

La R 197 Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill, on

Tuesday evening, April 29th, 1952

"Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it". Jeremiah 30 v.7.

God had some very solemn messages to send to His ancient people by Jeremiah the prophet. There was a solemn pulling down and uprooting and throwing down, and then there was to be a building up and a planting. God says emphatically, "I will watch over my word to perform it". So Daniel had to confess that God had watched over the evil. He had watched over the evil that he had pronounced against His people to bring it to pass, and very heavy were the judgments of God, very grievous were the desolations that came upon Jerusalem and Judah and the whole of the land of Israel. The land was desolate for the sins of the people, and the remnant of the people were carried into captivity. A long and grievous captivity it was, they were continually exposed to danger, they were among enemies who, had they been allowed to do it, would have exterminated them. We read something of it in the book of Esther, you may remember, and you have also some mention of the captivity and of the enemies of God's people in the book of Daniel. So the Lord's people of old were under heavy judgments; grievous sorrows came to them and their deliverance was nothing short of a divine miracle.

The prophet here was inspired to say, "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it". "It is the time of Jacob's trouble". "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth", and God's dealings with His ancient people Israel were such that it is said, "He hath not dealt so with any nation". What other nation had God so near to them as Israel had? Of what other nation could it have been said that "as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel"? His dealings with His ancient people were very special, very peculiar. For their sin He visited them, because they proved themselves to be a sinful people, as He said, they were a stiff-necked people. He knew when He gave them the law they would not keep it; He knew that they would depart very wickedly from Him; He knew how they would despise His ordinances that He gave them, and how they would go a whoring after other gods; that they would forget the Lord; He knew all about it - it was no surprise to Him that they turned out so badly. Their behaviour in the wilderness was no surprise to Him. When they entered into the land of promise and so soon began to go a whoring

after other gods it was no surprise to the Lord. He knew exactly what they would do, and He knew too how He would deal with them and what He would do for them, and how that, notwithstanding all the wickedness, Judah should not be forsaken, nor Israel, of her God.

As the Lord chastens those whom He loves so these people were to be chastened by Him; His stripes were to be heavy upon them. So we read, "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it", and the Lord's judgments upon Jerusalem were very terrible, "It is even the time of Jacob's trouble". Now Israel, as we have often remarked, is a typical people. Israel of old is typical of the whole church of God, the spiritual Israel of God, and in the behaviour of that people and in their condition of heart, the bent of their mind, we see an exact representation of the state and condition in which God's spiritual Israel are by nature. As Israel was bent upon evil and their heart was deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, as they were continually bent on forgetting their God, this is true of the spiritual Israel, and if we are taught of God we shall know the truth of it. We shall be brought to confess that in all that He has said about us and against us in His Word, God had spoken the truth. Not one line is too black, not one indictment too strong; we shall have to say, 'guilty, guilty, guilty'. What a mercy it is that the Lord has not forsaken His people! that high as the heaven is above the earth, so great is His mercy towards them. And the covenant is firmer than the earth. Mountains shall depart and hills be removed but the Lord's covenant with His people shall not be broken. God hath not forsaken His people whom He did fore-know, and it is an amazing thing to a child of God that despite all his foolishness and His wickedness the Lord still bears with him, still deals with him. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee", says the Lord. It seems impossible, since our forsakings of Him are so frequent and are so foul, but that He should forsake us, but if the Lord has made us His people then He will not forsake His inheritance.

We are told here of a time of Jacob's trouble. This trouble came upon Jacob because of God's favour to him. As I said just now, "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth", and if we are truly the people of God we shall know something of a Father's chastening rod, we shall know something of the time of Jacob's trouble. It is called 'Jacob's' trouble. Other men have their troubles, but Jacob's trouble is different. Other men have their troubles, but their troubles differ from Jacob's trouble in this that there is only one side to their troubles, but the true people of God have two sides to their

