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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Chapel, Clapham
on Sunday Evening 18th August 1957.

Text: "But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in
the Lord God, that I may declare all Thy works." Psalm 73. 28.

I have been speaking a little today from this Psalm in the 24th and 25th verses, referring a little to the experiences that Asaph passed through under what were then to him, as he felt, mysterious, conflicting and unjust dealings of God in His providences unto people: so that he proceeded for a season in temptation and became resentful and rebellious in his spirit, and his feet began to slip, and his spirit fail with envy at the foolish as he saw the prosperity of the wicked. Then we saw the gracious confirming way the Lord dealt with him in this when he went into the sanctuary: how the Lord opened his eyes, and gave him a gracious revelation of His infinite wisdom, turned his eyes another way, enabled him to look away from the world and all its possessions to a better estate, a more wealthy inheritance, to abiding and everlasting riches. Indeed the dear man, after all he had suffered must have been greatly favoured, richly blest. He confesses his foolishness and ignorance. His heart was grieved, he "was pricked in his reins." He had wandered away, but had been brought back again by divine mercy to contact with God. So he acknowledged that, although he had so drifted in his mind and feelings, and harboured these hard thoughts the Lord had not entirely left him; He had kept His eye upon him, nevertheless - a wonderful word - nevertheless: though I was as a beast before Thee; though I had these hard and bitter thoughts, though my feet had well nigh slipped, though I was envious at the foolish, yet, "Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee, Thou hast holden me by my right hand." This is an expressive acknowledgment of divine support, that the Lord had not entirely left him or forsaken him. He had brought him back again now to a gracious confidence in the guiding hand of his God, enabled him to commit his concerns into His hand notwithstanding all, although the Lord's ways seemed to be so opposite to human reason.

O, how much better is it to fall at the Lord's feet than to try to bring God to the bar of human reason! The one is grace, humility, faith, love, submission; the other is unbelief, pride, presumption. But Asaph was brought to a blessed place. Thou shalt guide me and afterward receive me. There is none to compare with Thee; "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? There is none upon earth I desire beside Thee." And it might seem as though the good man was in some physical weakness too, for he says, "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever." Asaph had been looking to this side of the grave, but the Lord took him to the

other side of the grave. He lifted the veil as it were. Asaph saw the wealthy worldling live easy and die easy, but had not thought of the slippery places they were in, and that living and dying so they would be cast into destruction, brought into desolation, utterly consumed with terrors. Now he is sweetly gathered up as though there were no world; his heart is full of the Lord's goodness, he is melted before Him. Faith views the wonderful love and grace in God, notwithstanding the conflicting outward conditions, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever."

I would like to apply myself for a short time to the glorious conclusion to which Asaph came at the end of this remarkable Psalm. It was a blessed conclusion! In verse 27 we read "they that are far off from Thee shall perish, and thou hast destroyed all them that go awhoring from Thee," but, a wonderful 'but', "but it is good for me to draw near to God." What different language! In the beginning of the Psalm, although he acknowledges the goodness of God to Israel, and to such as are of a clean heart, he says, "But as for me my feet had almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped." He was not drawing near to God then; he was looking another way. "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." He was not drawing near to his God then; godly man as he was - as his Psalms proved - but at the end of the Psalm his gracious resolve is, "it is good for me to draw near to God. I have put my trust in the Lord God."

Have you ever proved this to be true in your life, in your circumstances, in your afflictions, in your sorrows, in the storms of life, in hard things? Have you ever proved it to be good to draw near to this God? Although at times it may have seemed as though His hand was gone out against you, yet, whatever conditions prevail, however fiercely the storm may rage, however thick the darkness may be, yet, "it is good for me to draw near to God."

