seen in this great salvation. It is also said to be an everlasting salvation, that is to say we shall be saved not for a thousand years and then be despatched to endless perdition, it is an everlasting salvation. The inheritance is an eternal inheritance. It is a transporting thought, is it not, especially when we compare it with the vanity of all things here below, and of life itself. Our days here are as an handbreadth; or as a tale that is told - not a tale that is going to be told, but as a tale that is told. We are born, we die, and we enter an unseen state, a world of endless bliss or endless woe.

The second point here is the joy of it. You may say what joy is there in it, for as far as I can see these religious people look pretty miserable for the most part. I do not know what joy can be in it. If you feel like that it shows you do not know anything about it. If you are really concerned about your soul's redemption, and are favoured to feel the precious blood of sprinkling, a taste of pardoning love, and your interest in it sealed, you will be filled with joy. Blessed is the people - as we read this morning - that know the joyful sound. Knowing it goes a step further than hearing about it although with some of us it has been and is a joy to hear about it, a great joy; and if the Lord should bless you in your soul with an interest in it, it will still be a joy to hear about it. We may not feel always able to say with David, "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?". We do not sail all the way in a steady breeze to heaven, but more often we may feel like the good man of whom we read in Isaiah who said, "Woe is me for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts". The joy of salvation is when we can feel that it is our salvation, that we have an interest in it, and are favoured to rejoice in it. "In thy name shall they rejoice all the day and in thy righteousness shall

be exalted", this is a sweet joy, it is not the joy of the world; it is not the crackling of thorns under a pot as we read. The joy of salvation is a sweet joy that fills a poor sinner's soul when he gets a sight of Christ, and views by faith that fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and can feel a sacred sense of interest therein. It will fill you with joy. O how precious everything will be about your Beloved Jesus then, your heart is filled with a sweet attraction to Him, He brings you into His banqueting house, spreads His banner of love over you and fills you with joy. This joy is also the joy of believing. Perhaps you say, As far as I know I do believe, but I do not feel any joy; You may, and I trust you do believe the sacred revelation; you believe what is recorded in His holy Word, you believe in the grand foundation doctrine of the redemption of the Lord's people; but although you may believe in that sense, yet when His sweet love flows into your heart, you believe in quite a different way from what you did before; now you say, "My beloved is mine and I am His", He is to me the chiefest among ten thousand.

The joy of salvation is also the joy of hope, every intimation you get of an interest in this Gospel raises up a hope in your heart, it is a blessed hope, it is a hope that has joy in it. Writing to the Romans the Apostle desired that they might be filled with peace and joy in believing. This is the assurance of faith that you have a part and lot in the matter of eternal redemption. "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation". And this is the joy of faith. It becomes very active in your heart it is a living principle there, it is what Peter refers to in writing to the scattered tribes, he says, "In whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory". This is the joy of faith and how sweet it is when you come to a spot like this and can say, why, there is everything in Him that I need, everything, bless His holy name, He is my Saviour, I need nothing more and I want nothing more. He is all I want. Some people want things they do not need. Sometimes they need things they do not want; but when you get a little of this joy flowing into your heart you say, He is all I need and all I want. This is the joy of salvation. Here I must leave it. The Lord add His blessing. Amen.

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