troubles. They have a natural side and a spiritual side, and in their troubles they are, as the Scripture says, 'exercised thereby'. A child of God is the subject of peculiar exercises under his troubles. Read the book of Job, and you find there that although poor Job gave utterance to many things in which he was not just, he spoke many things peevishly, yet there is revealed in his utterances more or less of godly exercise notwithstanding all, so that God could say of his friends that they had not spoken of Him the thing that was right as His servant Job had. Although Job had to be reprov'd for having walked with wicked men and in the company of workers of iniquity, yet the real attitude of his heart was right towards God. There was a gracious exercise under his troubles and in the midst of them all there was the panting of his heart after God, as the Psalmist said, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" So Job in his trouble was reaching out in the desires and hungerings of his poor soul after God. "O that I knew where I might find Him". Nothing could satisfy him but the living God, and if he could but have the living God for his portion nothing else really mattered. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord: that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy". And there came deliverance for Job in the Lord's own time, and a very great and a very precious deliverance it was too. How favoured was Job in his latter end; how the Lord blessed his latter end more than his beginning. But he had his day of trouble, and a long dark day it was to him.

Then in these troubles of Jacob, which somebody has called 'Israelitish troubles, there is always this - an affliction on account of sin. When a child of God is visited by the afflicting hand of God, in his affliction there is always super-added an affliction more or less on account of his sin. Sin is a great trouble to a child of God. I remember a poor woman who was dying of cancer and suffered agonies of pain, and when the Doctor said something about the pain she was suffering she said, 'This is nothing, nothing to my dreadful sins. It is my dreadful sins, those are my trouble.' The pain she was suffering was in her esteem a small matter compared with the sin that she felt on her conscience. It is a day of trouble when the Holy Spirit begins a dealing with a sinner. When He begins to set a man's sins before him in the light of God's countenance, a poor man begins to realise that he has to do with God, that he is a sinner in the sight of God, and a sinner in every power and faculty of his being, and in the very warp and woof of his whole life he is a sinner. 'Woe is me that I am a sinner'. He is made to possess the sins of his youth, his iniquities are gone over his head, as an heavy burden they are too heavy for him. As

David said, his sin was ever before him, and there is the awful curse of God sounding in the conscience. 'O what a contemptible wretch am I! what a condemnation- worthy wretch am I', a poor sinner feels and confesses, and how he can be forgiven, how he can be justified, how he can be saved from the affliction by which he is encompassed, and from the doom, the awful doom that he deserves, he cannot tell. Everything is against him. As yet there is no ray of mercy shining into his poor soul- all he can see is his sins, the justice of God, the holiness of God, the spirituality of the law, God's holy, just and good law. The law has entered and iniquity abounds. The law has entered into his heart and conscience and stirred up within him all manner of concupiscence, for without the law sin was dead. "But when the commandment came sin revived and I died". O what a dying this is! A dying to all hope in self, to all hope in creatures, to all hope of being justified by the law. One says,

"To endless death I seem consigned,
So destitute of cheering hope".

What a day of trouble this is! A poor man feels immersed in it, goes about with this burden upon him day after day more or less, and strange to say, if he feels any lightening of the burden, any forgetfulness, that fills him with alarm. He does not know how to bear the burden and yet he is afraid of losing it. He is desperately afraid lest his concern about his condition should pass away and he become careless and more hardened than before and yet he knows not how to endure it. It is the time of Jacob's trouble. And the devil is an adversary to him as we read of Joshua the high priest in the book of Zechariah, Satan stood at his right hand to be an adversary to him to accuse him. And so the devil is busy accusing and torturing the poor soul. O the things that he lays to a man's charge, brings up before him sins long past. 'How can you hope to be forgiven?' 'How can you ever expect that God will look in favour upon you? You have been guilty of such and such sins, you have sinned in such a way'. Sometimes the transgressions a man has been guilty of are brought before him, and seem accompanied with so many aggravations. There is an expression I have often thought of in the Scripture, where it is said He will convince the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed. O I have had such a view sometimes of my sins, I have seen them to be so ungodly, I have seen in them such exceeding sinfulness. Then there is that other expression, "all their transgressions in all their sins". There is a manifoldness about sin, no sin stands alone; there is a whole host of sins bound up with every sin we are guilty of. Sin is exceedingly sinful. Well, all this is very burdensome to the poor man who has this burden laid upon him, and he cannot tell how to get rid

of it. This is the time of Jacob's trouble. Sometimes he hears the voice of the law, "The soul that sinneth it shall die". "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them", and he realises the impossibility of his doing anything to rectify his past mis-doings, to atone for one sin, realises the utter impossibility of making his foul heart clean, This is the time of Jacob's trouble, and a real trouble it is - a time of grievous affliction.