I would like to consider this in one or two particulars as it is proved in a believer's experience. It is good to draw near because the Lord has given us a ground to stand upon in making this holy venture. I say 'holy venture' because it is made, when it is made rightly, in the exercise of that faith which the Lord Himself gives; because without faith it is impossible to please Him, for, "he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." But I want to treat this not simply as a doctrine, but as a gracious experience which is sometimes very sweetly felt when the Lord's people venture to His footstool; there is a ground, and that ground centres in the name of Jesus "If ye shall ask anything in my Name, I will do it." But what do we understand by His Name? By 'His Name' we understand all He is to us in the salvation of our

souls; and all He is to us in the exercise of prayer. One puts it very beautifully on this point.

"The blood and righteousness and love
Of Jesus, will we plead;
He lives within the veil above.
For us to intercede."

O, what will help you to pray under all your burdens - sin, guilt, fears, darkness and difficulty? What will help you to pray? Faith brought into exercise upon the fulness of Christ: upon His flesh, His fulness of grace, His precious sin-atonement blood, His glorious righteousness, His intercession in Heaven, His all-prevailing mediation there - that will help you to pray. As your faith gets a glimpse of Him it opens your heart, moves your feelings, draws your affections, gives you access, helps you to open your mouth wide that He may fill it. This is great in experience! It is His good Spirit that helps our infirmities in this by removing the veil of ignorance, the darkness that may be upon us, and bringing before our view the bloodstained mercy-seat, that wonderful mediation standing between an infinitely holy, just God and a 'dust and ashes' guilty sinner!

"But since my Saviour stands between,
In garments dyed in blood,
'Tis He, instead of me, is seen,
When I approach to God."

Is not this an experience? Has not, now and again at least, this blessed foundation held you and given you strength to venture? It affords importunity-

"I can no denial take,
When I plead for Jesus' sake."

O it can be good to draw near like this! Has it ever been good to you to draw near to the mercy-seat? Let us come boldly, said the Apostle Paul. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

It is good then, because the way is opened by blood.

"A bleeding Jesus is the Way,
And blood tracks all the path."

O, it is good to draw near. No case is too bad.

"The vilest sinner out of hell,
Who lives to feel his need,
Is welcome to the Throne of Grace;
The Saviour's blood to plead."

And as to the ground upon which you stand, you will not wish to plead anything else but that, it is all-sufficient. His precious blood has removed the barrier and rendered God approachable by a sinner through the blood of Christ. So we have it: "having an High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." Have you

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ever been able by faith to get hold of God upon this ground?

Have there been occasions in your soul when you have felt a sweet holy liberty in pleading all that He is? Here is His divine intercession in heaven. "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled separate from sinners." Does this cast a light on your experience, that it is good; even for me, to draw near to God? When is it good? When heavy things lie upon us. The Psalmist in Psalm 61 said, "Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer." From the ends of the earth the Lord's dear people often have to cry. "From the ends of the earth will I cry unto Thee." When? "When my heart is overwhelmed." Has your heart ever been overwhelmed, that is oppressed, weighted, bowed down with things so that you have hardly known how to bear it? It is good then, O, but, say you, when I try to pray I get no access, feel no liberty, have an opposite voice, unbelief rises; I am worried, all seems to no purpose. Then you have a companion in this same good man. O, but, say you, how can that be? Surely he had never been in such a place as I am, never felt so distant, so desolate, so far off, in such a helpless case? I believe he had. Here are some of his expressions - "Will the Lord cast off for ever?" Have you ever felt like that? Asaph, although he felt like that, knew what answered prayer was; he knew what it was for the Lord to regard him notwithstanding all. "I cried unto God with my voice even unto God with my voice and he gave ear unto me." Not, I cried and He took no notice "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not:" Do you know anything about that? Have you ever had a sore that would run in the night, keep you awake, make you toss on your bed, disturb your sleep, break your rest - some trying bitter thing - a sore that would run in the night?" "I remembered God and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed." What then? Will the Lord cast off for ever? Have you ever had a thought like that? Have you felt sometimes you would have to give up praying, and religion, and everything else? Have you ever felt that you would turn out to be a whited sepulchre? "Will the Lord cast off for ever? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" Who uses expressions like this? Asaph, a man of God, a good man too, but one who evidently knew what it was to go down into the depths. But, O, he said, this is my infirmity, these questionings, these plaintive enquiries are my infirmity, "but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High." Do you know anything about Asaph? Has Asaph any followers in Ebenezer Chapel? Have you ever said will He cast me off

