

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill on
Sunday evening, May 11th 1952

"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the
salvation of the Lord". Lamentations 3. 26

If anyone were to read the opening verses of this chapter he would read nothing that promised a cheerful note; he would read everything to inspire depression of mind. The prophet poured out the sorrows and the miseries that he felt as his eyes looked upon the desolation that had come upon his native land and upon his people. He poured out the anguish of his troubled soul, in language of extreme dejection until the Lord suddenly gave a new turn to his thoughts. It is wonderful how the Lord does in mercy turn the captivity of His people when they are filled with sorrow and with deep dejection, how in a moment, he can lift them up. Just as we may see around us in the earth nothing but gloom, black clouds overhead, and then in a very short space of time the sun breaks through and all is bright, so the Lord shines upon His people; "His going forth is prepared as the morning". Thus the prophet was brought to this point: "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope". And what was it that brought hope to him? Why, this consideration, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not: they are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness". Now he began to get a glimpse of the Lord's mercies; Where he saw nothing but cause for dejection, now he saw cause for gratitude. Where he saw nothing but misery, he now saw nothing but mercy, saw himself to be compassed about with the mercies of God. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him".

How different this from the language used in the former part of the chapter! "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul". Here the man found satisfaction; this was a full portion, a soul-satisfying portion. O it is a great thing to be enabled to say, "The Lord is my portion" and have the power of the Spirit in the heart, bearing witness that the Lord is my God, that He is my portion. "Whom have I in heaven but thee and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in Him". As though the prophet would say, whatever comes, whatever sadness and depression I see around me, "Therefore will I hope in Him". He saw the Lord as his portion to be superior to all

the calamities that his eyes witnessed, and that his heart had been saddened by. "The Lord is my portion" had lifted him up above it all; and so God's people have been immersed in trouble: business has been in a terribly involved condition, things in the home all contrary to what they would have them, trouble on every side, and yet the Lord has made Himself known to them as their portion, and they have found that He, as their portion, infinitely outweighs all the things that were against them. "Therefore will I hope in Him". What a wonderful and consolatory Scripture this is, I mean for those who are in the place for consolation. "The Lord is good unto them that wait for him", that "wait for Him". These are people that cannot run before the Lord, they can only go as He leads them, they can only receive as He bestows the blessing upon them. They are taught to wait for Him - every step of their daily path they are more or less taught to wait for Him - they wait for him at the mercy seat. They wait upon Him and wait for Him in the path of prayer.

Do we know what it is thus to wait for Him? Are we among those who are watching daily at wisdom's doors, who are seeking the Lord early and seeking Him with the whole heart, seeking Him with fervent desire, with a real sense of need? "The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him". One says,

"However sinful, weak and poor,
Still knock, and pray at mercy's door.

Faithful Jehovah must remain,
Nor shalt thou seek His face in vain".

"The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him". "To the soul that seeketh Him". You may feel your seeking to be a very poor sort of seeking. "We grope for the wall like the blind", says the Scripture, and you may feel it is like that with your seeking, that your seeking the Lord is only like the groping of a blind man. But the Lord is good to the soul that seeketh Him. "The soul that seeketh Him", note the importance of this personal pronoun "Him", note who it indicates. It indicates the Lord Himself, and this soul that is seeking Him can be satisfied with nothing short of Himself. "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God, when shall I come and appear before God?" O can you say that nothing but the knowledge of the Lord as your God will satisfy your heart? Is that the thing you would be at, to be able to say "my God", "my Father", "my Saviour", "my Redeemer", "my Husband", "my Friend"? to be enabled to use the language of appropriation? "The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that a man should both

hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord". "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait". "If we hope", said the Apostle, "for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it". People sometimes talk of hoping when there is no evidence of their waiting. There is a very superficial way of talking of hope. I have heard people say, if a question has been put to them as to their state, "O I hope", "I hope", but it is so superficial, there is no reality in it. and the lack of reality is proved by their attitude - there is no waiting. If you are hoping for a thing, you are looking for it, you are looking with some expectation, with some desire. If you are hoping for a thing you cannot be fully satisfied without it, and so it is if you are hoping for the salvation of the Lord; if you are really hoping for it you will be waiting for it. "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope". What was it that led the Psalmist thus to hope and to wait? Why it was this consideration, There is forgiveness with God that He may be feared; and that came to his heart as good news from a far country, as cold waters to a thirsty soul. It brought hope into his heart, and therefore he says, "I wait for the Lord", and if ever you get a real sight of the mercy and the forgiving love of God in and through Jesus Christ, you will wait to feel your interest in it made clear to you.

