

820

Lap. 389

820

preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on
Wednesday evening 24.5.72

Hymns 944, 1075, 268

Reading: Psalm 73

Text: Psalm 73.28

LIBRARY OF THE
GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS 72/N

"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".

This remarkable Psalm describes an experience that Asaph a man of God passed through, doubtless many of the Lord's people have known something about these things, and there may be some who are passing through similar exercises here this evening. The Psalmist describes the intense conflict that he felt, the deliverance that he obtained, and the resolve of his mind to draw near to God, which appears to be the blessed issue of the trial through which he passed. It is true that the disposings of God's providence may sometimes confuse us, and if we look merely at passing circumstances, adverse conditions and do not look above them, we can soon be in a similar condition to that of the good man here when he said, "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped". In his heart he was evidently saying, 'To what purpose is it to serve God? Others fare better who serve their own lusts; they appear to have their hearts content, everything goes well with them; they live easy and die easy, have no bands in their death, and their strength is firm'. All the time we look at conditions, and lose sight of that God Who controls them, we fall into a mire of confusion not only about our own personal case, but the disposings of God concerning others in this life.

I am not intending to dilate upon this particular point this evening, but to notice the blessed place that the author was brought to. He makes a full and frank confession with regard to himself in verse 22; saying, "So foolish was I, and ignorant" to speak so, to view things in that way, or come to such conclusions, for they disturbed me and distressed me to such a point that "I was as a beast before thee", like a bull in a net so to speak, or like someone distracted. But the Lord did not leave him to die like

that; a sweet and blessed change came to him as we read, when he went into the sanctuary. We may assume then that it was in this state of mind he went into the sanctuary, but in the sanctuary the Lord appeared to him, which completely changed his outlook. The Lord showed him not simply how the wicked lived and how they died, but how they spent eternity. It must have made a tremendous change in Asaph's view of things. "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places - very slippery places - thou castedst them down into destruction"; they were in such slippery places that they kept slipping and slipping until they slipped into hell. "Thou castedst them down into destruction". What a mercy it is to us that the Lord has not left us to live and die with no better god than this poor perishing world! But says the author here, "Nevertheless", - it is a beautiful nevertheless, - although I have come to such conclusions as these, although I had hard thoughts of God, although I quarrelled in my spirit, yet nevertheless the Lord did not leave me to fall. "I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand". The Lord did not leave him. There was a hand that held him up even when as he says "My steps had well nigh slipped". "Nevertheless I am continually with thee". Thou art with me, "Thou hast holden me by my right hand". Then it was as though there had never been a world, he had no thought or care about all their wealth and riches, but he said this, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory!" Not, thou shalt guide me with thy counsel and afterward I shall perish for ever, but "Thou shalt receive me to glory." You would hardly think it could be the same man; but he seems even to rise higher than ever. He is not looking out upon a prosperous world now, he is looking up toward heaven, and he sees God, I would say he had never seen things in quite the same light before, it captivated him to such a degree as that all the world is as nothing as long as Thou wilt receive me; then there will be no casting down into destruction, "Thou shalt receive me to glory".

"Whom have I in heaven but thee?" He is looking up to heaven now, and the affections of his soul are captivated as though he would say, All I want is Christ; if I have Him I have heaven,

I have all my desire. If I have Christ I have what a thousand worlds could not give me and all the wealth of it. How sweet it is. It was a blessed place he was brought to. His feet are not slipping now, his faith has got hold of his God, the world can go. "Thou wilt receive me." What a blessed prospect now lies before him, now he can say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee". Thou art my heaven, thou dost fill heaven and thou hast filled me. What an amazing mercy it is, and what a change it makes, when the cloud breaks, and the sun shines, then the clouds are balanced, and faith sees a divine hand in every dispensation of His providence. He is "too wise to err and too good to be unkind"; and that not so much with regard to the things of this life as in what He has prepared for His people. "And afterward receive me to glory". How sweet it is when faith gets a glimpse of Him, when it is as it was with the church in the Song of Solomon and as we were singing in the first hymn (944), when we are feeding with the flock, communing with Christ, feeling a touch of His love, sitting under the apple tree receiving the sweet fruits of His bitter sufferings, filled with Christ, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee"; it all comes down to this - Thee.