forever? Will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? But even under such conditions as that Asaph found it good to draw near to God. O, but, you may say, what can I say when I am in such a state as this? I know not what to say. Say what Asaph said, "Will the Lord cast me off for ever? and will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies? And I said, This is my infirmity!" Poor Asaph! Yet it is the same man who said here. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth I desire beside Thee." So it is with the Lord's people. They go down into the depths, and sometimes rise in the actings of faith as Asaph did. But in all this it is good for me to draw near to God. It is good when calamities and reproaches come upon us; it is good when afflictions come upon us; it is good when adverse providences come upon us; it is good when the Lord touches us somewhere, when He takes something away that we wanted; good when He gives us something we did not want. It is good under every condition, every condition, for me to draw near to God. Why is it good? It is good because God has all blessings to bestow through His beloved Son. O, say you, but I do not get them; I come away disappointed; I seem to be a failure altogether. Yes, I know that may be so, yet it is good because where else can you go, to whom else can you go? Have you not sometimes felt like Peter "to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life".

It is good to draw near because no case is too hard, no matter too difficult, no sinner too bad, no sin too great - except the unpardonable sin, of which it is said that there shall be no forgiveness. -But what I mean here is this, there is no sin too great in a poor confessing, broken, humbled, contrite, repenting sinner; although his sins may like mountains rise, the atonement rises higher. Although your difficulties may rise high, His power rises higher; He is above them all; therefore it is good for me to draw near to God.

It is good because this is a believer's privilege, it is granted to him. It is good because the Lord has invited such to come unto Him. "Come unto Me," said the Saviour, "all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." Yes, say you, I know, I have read it all many times, yet here I am enveloped in difficulties, do not know what to do, feel ready to give up; feeling like Jonah when he was being tossed about in the depths. Even so is it not good to draw near to God, even under such conditions? Did not Jonah draw near

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to his God even then? "When my soul fainteth within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came unto Thee, into Thy holy temple." So when David came to Ziklag and found the city in ruins, and everything captured by the Amalakites; although they wept until they had no more power to weep, yet "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." There seemed no way out did there? All was gone; there seemed no prospect of any recovery; yet he encouraged himself in the Lord his God, and the Lord gave him a wonderful promise. "Shall I pursue after this troop, shall I overtake them? Pursue" said the Lord. Not, you might do, but, "for thou shalt surely overtake them;" and they recovered all.

"It is good for me to draw near to God:" It is good because sometimes in your soul's feelings you may get some encouragement amidst all your fears and calamities and difficulties - some gracious encouragement.- You may hear a whisper in your heart saying, "Fear not worm Jacob, I will help thee." It is good then because the Lord is none the poorer for what He gives. If He is pleased to help one poor sinner in trouble it does not mean He has no more resources to help another. "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." It is good to draw near to Him for those things we feel to need, whether they be in our souls, and concern our eternal destiny, our hopes and prospects for eternity, or whether they may concern some things in this life. In the Scriptures we have instances of those who prayed in relation to the calamities and reproaches that fell upon them, as Job, Nehemiah and others. Nehemiah when he heard of the desolation of the city prayed to the God of heaven, he was not indifferent about it; grace does not make people indifferent, hard, careless, callous, grace will never do that; grace will give tenderness, grace brings meekness and humility and under this exercise it is good to draw near to God. After all, what a wonderful mercy it is to have a God to go to, to take our burdens to, to lay our case before Him. It is good, good because we may plead His promises without presuming, and hold Him to it. Godly men have done this. Jacob did it, others have done it. It is faith that holds God to His promise. And will He be offended with them? Not so, it is pleasing unto Him; importunity is attractive to Him. The Lord said to the poor Syrophenician woman, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." "Truth, Lord", that is quite true (she did not contradict Him, but she had a wonderful way of putting her case, and it was as though it moved His heart toward her) "yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their Master's table." Let the children have the bread, let them have all the bread, but will there not be a few crumbs left for a poor dog like me? Was He offended? "O, woman,