Some, I know, have to go deeper than others into this, and some people are troubled because they do not feel troubled sufficiently about their sins. Maybe they hear the preacher speak of the extreme agony of soul that some endure, and they think, 'I do not feel like that, I must be wrong; I do not feel deeply as I ought to do about my sins'. Well, I tell you a prayer that I have often tried to pray, "Lord, make me to feel my sinner-ship in some sufficient measure, in such a measure as that the Lord Jesus Christ will become to me the one thing needful". It is not for us to insist that the Lord must do this or that, that He must bring us through such and such depths, but this is needful, that we be convinced of our sin sufficiently to bring us as sinners to the feet of Jesus, to bring us helpless, guilty, sinful and needy to the Saviour's feet. Sometimes a poor soul is troubled, as the hymn-writer says,

"Uneasy when I feel my load,
Uneasy when I feel it not,
Dissatisfied for want of God,
Though oft of Him I've not a thought".

Then there are such contradictions seen in the case, such fickleness. O, "Sometimes I follow after God, sometimes I carelessly retreat". I have sometimes compared myself to a boy going on an errand, and on the way he sees some flower he must pluck, or a butterfly that he must chase, forgets all about the errand upon which he is sent, and goes after the flowers and butterflies. And sometimes after being concerned about one's soul's case, there may come a spirit of lightness and forgetfulness, and it seems as though there is no concern at all, as though all the exercise has gone. Then the poor thing wakes up to find himself in that condition - 'What am I coming to? Where am I?' and he begins to long to get his burden back, wishes to have his trouble back upon his mind, is afraid of losing it. And the devil will accuse and will make the case as black as he possibly can, and it will be our wisdom when the devil does this, to let him lay his brush on as black as he can and say, 'Well, devil, you have not made it black enough yet, I am guilty of all you have accused me of and more beside'. Martin Luther was helped to take that way with the devil. When the devil presented him with a long list of his sins, he said, 'Well,

devil, it is all true, but write underneath, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin". It is wonderful how the Lord does sometimes strengthen His poor weak people against the assaults of the devil, very wonderful indeed.

Then again, Satan will come in other ways as some of us know to our cost. He will come with 'ifs', and 'buts' and 'hows' "To sink us in the gloom of all that's dismal in this world, or in the world to come". He comes as an infidel and an atheistical devil. O the terrible insinuations of an atheistical devil! He will distract and distress the mind of some poor soul who is under this heavy dealing, in this day of Jacob's trouble. Painful it is to find blasphemous thoughts rising up in the mind. Bunyan gives a graphic description of Christian passing through the valley of the shadow of death, and the dreadful things he had in his ears that seemed to come out of his own heart, by which he was very much distressed. These things bring a poor thing very low, when it seems as if everything that he had hoped for and that he desired to have was being snatched from beneath his feet. What an awful thing it is to contemplate, his Bible gone, his Jesus gone, his God gone, everything gone, nothing but the blackness of atheism. This is a great trouble to one who fears God, and some have long seasons of this sort.

This is a time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it. Salvation is of the Lord, and He is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by Him. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost". Those very sheep who are wandering about on the dark mountains, who cannot find their path, know not which way to follow, cannot see where they are and are ready to lie down in despair and die - "The Son of man is come to seek and to save" such. He goes through many a rugged and lonely path to fetch back these poor wanderers, these scattered sheep, these sheep that are driven away. He will bring them again, Jacob shall be delivered out of his trouble. O what a way the Lord stooped to walk in, in order that His poor Jacobs might be delivered out of their day of trouble! The dear Son of God came down into this world of sin and sorrow and gloom and became "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief". He stooped to a path of suffering, a path of trouble and desertion and distress, He stooped to it that He might know how to deliver His people, that He might be able to speak a word in season to him that is weary. Wonderful it is to get a sight of the Lord Jesus stooping thus low in order that His people might know Him to be a Saviour and a great One, that this word might be fulfilled in their experience, "It is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it".

