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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham, on Wednesday evening
28th August, 1974.

Hymns: 171, 175, 1010

Reading: Psalm 73

Text: Psalm 73, v. 24-25.

"Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.
Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I
desire beside Thee".

These verses describe the blessed place the author was brought to after what he had passed through. He has a particular sense of the goodness of God to His people, "to such as are of a clean heart", - that is not perfection in the flesh but a heart sprinkled with the precious blood of Christ and cleansed through His merit applied to the conscience; but even so he has "slipping feet". "As for me"- God is good to His people, they are gracious people, they have a clean heart, - "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped". Why was he in such a condition as this? Because he was looking the wrong way, he was looking away from God, to conditions in the world that confounded him. Many of the Lord's people have been there and have suffered as Asaph did, but in the end he obtained a wonderful deliverance; but before this he came to such a pass as to be as a beast before God. I wonder if you have ever been there, any of you? has there been a time when conflicting things in your life exploited by the devil have brought you to such an extremity as to feel like a bull in a net? "I was as a beast before Thee". He seems to have come to a desperate condition, yet here is a "Nevertheless". Although he was in such a condition he was not in utter despair, "nevertheless I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand". The Lord did not leave him to sink into despair, or fall a prey to the devil, or come to wrong conclusions. It was a sweet place he was brought to as we read here in the psalm. "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God". There he appears to have seen what he had not seen before. It would appear that the Lord revealed to him the end of the wicked, their eternal destruction, and it made a wonderful change in him, "then understood I their end".

So it has been with many of the Lord's people through the ages; they have found relief, and sometimes deliverance, in the sanctuary of God. Perhaps some of you may know something of this, you may have come in a state of conflict, confusion, and near despair, but you have obtained help in the sanctuary, "Until I went into the sanctuary of God". There the Lord appeared to him and there he seemed able to leave everything of earth, whatever conditions might prevail, however conflicting they may have been; he is able to leave them all, and have

communion with his God; and it brought him to a sweet place, "Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand", as though, to use this figure, the Lord was holding him up and did not leave him to utter despair. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel". He had come to the end of his own conclusions, and his view of those perplexing things that had bewildered him; he had come to the end of all that, and was able to look alone to God. Have you ever known this? Has there been a moment, once or twice in your life, when you have been, as the author here, able to draw near to God? The nearer you got to the Lord in prayer and feeling a sweet liberty, the further away earth became; all seemed to fade from view. Nothing else was of comparable importance to this. It was a sweet place to be brought to. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel", as though he would say, I commit myself to Thy hands; do not leave me to take wrong steps, or walk in a wrong course, or become a prey to my enemies or the devil. "Thou shalt guide...glory". This is the first point then - gracious guidance, with the counsel of God.

"Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land"

"Thou shalt guide me", no one else can, neither can I steer my own course; I am full of perplexity, I know not what to do; I seem to have come to the end of all things; but "Thou shalt ... counsel". It is not so much a prayer as an expression of confidence. He seems able to commit himself into the hands of a covenant God, and there he finds a sweet relief. Others may say, if I were you I should take this course or that course; but he comes before the Lord: "Thou shalt...counsel".

What are we to understand by the counsel of God? Two or three things. First of all, His divine decrees are referred to as His counsel, His purposes, His settlements. It is recorded in the Scripture that He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will", that is a settlement in His divine purpose. This must be the counsel of the eternal Trinity, three Persons in One God. "Thou shalt...counsel". In a later Psalm it is said "For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven". Guide me by that settlement, those eternal decrees that the Lord has purposed concerning all His people. It may seem mysterious to contemplate a divine settlement, yet this must have been so according to the Word of God. "For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven" - and settled concerning His people and on their behalf. Their providences are settled, their spiritual exercises are settled, in the purposes of God, their path, their end, their eternal destiny, "For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven". "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel".