Now, "it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord". In the first place this salvation must be a matter of necessity. You will not hope for it, you will not desire it and wait for it, if it is not a matter of necessity, and when the Spirit of God takes a dealing with a sinner He makes salvation to be a very weighty matter in their view. It becomes a matter of first importance - 'What must I do to be saved? How can such a sinner as I be saved, be reconciled to God and get to heaven? How can I be delivered from the wrath to come and be received into everlasting bliss? How can it be?' This becomes a pressing question, a burning question, a biting question. Salvation! to be saved from the guilt of sin, to be saved from the dominion of sin, to be saved from the love of sin, to be saved from the awful, the eternal consequences of sin, to be saved from the curse of the law and from the wrath to come, from the place of eternal torment. O, Salvation becomes a great matter - 'How can my soul be saved?' Well, when this is made so pressing a question in the sinner's heart and conscience and he is looking here and there with intense anxiety, how he will try this and that, go to this preacher and that preacher to see if he can hear something that will throw some light

upon this awful question that agitates his poor mind, and for which he can find no relief though he goes from church to church and from chapel to chapel. He cannot find a man who can be an interpreter to him of his soul's case, who manifests any understanding of what he is passing through. But the Spirit of God has this man in hand, He will never leave him nor forsake him; having begun the work He will carry it on until the day of Jesus Christ, and He will see to it that that man has the right book put into his hand. Good John Bunyan had Luther's commentary on the Galatians put into his hand, and he said in commendation of it, that "Of all books, hold off the Bible, he did esteem this book of Martin Luther to be most fitted for a wounded conscience". God saw to it that he had the right book put into his hand, and the Lord will see to it that a man is brought to hear the right minister. Sometimes in wonderful ways men are directed to hear some minister of Jesus Christ who is made to them a real interpreter of the things of the soul. There was a man in Berkshire-I knew him as a very old man - who was in a state of soul trouble for some length of time, and the minister he heard was of no profit to him. He did not realise that the preacher was legal, he thought he himself was wrong, but things went on like this until a man he knew said to him, "There is a man preaching at Abingdon, I think you would get on with him." So it was agreed that the next time this minister, who happened to be Philpot, was preaching, they would go together to hear him. And when the man heard the preaching, how his heart was opened to receive it. He had never heard such tidings before, he had never heard the things of his soul opened up to him like this before, with understanding, with gracious unction. And he said of the preaching he had been accustomed to hear that the more he went to Abingdon, the worse it got, and the better did the preaching become at Abingdon, until he had to walk 13 miles every Lord's day to hear the gospel there. I say, the Lord will see to it that a man is brought to the right book and the right minister, or He prepares other instruments that He will use for His good. But meanwhile this will be maintained in the man's soul, a waiting upon the Lord. O how he will wait upon the Lord in confession. "I have sinned and perverted that which is right and it profited me not". "O Lord, I am a sinner, a very great sinner". "Lord, I have been a fool all my days, I have played the madman's part. I have sinned against Thee a holy God, I have sinned against conscience, I have sinned and done evil in Thy sight and against thee only". Thus the man will be waiting upon God in confession, he will be waiting upon God in pleas for mercy. "God be merciful to me the sinner". "Have mercy upon me, O God, according

to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions". "Take away all iniquity and receive me graciously: so will I render to thee the calves of my lips". O the complaints that will burst from this man's heart and lips when he is in secret before God. Not that he can always find words to express what he feels. Very often the deepest feelings of his heart find no vocal expression, but he pours out his soul before the Lord in unutterable sighs and groans.

So he waits upon the Lord, and he waits upon Him in His word. Where there is a work of grace begun in a sinner's heart the Bible becomes esteemed as it never was before. When a man is thus exercised he cannot let the dust gather on his Bible to be a witness against him, but the Bible becomes a well-thumbed book. I know a man in Lancashire, who in his unregenerate days was a professional boxer, and he told me that in those days his mother gave him a Bible as a birthday present. He does not know why she gave him a Bible as she did not appear to value it herself, but the time came when he was glad to have it and he made such use of it that it began to show signs of heavy wear, and now it was so highly prized he thought of having it repaired. I just mention this to show how when God begins a dealing with a man the word of God becomes a great Book to him. "I have esteemed the words of thy mouth more than my necessary food", but remember it is not just the Bible considered as a book or as a historical record, but it is the word of God as made spirit and life to the soul. "I have esteemed the words of thy mouth more than my necessary food", and if we read our Bibles rightly and if we wait upon God in reading them we shall be desiring that the Lord will speak to us. "Lord, thou hast inspired this book, do speak to my heart by it", and the Lord says, "As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven... so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth", "that goeth forth out of my mouth" and if the word should come to us out of God's mouth it will be very different from just reading the text in the Book. "It shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it". Well, if we are waiting upon God we shall wait upon Him in His word, and as sure as we are waiting upon Him we shall meet with opposition. You are familiar with the hymn which begins,