How about these ungodly people now? Why, they are far off from Thee, they perish. "Thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee". They are going the broad way to hell and to hell they will go unless grace prevent. What a mercy then if we know something about Asaph here. What a mercy if you and I can come to this last verse, and this is beautiful, it seems so to speak to put aside everything that has preceded, it puts it aside, and he comes to his own case, "It is good for me to draw near to God"; and so it is and will be with the Lord's people; whatever the burden may be, the conflict, the temptation, the assailments of the devil, or the darkness of mind, "But it is good for me to draw near to God". Is not this an amazing thought that the Majesty of heaven, that One Who fills eternity, heaven and earth, Who is infinite, Whom we cannot fully comprehend - that this glorious infinite God is approachable. Is not this an amazing thought? If He was not approachable by a sinner, sinners would never know His great

salvation; I believe it can be said that the marrow of religion consists in contact with God. If we have no contact with Him here we have no prospect of being with Him there. Do you know anything about these tossings to and fro, and this, "Whom have I in heaven but thee"? He is approachable. Yes, you say, but my case is a bad one, I am beside myself, I am tossed with tempest, my feet are slipping. Yes, but whatever the condition may be, it is good to draw near to God.

Can we come as far as this then? This drawing near to God is not an act of nature, for nature has no desire to draw near to God. This drawing near is an exercise of faith in the heart of a poor sinner who has some revelation of the truth in his soul, and who can realise that there is One who can understand his case, if no one else can. It is good to draw near. It may be a hard, difficult, complicated case; and you may not be able to explain it to anyone, but you can explain it to Him. He will never betray our confidence, we can as helped open our heart to Him without any apprehensions whatever. "It is good for me to draw near to God." Sometimes particularly we may be brought to a place, and we are, when we have no one else to go to. You may speak about your matters, your trials and providences and so on to your friends in a right way, and they may be very sympathetic with your case so far, but there is only one Who can really take it up, give you relief, bring quietness into your mind, strength into your heart, and peace into your soul. It is good to draw near, and sometimes this drawing near has been with a heavy case has it not? The need of your soul, or it may be your matters, your business or some particular providence, some hard thing, some mysterious thing; but it is good to draw near to God. It is good because He can help when no one else can. It is good to draw near to God because all blessings come from Him and you cannot have a need that is beyond His power to supply.

This drawing near to God is the exercise of faith in a living soul. It is not a matter for carnal reason to play with. We find the church saying, "Draw me, we will run after thee". Draw me, she says; and it appears to me that in this drawing near to God,

that is when access is really felt, are three things - first there is the Father, we do not draw near to an abstract God. I believe it is Luther who said, 'Keep me from an abstract God'. What kind of God do you draw near to? The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the blessed object of a poor sinner's faith. God the Father. He is the Father of all His dear children. It makes such a difference when we can feel this, it may not always be expressly felt, but there are times when I believe there is a sweet feeling in the heart that you draw near to God as your Father.

Here is a relationship - not a high court judge, but a Father, and a Father Who understands the case of His children. You have a bitter cup, have you? Who gave you that cup? Does not one hymn writer say,

"My Father's hand prepares the cup

And what He wills is best"

I do not doubt but that some of you here understand me on this point when you can feel in a particular sense that God is your Father it draws you to Him. It is as recorded by Elihu in the book of Job, "My terror shall not make thee afraid neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee". He will be as a tender Father who will not drive His troubled children away, but will receive them. It is good for me to draw near to God as my Father.

