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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday evening 1.11.70

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Hymns 746, 92, 266

Reading: Song of Solomon 2 and 3

Text : Song of Solomon 2.14

"O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

I have as you may remember, been speaking this morning of that good place the church was in that is mentioned here in a personal way, and truly it applies to any of the daughters and sons of Zion - "He brought me to the banqueting house and his banner over me was love". This is a blessed place to be in, though not often is this the experience of the Lord's children, but where this is in a real sense then that experience is a blessed seal of an interest one day in everlasting life and glory.

In chapter 3 the language is rather different from this; for here the church says, "By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth I sought him, but I found him not"; and she rose up and went about the city and the streets and the broad ways seeking Him whom her soul loved, but she says, "I found Him not". Here she does not appear to have been in the banqueting house, but even so there was a love in her heart toward Him. My late pastor used to say "you will not find Him on the bed, this is the bed of sloth and ease, that is not the place to find Him". She had to pass the watchmen that go about the city, but still she did not find Him; then it says, "It was but a little that I passed from them, that I found Him whom my soul loveth". She found Him at last, she had so to speak to get up from the bed and go about the street, in the broad ways and enquire from the watchmen, but eventually she found Him. What is so good here, she says, "I held Him, and would not let Him go, until I had brought Him into my mother's house, and into the chambers of her that conceived me". Here it was not being brought into the banqueting house, the Lord allowed Himself to be brought into the

church and to be held by one who loved her Lord as she says, "I held Him, and would not let Him go". Some of you may know something about this when His presence has been sweetly felt or you may have dreaded lest He should depart; but even if He does it is not for ever. We pass through many changes here below, and at times have to mourn His absence and may have a long time to wait before He comes, but even so He has said that He will come; she had been favoured to such a degree that it seemed she could hold no more. "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love. His left hand is under my head, and His right hand doth embrace me." She was enfolded in the bosom of His love, the left hand of His providence supported her, and the right hand of His grace and love embraced her, she could see His hand, and feel His gracious support in matters of providence and enjoy the light of His countenance and His love in her soul.

In a remarkable way here the church hears Him coming. "The voice of my beloved! he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills". She was observant of His approach, and His rapid approach too, as a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall". When His time comes nothing can hinder Him, no mountains of difficulty or darkness or sin, can hinder Him when that time of love shall come. He comes leaping over all and He fills the heart with a sense of His love and grace, and this makes the wonderful change described here that I referred to this morning.

In this verse we have not the voice of the church, but of Christ, Who desires to hear the voice of those that are in a secret place; as is stated under this figure, "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, ." Here is a beautiful figure; many things I suppose could be said about this figure of the dove, but there are one or two things that are descriptive, as that they are inclined to make a mournful noise, somewhat monotonous in its tone, so at times are the Lord's doves. Hezekiah was something like this when he said, "Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed" undertake for me". Do you feel to be like one of these doves,

"O Lord I am oppressed", mourning over your guilty, sad condition and yet feeling like one who said,

"Dear Lord, may I a mourner be,
Over my sins and after thee"

This is a wholesome mourning with the Lord's doves, grieving over sin, feeling to be burdened by it, and mourning before Him. The Lord says that such will be comforted. "Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted". The Lord is appointed to proclaim comfort unto all that mourn. These are the Lord's doves; I understand that doves are very fearful, timorous creatures; not like an eagle or a raven, no; and does not this describe the Lord's dear people for when the Lord addressed His disciples on one occasion He said, "Why are ye so fearful, how is it that ye have no faith?". This can be descriptive, for the Lord's people are a fearful people, hence there are a number of these "fear nots" in the Holy Scriptures addressed to these poor fearing ones. Do you feel like one of these doves, fearful and afraid? To such He has a kind word, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". He has a "fear not" for these poor fearful doves. Do you feel fearful, are you careful and troubled about many things, dismayed and sometimes wondering how you will come through this, or get through that, mountains before you that you may be shrinking from, and wonder where the scene will end, full of fear and apprehension? In Isaiah 41 it is said, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed: for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee: yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." That is a good word, is it not, especially when you are passing through these waters and rivers. We are fearful, that is if I know anything about it, but these can be unwholesome fears-

"Creatures of fear, we drag along,
And fear where no fear is"

We can be distrustful of the Lord's word and promise in these fears and lack that confidence which behoves us to put our trust in the

Lord our God; Still these are the Lord's doves. He does not cast out His poor fearful doves, He still claims them, "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock".

