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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday morning 3.7.75

Hymns: 874, 833, 402

Reading 2 Chronicles 20 (1-26)

Text Romans 15.4

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope".

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The Apostle Paul in writing to these believers in Rome refers to a number of things relative to their church state, and their life and walk with many timely exhortations, and here in the subject he refers to things written aforetime, by which we may understand in a general sense the writings of the Old Testament that were written aforetime. The writings of the Old Testament, as you are well aware, contain a great many things that are for our instruction, guidance and edification in the truth in relation to the creation and the dealings of God with His ancient people, particularly Abraham and his seed as a separated people in the purposes of God; and a great many other things are there recorded. The Scriptures of the Old Testament, as the Scriptures of the New Testament, are divinely inspired. The Apostle assures us of this that all Scripture is by inspiration of God, not some of it, but all Scripture. This can greatly affect our minds in reading the Holy Scripture, and it can be very profitable to us when we read it even if it be in our daily reading. If we prayerfully seek instruction, even in a few verses that we may read, it will not be just a formal reading but will be an exercise in our homes that can be for our comfort and edification.

Things that were written aforetime - this incorporates a vast mass of history and sacred, precious doctrine that is unfolded in the prophecies and experience, particularly the experiences of the Psalmist that we have in the Psalms, which may be often read in family reading. Whatever part we may read it is well to bear in mind that all Scripture is by inspiration of God; and what a comfort they can be, they are for our learning. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime

were written for our learning", not just simply as a passing interest, historically considered, but far better than this in the effect of them upon the heart and conscience in warnings, exhortations, directions and in much precious doctrine. In the Holy Scriptures we read of wicked men, we read of good men, gracious men and we read of the experiences of the Lord's people, in the Psalms in a particular way, that have been undoubtedly made a great comfort and consolation to the Lord's redeemed people.

It says that they are written "for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope". "Through patience" - there is something very instructive about this, because it may be that on some occasions you may read the Scriptures and not seem to get anything much by them, and Satan may play upon this and try to tempt you to give up, as though it is to no purpose to continue reading them. This is where we have need of patience. It is recorded in the Scriptures that God is a God of patience. We must look up to Him which is something more than coming to a passing conclusion; we need grace to look up to Him for patience in reading the Scriptures because we may read for quite a time without seeming to get much benefit; and how soon it may become formal, sometimes has done so, and there has been a temptation to discontinue it. I shall always have cause to praise the Lord for a praying father; he would always read a few verses, kneel down at his armchair and seek the Lord in prayer; it seems to have affected us boys at the time, as it did our eldest brother which he refers to in his little bit of writing. What a blessing this is, and some of us may have cause to thank the Lord for it, because after we left home when temptations came to indulge ourselves in this and that, our father's prayers have come before us and prevented us.

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience". . . . this seems to indicate a waiting period. It indicates something more than a waiting period. We read of the Psalmist, "I waited patiently for the Lord;

and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry". You and I may have need to wait patiently upon the Lord, not say a prayer one day and expect an answer the next, but to wait patiently. This may be a trial of faith, as sometimes it has been, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience". They are a means of timely, gracious instruction. It is good to think of Nehemiah. The inconsistencies of the people distressed him and he said, "Thus did not I because of the fear of the Lord". Is not that rather speaking? I do not doubt but that it may sometimes appear that to depart from the straight path may present a golden opportunity, but it will never have the blessing of the Lord upon it. This is waiting in patience. There is something else about this patience and that is submission; patience appears to indicate walking in a trial, subjected to the will of God without murmuring or fretting or rebelling against it. It is a wonderful grace, it is a Spirit-given grace and it does not matter what one's natural temper may be for they vary a great deal; one may be very impulsive, and yet that one may have to prove the great benefit and blessing of waiting patiently. Not I waited simply, but patiently.

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning". Even naturally speaking what interesting things many of them are; but to the Lord's people they are a means of divine instruction, of solemn warning sometimes, and of gracious direction. There is something else about this matter of patience not only in waiting a long time for something, or in being subject to the will of God, but in continuing in something difficult, some peculiar thing, even some repulsive thing or something that touches the wrong spot; yet it is continuing, and often continuing in a path of trial that may attend one in this gracious exercise. I do not know but that some of you may know what it is to have to wait for the slightest indication of the will of God in some of your matters in life; I mean here some providence. You may have to wait day by day to ascertain what course you may have to take, if

the Lord shall be pleased to show you; and it has never proved to be the wrong way, "I waited patiently for the Lord" in submitting to His divine will. "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry; He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings," - not at once, but after waiting patiently. The Lord did this for the Psalmist and I wonder what He may have done for some of you after waiting patiently, perhaps in the face of much opposition and it may be in much trial. What a word this can be for some of our younger friends in matters that may concern them, this waiting patiently upon the Lord to know what His will may be, His will may not always be your will or my will, it may often be averse to our will but it may not always be.