Then here is another point - It is good to draw near to God through the Mediator - in fact it must be through Him. It is always through Him in a Gospel sense. What does the Lord say about this in the Gospel by John? He says, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do". Here is an experience which some of you may understand a little, a new and living way is opened for these people who draw near, a new and living way, and an invitation is extended, "I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it". This opening of the mouth wide is pleading the all sufficient merit of Christ, this is the boldness of faith, pleading for Christ's sake, drawing near on the ground of His great and precious atonement. If you get a sight by faith of the blood it will draw you to that mercy seat which is sprinkled with blood, and that is the place where this amazing contact is made between the Majesty of heaven

and a poor, trembling soul, for the Lord says of this mercy seat, "There will I meet with thee". There has never been one turned away yet who has had a grain of faith in the atonement. This is the ground upon which we stand, the blood and righteousness alone of Jesus will we plead. This is the way that is opened. How sweet it is to feel a softening in the heart, a drawing near, and if or when you feel this spirit of access, it is actually in experience the efficacy of the atonement. There is no wrath there to fill one with terror and despair. It is a place of sweet communion, it is good to draw near.

Then there is a third point and that is intercession of the Holy Spirit who helps our infirmities. What does the Apostle Paul say about this? "We know not what we should pray for as we ought". That is we have not a right understanding in these matters of ourselves, but this good Spirit of the Lord opens the eyes, moves the heart, helps our infirmities, and makes intercession within. This is not to be confused with the intercession of Christ in heaven the Holy Spirit intercedes in the heart, brings into the heart a sacred unction, gracious anointing; here is a broken and contrite spirit, holding communion with heaven's Majesty, standing upon a firm foundation that will never fail him.

"It is good for me to draw near to God. I have put my trust in the Lord God". This trust is the confidence of faith. Faith is a confidence, faith can receive what nature cannot understand, faith is a grace in the heart that holds fast to Christ and is never offended. It will press on, press on until the blessing comes, even if the Lord is silent for a time, and although there is a cloud of darkness, faith will still cleave to Christ. Faith pleads the precious blood of Christ as an argument that prevails in heaven; "I will put my trust in the Lord God". This is a trust in His power to hold us up, to carry us along, it is also trust in His wisdom to handle matters for us. It is a trust in His grace that Paul found to be all sufficient; it is a sweet trust when you can feel it in exercise. You can cast your burden on Him what ever it may be. If heavy burdens press, if storms are ready to burst, if death is confronting you, I say it tenderly, when this faith fixes in the

atonement you can cast your burden upon Him, soul and body. I will put my trust in Him. In an earlier Psalm it is said, "Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him:". But we have to prove do we not that although there are many gracious precepts, we need grace to rightly respond to them. It is not nature that casts its burden on the Lord, it is when that venture of faith is felt in the heart and grace prevails. "I have put my trust in the Lord God". This is what Asaph was able to do, are we? He is not now envious at the foolish, or the prosperity of the wicked; let them say or do what they will, I can leave them all, I can leave this poor dying world, I can leave all below, I have put my trust in the Lord God. It is a very sweet spot, dear friends, when you can feel in your heart that God is your Father, for then you can put your trust in Him. It is when you can feel that Christ is your Saviour that you can put your trust in Him, and this I believe is the way to heaven.

Then there is just this, "That I may declare all thy works", - as though he would say, 'I am not going to be silent about these things'. The church says in a later psalm, "The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad". There are His works in providence, it is true, and the Lord's dear people may often be a strength to each other in declaring to each other what they hope the Lord has done for them, or what they may be passing through; but in Psalm 66.16 the Psalmist says, "Come and hear all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul". I know with a lot of religious people it is what they are doing for God, but with the poor trembling thing it is what God is doing for him. "I will declare all thy works". It is an amazing mercy if we can look upon a spot in our life, once even, and say, There I had communion with God, I had contact with the Majesty of heaven, I got a glimpse of that glorious, blessed Mediator, the Lamb of God, and I felt my poor heart drawn in a little love to Him; it is a wonderful moment, I would not say precisely that all of you understand what I mean but some of you do. It is not something that has been worked out after a long study, it flows into your poor heart

and you say, 'He is all I need'. Bless His Holy Name that the Holy Lamb of God should ever have suffered died and shed His blood for a poor wretch like me; why, they are just the sort of poor wretches He has done it for. "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". Amen.

+==+==+==+==+

... ..