And the Lord Jesus does save. I remember once how sweet that refrain was to me when I heard it sung, "Jesus saves, Jesus saves" It came like good news from a far country to my heart. I knew it was a truth, but I was in such a pass at the time that I needed the assurance of it, and I remember how my heart was comforted as I heard it - "Jesus saves". "He shall be saved out of it". The Lord looks upon His people as we read just now, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still" I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself" - ah, He listens to the bemoanings of His poor Ephraims, He listened to the poor publican who smote upon his breast and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner". The dear Saviour listened to the man's heart, to his sighs. His eye was upon his poor petitions, and "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other" - the Pharisee. "He shall be saved out of it". Through all these exercises the Lord is at their right hand, as it is said, "He shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul". Therefore it is He who keeps their head above water, as Rutherford puts it in his quaint way, "Though ye be ducked, ye shall not drown for Jesus will keep your chin above water". So He supports the soul, He gives a secret prop, lends an unseen hand, He keeps alive that spark of grace He has implanted in the soul, and will raise it to a flame. "The bruised reed He will not break and the smoking flax He will not quench. So He keeps the soul alive, keeps faith alive in the heart and godly fear, keeps the spring of prayer flowing in the soul, so that this poor thing who does not know how to speak yet pours out his heart again and again before God.

"Though to speak thou be not able,
Always pray and never rest".

It is an amazing truth really that those poor people who feel so much their inability to pray yet do pour out their hearts to their God again and again. Prayer is pressed out of them, they must pray. Their necessities, their miseries, their pains, demand of them that they should pray, and when they feel least able, it is then that they pray the best. Thus the Lord keeps them waiting upon Him. It is a wonderful thing to be kept "a beggar poor at mercy's door", to be kept a poor seeker as one of our hymn-writers has described it,

"Though tempest tossed and half a wreck,
My Saviour through the storm I seek"

The Lord's eye is upon His people amid all their tossings in the tempest. He never lost sight of Jonah, did He? Although Jonah "went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about him for ever".

the Lord never lost sight of him, and so He never loses sight of the poor soul in his day of sore trouble; when he is tossed about, up and down, feels destitute of cheering hope. The Lord's eye is still upon him and the Lord's word concerning him is "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

This is "even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it". Although his case be like that of the psalmist, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me", (Psalm 42.7.) he shall be delivered out of it. The Lord has a wonderful way of delivering His people. Wonderful it is if you have had deliverance. O what great things you have to be thankful for, "The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad". "Consider how great things He hath done for you." Has the Lord granted you a measure of deliverance? Has He caused a little of His mercy to drop into your poor heart, raised up in you a hope of forgiveness, salvation through Jesus Christ the Saviour? Has He given you a sight of Christ, and as you have been enabled to look upon the Lord Jesus Christ have you found your burden lightened, your soul somewhat strengthened, maybe not fully delivered yet, but still a measure of deliverance. You are raised to a hope - "There is hope in thine end". "He shall be saved out of it". "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me", He will not forget the cries of this poor sinner, "He will regard the prayer of the destitute and not despise their prayer". "He shall be saved out of it" for is not Jesus mighty to save? When the blessed Spirit brings Christ and the things of His grace into a poor sinner's heart, that will do it.

"Sweet the moments rich in blessing,
Which before the cross I spend.
Life and health and peace possessing
From the sinner's dying Friend.

O, a sight of Christ will do it, that will bring deliverance, that will cause peace with God and the peace of God to flow into the heart. This is the "time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it". So we read in the chapter which we read this evening, "Again I will build thee and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel". The Lord speaks in the heart of a poor sinner who is in such painful exercises and says, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near", and He helps the poor soul to seek Him and gives him to find sometimes a little relief in seeking Him.

"Sometimes a light surprises
The Christian while he sings,
It is the Lord who rises
With healing in his wings.
When comforts are declining
To grant the soul again
A season of clear shining,
To cheer it after rain".

Says the Lord. "This is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee". "It is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it". Well, may the Lord help poor people then, to "wait till his salvation come". "The vision is yet for an appointed time, though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry". Amen.

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