great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." It is good to draw near to God for what we need, for help, for guidance, for grace, for strength, for pardon, for mercy, for many things. You have your things, we all have our things, some of them trying things, but do you feel you can pray about them? Perhaps you can complain. Asaph complained, but his complaints did not help him, did they? He got relief when he was helped to draw near to God; that was when relief was granted to him. Have you ever been like that? Have you had occasions when you have had to turn away from yourself? Do you know what it is to be sick of yourself? Have there been times when you have had to turn away from the sickening sight of yourself, from your guilt and ruin?

"When from my own vileness I turn
To Jesus exposed on the tree,
With shame and with wonder I burn,
To think what He suffered for me."

It is sweet to feel that shame! It is sweet to be ashamed, to repent, to be softened before the Lord, to melt under a sense of His goodness.

"A sinner may repent and sing,
Rejoice and be ashamed."

I have put my trust in the Lord. This is what the man resolved to do, put his trust in God. Had he not received wonderful help here? He had been brought away from many things that staggered him. Have you ever been brought away from things that staggered you, brought to God, to put your trust in Him? Perhaps you may look at your own case, or your family, or business, or the church, or many things like this and say. What shall I do, what course can I take? This course, always this course, take your matters to Him; this is good, put your trust in Him. This is the confidence of trust in an able Saviour; this is committing your way unto Him, putting your trust in Him, rolling your burden upon Him. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."

There is something very sweet in this reliance upon God. O, say you it is all too much for me. No, it is not too much for you, it can be very easy (if that is the right word), that is to say; it can be very sweet in your heart to do this when the Lord is pleased to give you a touch, to revive your faith, and bring you to his dear feet.

I put my trust in the Lord God. But he had seemed to distrust God before, had he not in the earlier part of the Psalm, had very resentful feelings. You may have, we all have them sometimes, but now he says. I put my trust in the Lord God. All the sin, folly, wrong and wickedness of the enemy is in me; pardon my guilty transgressions, allow a poor hell-deserving wretch to draw near to Thee. Open the door, open the windows of heaven, Lord and

pour out a blessing for me; take my providences in hand, guide me and bring me through; guide me with Thy counsel. All this is the confidence of faith in God. I have put my trust in the Lord God.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee:" Asaph's mind was not stayed on God in the first part of this Psalm, but when later on He said, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory," his mind, his heart, his soul was sweetly stayed upon His God. Blessed place to be in! Have you had a moment or two when you have felt in the midst of hard, difficult, perplexing, distressing things you could cast your whole weight upon Him and leave your concerns in His hand, cast your care upon Him? It is good when we can as He enables us! If the Lord is pleased to speak into your heart He can change the gloomy scene, make crooked things straight, rough places plain.

I have put my trust in God! Nature puts trust in self, faith puts trust in God. "I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Thy works." Asaph would speak of the Lord's mercy, His faithfulness; would declare His works: His works in providence, His works in grace, "all Thy works shall praise Thee." The Psalmist said, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul." I feel I must leave it; may the Lord grant some profitable meditation, and may He often give us to feel it good for us to draw near unto Him, to feel access. May it be given us at our Prayer meetings; when nearness is given it is sacred, sweet and real. It is not perhaps always or even often, but there are occasions when those who pray feel in their own hearts a sweet liberty. It is sweet then, you can lose sight of yourself and everything but God. It will bring you to this, "whom have I in heaven but Thee." May the Lord help us to put our trust in Him. May He help us to speak well of Him. Amen.

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