"If unto Jesus thou art bound
A crowd about Him will be found,
Attending day and night.

and so those who are waiting upon God have found that the devil is an adversary to them. He withstands them as far as he is permitted to do so. He will try to frighten them from the mercy seat; he will try to frighten them from the word of God; he will do all he can to get them to forsake the means of grace; so do not be surprised that as you seek to wait upon God you meet with opposition and discouragement. Remember too, you have a carnal mind that is at enmity with God, that is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. You have a natural mind to which the things of God are foolishness, neither can you know them for they are spiritually discerned, and you will meet with many foes from that quarter. Then you will meet with opposition from the world, and there are so many things in the world by which, if we are left of God, we shall be turned aside, and allured from following Him. The religion of the world, the ways of the world, the pleasures of the world, the maxims of the world all tend to side-track people from following after Christ. O what a mercy to be kept waiting upon Him and waiting for Him through the thick of all opposition, to be brought to this state of mind, and more or less kept there, "nothing will satisfy my heart but Christ formed within me my hope of glory". O do you wait for that? Is that what you are looking for? Is your burdened heart praying in secret that you may know the Christ of God. Paul said, "That I may win Christ and be found in Him - that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings".

"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord". That is what these people are waiting for, and the secret of their waiting is that they hope for it. Where there is hope there is faith. If you have no faith you have no hope, but where there is a true and living faith there will be hope, hope in God, hope in His Word. "In His word do I hope". "Remember the word unto thy servant upon which thou hast caused me to hope". "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord". It is a wonderful thing to be enabled to entertain a hope, hope in Christ, hope in the gospel, hope in the promises and invitations of the gospel, the hope of salvation, the hope of forgiveness. "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord". And we are told a little of how it will be with such an one. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth", "Bear the yoke", and you know what the figure is. The idea brought before us is of a young ox having the yoke upon him for the first time; he is unaccustomed to it, he would gladly be rid of it, but he has to wear

it, is made to submit to it until he becomes accustomed to it and will receive it without protest. So it is with those with whom the Spirit of God is dealing. They often resemble the bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, they resent that yoke that is laid upon them. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth", and we are told further, "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him". And this yoke that is referred to is the yoke of a gracious conviction of his sin, the yoke of godly fear which is laid upon the soul. "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach". Here is a picture of the man who is bearing the yoke in his youth, who is under conviction, is under the mighty hand of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God has taken a dealing with him and will not leave him alone. What a mercy that it is so, that when the Spirit of God deals with a soul he will never leave him alone.

"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait". What is meant by that, "quietly wait"? Can a man be said to wait quietly when he cries and sighs, as one says, "I cry and shout and He shutteth out my prayer"? You remember that Psalm in which the words occur, "Be still and know that I am God". Dr. Duncan phrases it. "Be still, and in the stillness know that I am God". And what is this being still? Why it is a ceasing from legal toil, a ceasing from carnal endeavour, from those fleshly efforts that we make to satisfy our consciences and in the hope of pleasing God, a ceasing from all our legal strivings, from our running to and fro, seeking help here and there, ceasing from all that and being shut up to the Lord Himself. Be still,

"Cease from your own works bad or good,
And wash your garments in my blood".

"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord", and they that wait upon Him will never be put to shame. "The Lord is good to those that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh Him". O then, are we among the number of those who seek Him? Do we know what it is to have a hope raised up in our hearts by the blessed Spirit by means of the word of God? "Remember the word unto thy servant upon which thou hast caused me to hope". "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Not a delusion, not a salvation that is no salvation at all, a salvation dependent upon man's doing, man's contrivance, but the salvation of the Lord. "Salvation is of the Lord". And as we are

taught by the blessed Spirit of God how thankful we shall be for that truth, "Salvation is of the Lord", when we realise the impossibility of our contributing one iota to it; not a good deed can be contributed, not a good thought, not a good frame, nothing at all can we do towards our own salvation, but it must be altogether of the Lord Himself.

"He works salvation in the heart
And forms a people for His praise,"

so His people give to Him the glory which is due to His name, to Him who, as we have been singing, "Salvation sends, procures and seals". There we have the blessed Trinity mentioned, the Father sending, the Son procuring and the Holy Ghost sealing salvation on the heart. "Salvation is of the Lord." May the Lord command His blessing.