These doves are defenceless creatures, not birds of prey, they do not attack other birds, but are very liable to attack by birds of prey. The Lord's dear people are despised and hated by the world, they are persecuted and defenceless in themselves. One says in a hymn:

"Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of thy wing"

They feel unable to protect themselves or to encounter the enemies that confront them, but their strength is in their God, and He will not forsake them, He will bear them up and bring them through. He will turn their captivity and make their wings as of silver and their feathers of yellow gold as recorded, "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold". This indicates a blessed interest in the Saviour's love and blood, the liberty of His blessed Gospel and the graces of His good Spirit in the soul, these are spiritual blessings for those who have been lying among the pots.

Just another word about these doves. I understand that they are very particular about their food; they will not pick up anything like some birds. They like clean food for they are clean birds. Are not the Lord's dear people like this, if they are given some measure of discernment? They cannot "eat" anything, they want clean provender, winnowed with the shovel and the fan, they know the difference between truth and error, they know the Gospel gives a certain sound, they can receive it, and bear their witness to it; but if it gives an uncertain sound they reject it. The Lord's people want clean provender. And what is this? - it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself Who is that bread and water of life. As He said, "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day".

Are there any of these doves here? Why, the Lord says they

are my doves even if they are at this time lying among the pots or filled with fear and apprehension, yet they are my doves, but where were they? The Lord knew where they were. He does not say I have lost them, no, but they are in the clefts of the rock, that is where these doves are. What are we to understand by the clefts of the rock? As you know the Lord Jesus Christ is compared to a rock. He is compared to this as the foundation, He said to Peter "Upon this rock I will build my church", but He is also the Rock of Ages as that blessed hiding place, providing that shelter only He can give. Where are these clefts of the rock?

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me;
Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power".

Here are the clefts of the rock, a wounded Saviour, the best hiding place or shelter that can be. May we not look at these doves as making use of this hiding place. Here they are in the clefts of the rock, or in the secret places of the stairs. This has the same import; they are in hiding, if we may view it like this, they have concealed themselves, they are silent, they have got into the secret places of the stairs. This is a safe place, there is no better hiding place than the clefts of the rock, and the secret places of the stairs. These places may not be known by birds of prey; it can be that they are concealed where they may have secret communion with their Lord.

Now these secret places of the stairs may be good places where these doves conceal themselves, but there is this point about them, they are too silent; there they are, hiding up in this secret place of the stairs. This is a figure but as you know doves are just like this. I understand they were very prone to conceal themselves in certain parts of the temple buildings, certain hiding places where they could creep in and feel they were safe from attack. Is not this true of the Lord's people?