There is another feature of this counsel of God, and that is His holy Word,

as we have it referred to in the 119th psalm; the Holy Scriptures, the written Word, "Uphold me according unto Thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope". "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel." Here we have the Scriptures. They are said to make us wise unto salvation, that is as the Holy Spirit applies them to our souls, and enlightens our spiritual understanding. Here are the counsels of God as recorded from Genesis to Revelation. Here are the counsels of a triune Jehovah concerning providence and grace, the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal salvation of His dear people, their everlasting destiny; it is all wrapped up, so to speak, in the settlements of heaven. What a wonderful mercy it must be for any poor sinner to be in that book of remembrance of which we read, "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels". Those in this book of remembrance, - not a book in a literal sense, but the divine counsels of God, these everlasting settlements - are bound up in His everlasting mercy and shall be absolutely secure. "They shall be mine" - we may not often feel much of this. The days of darkness may be many and we are tossed to and fro and not comforted and sometimes may wonder where the scene will end; but here the Psalmist says, "Thou shalt guide me" and he does not appear to question it. It seems like a confidence that he felt in a covenant performing God, "Thou hast holden me". "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before Thee. Nevertheless I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden me". "Thou shalt guide me" - This is expressive language, the Lord holding one with His right hand and guiding them in the path that he has appointed, with all that is involved in it.

"Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel" - There is another counsel and that is the counsel of the Holy Spirit in His saving teaching in the hearts of His people; and that counsel, that teaching, issues in this: it is what the Lord said of the Holy Spirit "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you". There is no revelation like that. If you get that blessed revelation you have a seal of heaven. "He shall glorify me". That is what the Holy Spirit does. He makes Christ precious in the hearts of His people. It is an experimental matter, He glorifies Christ in the experience of His people; and that incorporates the path in which He leads them, the trials that may come upon them, the afflictions that attend them, everything concerning them. I wonder if you have ever been brought here? It is not simply to ask or plead with the Lord that He would guide, but to feel this confidence in a covenant performing God in your own soul's experience, or in your pathway, however dark or confusing it may be. It makes a profound change when one can look up to heaven, lose sight of earth and see a covenant-performing God Who is too wise

to err and too good to be unkind. "Thou shalt guide me". There is something very sweet about it as though he would say, I cast my care upon Thee; but one may say: The path is heavy and the trial presses upon me, I sink very low, the burden is hard to bear, yet, "Thou shalt guide me" through. He has said, I will not fail thee nor forsake thee. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel"; I commit it to Thee, I cast my care upon Thee, Thou art too wise to err. This counsel is the teaching of the Holy Spirit in the heart, experimentally viewed. The Lord Jesus referred to Him in the days of His flesh and says of Him: "When He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth". The truth that the Holy Spirit guides His people into is a knowledge of Christ, to bring them to put their whole and entire dependence upon His finished work for the salvation of their never-dying souls. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel", and so it comes to this, dear friends, with the Lord's dear people at times; they come to the end of querying this and questioning that, and wondering what to do about something else, they look up to heaven and say, "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel".

This is a blessed 'afterward' when one has been favoured to see the hand of the Lord bearing them through, although there may have been many days of darkness, many conflicting things and much tribulation; but there is an 'afterward'. There is an afterward with everything of earth. There is a time coming when all will terminate beneath the skies; the end of the world will come; but in heaven there will never be an 'afterward'. Here we are often careful and troubled about many things, but they are only for a time, a season, an appointed time, as Job says, "He performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with Him"; but there is an 'afterward' down here. There is nothing down here for ever and ever, but there is no 'afterward' in heaven. This is the 'afterward' all the redeemed of the Lord are prepared for; there is an 'afterward' when they have done with earth and everything here below, whatever their age may be. How sweet it can be sometimes, when the Lord's people find the going heavy, and wonder how much longer they can hold fast their profession, bear up or continue, yet they have this - there is an 'afterward'. There is an end coming to everything down here, but there is no 'afterward' in heaven. May you and I be among those referred to here - "afterward receive me to glory".