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope". What comfort they have been in times of trial. When young martyr William Hooper was reading the Bible for his comfort that resulted in his martyrdom and it is very evident that it was a comfort even when engulfed in the flames. What cause we have to be thankful for our liberties. "That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures"... Many of the Lord's people when they have been passing through heavy things have read a few verses of Scripture and have been comforted thereby and sometimes this has been under very unusual conditions. I knew what it was in France in the days of the first war to get somewhere quiet and have a read and try to seek the Lord's protecting hand in times of great danger. It is a wonderful thing to have a God to go to, a God of comfort. This is a relative term; it indicates that there has been suffering, pain, grief, sorrow; and comfort is that which brings a quiet, restful feeling into the spirit. O how sweet it is. The comfort of the Scriptures - sometimes there is the comfort of the doctrine that is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Is it not by the Scriptures that we come to some knowledge of the truth of God, of creation, of providence and of many things? There is something sweet about this comfort. We must be in some trouble, some difficulty or

some particular exercise. We need to be in a suitable place for comfort. We are not always in a place for comfort, but the Lord knows whether we are in a place for comfort. "That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope". That is to say, in the careful, prayerful reading of the Scriptures a hope may spring up in the heart and this applies particularly to the promises of the Scripture. How comforting they are when the Lord's people are walking through trying, painful and difficult things. There is a comfort of the Scriptures that we might have hope. Hope is a wonderful thing; it is something that we feel in our hearts that is very sweet, especially when one is raised up to feel a hope in the mercy of God and in the blessed Gospel, a hope of an interest in it. How sweet it is to feel it is a beautiful grace. The Apostle speaks of being "saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" This is something that lies before yet it is something necessary for our life and continuation in life, for if we really got into a hopeless condition I do not think we should long survive. "We are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" Some of you may be there; but you are hoping for something, you are not sure about it; but you are hoping. Yet there must be some ground to hope for it. It may be some matter of providence that you may have in mind or some particular exercise in your soul which refers to something that will affect your future.

"That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" - that is particularly a hope of our interest in what we read in the Scriptures, of our interest in the Gospel, of our personal interest in the glorious Person and finished work of our great and blessed Redeemer. So we live in hope of an ultimate fulfillment of some promise. With our young friends there is hope of success and it is quite proper according to the will of God. "Might have hope" - this is a hope relating to the blessings of the Gospel, it is a hope of pardon of sin. We do not know how many have gone to heaven that have never got beyond a hope. They

may not have felt able to speak of assurance and yet they have gone to heaven under the comforting power of the hope that the Lord has a favour toward them, though they may not have felt to have had some blessings they may have longed for. How blessed it is to have a hope of heaven, any hope of eternal life. This hope of heaven is also a hope that, in the face of the trials and difficulties that attend you, you will be brought through honourably to the end of your journey; it is a hope that goes beyond the grave. It is a hope of eternal life that God has promised to all them that love and serve and obey Him. How precious it is! It is often upon my spirit now in these my last days, a desire when the end shall come to feel a blessed hope of eternal life, to feel to rest my whole soul upon it and feel the comfort and strength of it so that I have nothing to do but to die. That is a wonderful thing to have nothing to do but to die, to feel that your peace is made with God. You have made arrangements about your temporal concerns; you commit yourself into the will of a covenant-performing God and feel a sweet hope of eternal life which God has promised before the world began.

These things "written aforetime" are for our learning, and even that which I have read of this morning is for our learning. When the children of Israel were threatened by this great army coming against them, they felt they had no strength, but they had to "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord" - not 'that He will show you next year' but today. "Tomorrow go out against them" and what did they find? A mass of dead bodies. "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you". "Whatsoever things were written aforetime" - here referring to the Old Testament, but now to the whole of Scripture - is for our learning "that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope". Patience in waiting upon the Lord and comfort the Scriptures bring into the soul; hope that we shall be brought through and hope that one day we shall enter the heavenly city to go no more out but to join in an eternal Hallelujah to the praise, honour and glory of our Covenant God. Amen.