Do they not betake themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, is not their hope built upon His precious sin-atonement blood to deliver them and His righteousness to cover them? They know where they are safe, they are the Lord's doves, they are not fluttering about in the sight of everybody, they are in the clefts of the Rock. This is a good place to be in, it is said of the Lord that "a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest". So these doves are in a safe place, but they are too silent, the Lord does not reprove them, but He wants to see them; they are hiding. What does He say? "Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice". By the countenance of a person you can often tell the state of their mind, they display it by their countenance. The point here is that though the Lord knows they are in the secret places of the stairs, He will have them to show themselves saying, "Let me see thy countenance", He does not say, let me see thy back. To see a person's countenance they must be looking toward you, as I can see your countenances now, as you are looking toward me. The Lord desired to see these doves looking to Him, with their faces toward Him, coming to Him, coming out of those secret places. They had been silent quite long enough, "Let me see thy countenance". This is descriptive, experimental language; for Him to see their countenance they must be looking toward Him, coming out in the open as it were. The Lord may be saying something of this kind to some of you, I do not know if this is so. The Lord has many doves in the clefts of the rock. What if the Lord should say to you, "Let me see thy countenance". It is not discernible in the secret places of the stairs, He will have you coming to Him, that is according to His own Word. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden". This is one with his countenance toward His Lord, looking to Him. May not this have some relation to owning Him, putting Him on, and making no provision for the flesh? The countenance here may refer to the profession - let your profession of Him be seen in an open acknowledgment. Am I not worthy? "Let Me see thy countenance", be a living witness to Me. "Let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely". So there is an attraction to the Lord's eye in these doves of His. "Thy countenance". He says, "is comely". This is attractive to Him, it is

acceptable to Him, has His approbation, He has said, "them that honour Me, I will honour". The Lord desires so to speak to see your countenance in a spiritual and practical way; come forth into the light then and honour Him by obedience to His commands. This sight of the countenance indicates His approbation upon such a one, "for thy countenance is comely", it is attractive to Him to see these inhabitants of Zion walking in His ways, following on in the footsteps of the flock.

"Let Me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice". This may seem difficult for a poor stammerer to understand. This is not to be taken literally exactly, although it can be so, and even in prayer when one is pouring out his heart before the Lord his voice is sweet and attractive, - "sweet is thy voice". The voice of these doves is acceptable to the Lord, in confession of sin. The Scripture says "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Sweet is their voice in confession, sweet in repentance, in repentance that is toward God. Sweet is their voice in their testimony to His goodness and mercy to them, as we read in the Psalms, "Come and hear all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul".

I felt it very sweet this afternoon to read an obituary in our magazine this month of a friend I knew very well. It refers to the time when she was very much exercised about baptism and her heart was full but she seemed to want someone to mention it to her. One day as she was walking up the path from the chapel the pastor put his hand on her shoulder and said to her, "Come in thou blessed of the Lord". He had never said anything to her before about spiritual things, but he just said that and walked on and said no more. She said my legs trembled, "I hardly knew how to get on my bicycle," but her soul was alive and she could not let the matter rest any longer; she was obliged to go forward and at her baptism as she passed the baptistry and saw the water she said, "The words stole so sweetly across my peaceful breast: 'Now when they search to find their sins their sins can ne'er be found'." When she was received into the church she said that it was a good day to her and they had that hymn 440.

"How sweet and awful is the place,
With Christ within the doors".

By 'awful' we are not to understand it in the sense that often it is used of something very dreadful or terrible in itself but as being solemn, venerable, august, majestic, blessed.

Here I must leave it. I would say this, if the Lord has any doves here in the clefts of the rock or in the secret places of the stairs may the Lord move them to come forth into the light, that we may see your countenance and hear your voice, "For sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely". Amen.

Address at the communion

My dear friends, it is my duty as your pastor, my privilege and my joy, to receive into our union this evening our dear sister in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. She has been helped to witness a good profession before you, and to declare what the Lord has done for her soul. She has recorded some blessed things, she has been in the depths of trouble and darkness and fear, but now the Lord has turned her captivity, set her soul free, blessed her with the light of His countenance, and given her to feel the pardon of her sins. Now we receive her into our midst, welcome her with all our hearts and pray that the Lord will be with her and enable her to continue in His word and ways and be a blessing and strength to us. How kind it is of the Lord, particularly after this time of sorrow we have had in having to part with one we loved. Now the Lord has given us another and may He bless the union to us.

My dear sister in the Lord, in the name of this church I give to you the right hand of fellowship and, although I may not give you a particular word, the Lord has done so already, He has claimed you as one of His. Now we pray that as we meet the Lord will be with you and keep you and be gracious unto you, cause His blessing to be upon you and give you peace. May He bless you to us. In the name of the church we receive you as a sister in the Lord.