Here is a point, then, the Lord's dear people have something to look forward to all the time, although afflictions may lie heavy, burdens press hard, and the travelling is difficult; yet they have something to look forward to. There is a scripture that says, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable". The joy of a believer is in the afterward. If there were

no prospect beyond this life, says the apostle Paul, "we are of all men most miserable"; but in another place he says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us - this is the 'afterward'. How blessed it is when for a moment or two a child of God gets just a touch of the 'afterward'. How sweet it is, how it strengthens hope, faith, love and every grace of the Holy Spirit. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel". This is a sweet spot; have you ever been there? It is as though, after you have been bewildered and troubled, and have wondered where the scene will end, you are able to look up, leave it all, commit all to Him and say, "Thou shaltafterward" - Oh this blessed 'afterward' - this was the strength and comfort of Asaph, the Apostle Paul, and many of the Lord's dear people, especially those passing through the fires of persecution and suffering. It is as though he would say, "Then I shall be satisfied", and so he will be and so will every one of the Lord's redeemed children. The psalmist could say that he would be. He says, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness". Oh blessed day, blessed prospect! Things trouble me here, say you, and the path is hard; so indeed it may be, but "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Cor.2,9) (him that waiteth for Him as recorded in Isaiah, and them that love Him in the New Testament - they both blend together). You would not be waiting for Him if you had no love to Him. It is really because of your love to Him that you are waiting for His appearing. "Thou shalt afterward receive me to glory".

"Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" What a good place to be in! The one object of his soul's delight consisted in one Person - "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" as though he would say: it would be no heaven if Thou wert not there. But He is there, He reigns there in His majesty and glory and love. Oh but, one may say, There is a multitude of the redeemed of the Lord there that have come out of great tribulation and have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. There is a multitude whom no man can number there in heaven. Yes, blessedly true, but Whom have I but Thee? His heart is not set so much in seeing a multitude of the redeemed of the Lord praising Him. One may say, There are myriads of angels before the throne, what a sight it must be!. Yes, but "Whom have I?" How sweet it is, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" When we have to bury our loved ones and can bury them in sure and certain hope, to our comfort and peace of mind it is consoling, but "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" They have joined the ransomed through there, and they look for no more afterward. With them it will be one eternal afterward, an eternal state of happiness, peace, joy and love, because there He is, the

blessed Lamb of God, before the Throne, as we have it in the Revelation. John saw the Lamb in the midst of the throne as it had been slain, and that is why in the spirit I am here, I could never have been here if He had not been slain; but the Lamb once slain has opened the gates of heaven for a wretch like me.

"Whom have I?" You may have had a few moments here and there when you have felt Him to be sweet and precious in your soul; but you say it did not last very long. If you have felt it for a few minutes, you know what heaven is, as far as you can down here. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" As I have mentioned before, when a friend in Sussex asked her pastor if we should know our relatives in heaven, he said: "When I set eyes on Him I shall not want to look at anyone else". "Whom have I"? Can you go as far as this? I will tell you when you can. I would not say that you live in this 25th verse always, but I would say that when the Lord favours you in your soul, or if you should get a sight of Christ by faith, if a crucified Saviour should come before the eye of your faith, you will say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" To see Him will surpass everything else, and there will be no 'afterward' then, but 'for ever and ever', as we read of the redeemed in the book of the Revelation. There they are 'for ever and ever;' and so are the lost in everlasting perdition. Oh beloved friends, if we could only realise the destiny that lies ahead we should be overwhelmed; and what would it bring us to? "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel". We should say, Lord, take me in hand, do not leave me to myself, I cannot trust myself, bear me through, prepare me for my end, "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory". "Whom have I in heaven -- that will be my glory, my peace, my joy, my heaven -- and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee".

I leave it there. I do not know how it may be in your own feelings, but it is sometimes sweet to feel that there is a prospect ahead, a future, a glorious prospect which eye hath not seen. And what will that be? To see Him as He is. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him". What a heaven that must be! We shall see Him as He is, and then we shall have a better understanding of this. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee" "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness". Well, dear friends, it is very sweet to feel a hope of heaven, a good hope through grace upon a good foundation; it is very sweet to feel it. This 'afterward' - blessed prospect - "Afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" Have you ever come there? If you have you will be in heaven one day. If you can say in your heart "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?", then one day you will be there, go no more out, but to enjoy an everlasting 'afterward'. Oh may the Lord prepare us for it and, when the time shall come to depart this life, may we enter fully into this subject, to our everlasting happiness, peace and joy.

Amen.