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SSermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" chapel, Clapham
on Sunday morning 3rd. September, 1973

Hymns: 1105, 782, 464

Reading: Zechariah 1 and 2

Text: Zechariah 4.7

"Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt
become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with
shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."

This remarkable prophecy was written after the return of the
children of Israel from their seventy years captivity. They appear
to have been returned about sixteen years, at this period, and were
reproved by Haggai the prophet for their negligence in not attending
to the building of the sanctuary, saying "The time is not come, the
time that the Lord's house should be built" and for attending more
particularly to their cieled houses and personal concerns. This
prophecy is accompanied by a very confirming promise that the Lord
would be with them in the work of rebuilding the Temple, as indeed
He was, although it appeared an utter impossibility. The first
Temple had been destroyed by the army of Nebuchadnezzar and was
just a mass of ruins. Indeed the whole land had been desolate for
a long period until the appointed time came and the Lord opened a
way for their deliverance by stirring up the spirit of Cyrus King of
Persia to give liberty to any who might have a mind and heart to return.

Zechariah appears to have had a number of visions, most of which
refer to this matter of the Temple, some reaching forward into the
"times of the Gentiles". Ezra records how when the foundations of the
Temple were laid that there was much shouting; but the fathers, who
remembered the glory of the first Temple wept, for in comparison it
was in their eyes as nothing. Yet in a very striking way the Lord
promised to be with them, and that His blessing would be in the
building of it, as recorded in the prophecy of Haggai and also here
in Zechariah. So eventually the Temple was built and the word of
the Lord came saying, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the
foundation of this house; his hands also shall finish it; and thou
shalt know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you".

Zerubbabel as a type of Christ is referred to as one who should gather Israel, and in Zechariah we are told that he was appointed to the management of the building and that the plummet was put into his hand. "They shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven" and eventually the work was accomplished. But it is more the experimental aspect of this that concerns us. These events took place a great many years ago, but they are for our instruction and in many particulars they have an experimental bearing. I have been rather struck with what we read in the first chapter where the prophet says that the angel talked with him - he does not speak precisely of the angel that appeared unto him but the angel that talked with him. "The Lord answered the angel that talked with me good words and comfortable words". We cannot always clearly understand about these angels. Angels are mentioned, but the "Angel" here evidently refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. Angels are the Lord's ministering servants. There is probably much more than we can realise in the matter of angels appearing to the Lord's living people. It is said that "the angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him and delivereth them." Although nothing may be seen by mortal eyes, yet these angels are sent by God to minister to the heirs of salvation. They have this duty placed upon them, and this has been exercised by them through the ages of time, but what impressed ^{me} in this case was, this angel talked with him. May this not be possible in the experience of the Lord's people? The angel of God appeared to Paul as recorded in Acts 27, and John in Revelation 1. The angels of the Lord then minister to His people, protect them in times of danger, and sometimes encourage them by delivering a message from the Lord to them.

In what I have read as a subject is a challenge - "Who art thou, O great mountain?" Here the great mountain evidently refers to the building of the Temple. It was as a great mountain before them, an apparent impossibility, but they are assured that it would be accomplished, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." So eventually the Temple was completed and the head stone was brought forth with shouting - not with a "Well done I", but with shoutings, crying "Grace, grace unto it". Why should this be repeated "Grace, grace"? I would say that it is to indicate grace

in the beginning and grace in the completing, as it is in the salvation of the soul of a poor lost sinner.

It seems to be a feature of the Lord's people to often have mountains before them, sometimes very formidable mountains. As you know, in the Scripture a mountain has various interpretations. Sometimes it refers to the Church of God. "It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be stablished in the top of the mountains, and all nations shall flow unto it". Experimentally speaking, a mountain as a figure may refer to something confronting us, or a burden heavy upon us; and if we are taught of the Lord we shall probably know something about these mountains. We may not always feel to have grace enough to issue this challenge, "Who art thou, O great mountain?", but we have perhaps been helped to look above the mountain, even when we have not been able to see a way over it. Many of the Lord's people, and some of you, have had to take your mountains to the Throne of Grace, and have seen the Lord level them and make them a plain as it is here - "Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain".

Spiritually speaking, one of the mountains that continually confront us, or press as a burden upon the heart are those guilty, dreadful sins. Sometimes they rise mountains high and we have no power to deliver ourselves from them. They can be a most formidable mountain, for if one sin is a violation of the Divine law and brings us under condemnation, death, and everlasting punishment, what must the whole sum be before the eye of justice? What a mountain or burden of iniquity presses upon the heart of a convinced sinner, We see the effects of sin generally in the world and in our land more or less every day. But the Lord's dear people find their own sins to outweigh the sins of others, and are as a terrible mountain almost overwhelming them. How can a mountain like this become a plain? There is only one way, and that is by the blessed atonement of Christ, whereby the sins of His people are all borne away. The mountain becomes a plain, when that sense of pardon is felt in the heart, when that precious blood purges the conscience and cleanses it, so that there is nothing of a condemning nature between the soul and God. Sins forgiven, guilt washed away, peace made through the precious

blood of the Lamb of God applied and sweetly felt in its efficacy - thus this mountain can be made a plain.

There is also the mountain of the law. The law is a mountain, because the justice of God shines in it. It is the reflection of the Divine character and the claims of God upon the obedience of His people. Every breach of the law is sin, ^{and} when applied, brings us under its censure; this can be another terrible mountain. When the Spirit of God charges the law home upon the conscience, a sense of the justice of God is felt as it never was before in the condemnation of the guilty. How can this mountain be made a plain? This mountain is made a plain by the perfect obedience of Christ to that law which His poor people have broken, every one without exception. None can say that they have kept the law perfectly. None of us can say so, and one sin brings us in guilty. How can this mountain be made a plain? It can be made a plain when the obedience of Christ to that law is applied to the convinced sinner. The righteousness of Christ is compared to a garment. "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness". The righteousness of Christ is a sinner's justification, this delivers him from the law which condemns him. Nothing else can deliver. This is an experience with some of the Lord's children. The Apostle Paul refers to the law and to the effect it had upon himself. But he also gives thanks to God for deliverance from it through the Lord Jesus Christ, and elsewhere he refers to the Lord's people as being dead to the law by the body of Christ, that is by all that Christ accomplished while He was here upon earth in His human nature, when He offered Himself up unto death, and when His body was nailed to the accursed tree. This mountain is made a plain when that righteousness is applied by the Holy Spirit, and one can feel to be covered with it, as the hymn says:

'Tis Jehovah's own providing,
Better wisdom can't devise,
From His eye for ever hiding
Sins of every name and size.

Oh! it is a great thing to have this mountain made a plain in our soul's experience. It is a mercy of all mercies to feel our sins forgiven, and our justification secured, by this obedience and blood of Christ which levels to the ground these terrible mountains.

But there is before every one of us another mountain, and that is the mountain of our mortality. The prospect of death is as a mountain before many of the Lord's people, sometimes because of much apprehension or bodily suffering, of much temptation and darkness of mind. It is intended that death should be an enemy, the Apostle says, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death". How can that mountain be made a plain? There is one way in which it can, in the feelings of the Lord's people, and that is when the sting is taken from it. Writing to the Corinthians Paul says, "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," He has taken away the sting and drowned it in the atonement so that in the language of faith one may say "O grave where is thy victory?"

A further mountain is the great judgement day. I do not know whether this is a mountain to some of you, because it may be you are not much concerned about it. But it is a mercy to be concerned about the great day of judgement, as the hymn-writer appeared to be who said:

When Thou, my righteous judge, shalt come
To take Thy ransomed people home,
Shall I among them stand?
Shall such a worthless worm as I
Who sometimes am afraid to die,
Be found at Thy right hand?

Yet are not these the very characters who will be found at His right hand? Even so that day is before us all. The Lord Himself refers to it, and it is mentioned in the Epistles: "After death the judgement"-everlasting life is appointed to every one of the Lord's dear people individually, every one of His redeemed whose sins are washed away; but everlasting punishment to those who live and die hardened and dead in their sins. Then will be the final assessment of our eternal destiny. We gather that later there will be a great general judgement day and the Lord Jesus refers to those who will be on His right hand in that great day, and those who will be on His left. To those on His right hand He will say: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world". Blessed people indeed! There will never be another mountain after that. Oh to be prepared to die, to be ready, and to have a

gracious and prayerful concern about it! How suitable is the hymn:

Prepare me, gracious God,
To stand before Thy face.

Then there are also mountains that come into our life in a providential way. I am sure some of you know something about this. You have been brought into things where great mountains have risen before you and have almost overwhelmed you. Can the Lord deliver His people from something that is a mountain in their providences? I am sure He can. How does He do this? He comes into the providence itself and handles it for you; He appears to you in it, takes it out of your hands, manages it for you, and in His own time brings you through. "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain". Sometimes bodily afflictions are like great mountains rising up before us, especially when they are of a serious nature. Does the Lord ever come into this kind of mountain, into these afflictions of His dear people? I am sure He does. It may not always be necessarily for their recovery; though it can be, according to His will. But I know He does come and bless His dear people in times of bodily affliction, when they are laid aside upon a bed of pain and weakness, or when they may be in hospital. He can come to hospitals. He can come anywhere to the help of His people and level their mountains. Even when you are passing through it He can take away the terror from it. He can level the mountain by bringing a sweet peace into your heart, by applying a promise in time of need. This is not an everyday experience, but I know it is an experience of the Lord's people, and I know it has been my experience. As I have mentioned before, when I was on the Downs at Swanage just before we were going to France, in much distraction of mind, the Lord came into it and levelled the mountain, took away all my distraction and distress and enabled me to fall into His hands, whatever the issue might be, for life or for death.

"He shall bring forth the headstone with shouting, crying Grace, grace unto it". This headstone appears to be the last stone to be put into the building. What does it mean? It means that the Lord will complete the work He has begun. The hands of Zerubbabel began the work of building the temple, and his hands were to finish it. As

this was literally so of the Temple, so is there such a thing as the headstone being brought forth in the experience of the Lord's people. The Apostle says concerning a work of grace "He who hath begun a good work in you will also perform it". In His own good time He will bring forth the headstone. In this Zerubbabel is a type of Christ, the plummet is in his hand to complete the work where He has begun. Experimentally speaking the Lord will complete what He has begun to His own honour and glory, and to the everlasting salvation of all His dear people. Then there will be shouting, crying Grace, grace unto it, because it is all of grace from first to last; grace in the beginning, in the eternal counsels of a covenant God before the world was; and grace in the completing and bringing in to everlasting glory that number that no man can number. They will all be before the throne of God in heaven shouting with one mighty glorious Hallelujah "Grace, grace unto it". May we be of that number who will be favoured to see their mountains levelled and who will ultimately join in the triumphal song, "Grace, grace unto it". Amen.

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