

1508

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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill

on Sunday evening 31.8.47

Text: Psalm 89.19

"Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people".

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Although this Psalm has reference to David and the kingdom of David, there is that in it which leads us far beyond David. If we regard this Psalm merely as having reference to David and to his immediate successors, we shall meet with disappointment, but if we are enabled to look beyond David and beyond Solomon and beyond all those kings that followed in Jerusalem and look forward to the coming of the Messiah, the coming of the Son of God in the flesh, we shall see a wonderful blessedness in the expressions used in this Psalm.

We read here, "Thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people". Now, it is, of course, true that David was chosen of God to be the king of Israel; he was taken from following the sheep and raised to the throne. Although he had to pass through much tribulation, much trial of his faith, before he was exalted to that high position, yet the counsel of God concerning him was fulfilled and David came to the throne. He was a great king and enjoyed the favour of God in a large degree, and was, as we know, the sweet Psalmist of Israel. The Spirit of the Lord spake by him and His word was in his tongue, and many a sweet song did he sing concerning his greater Son, who is the ultimate end of all the prophecies and of all the Psalms. So we may consider David as raised to that high position, but then even David himself was a sinner. He "sinned and came short of the glory of God" and although God testified of him that he was a man after His own heart, yet when God left him for a season to himself he revealed the dung and the dross that was in his sinful heart, just as any other man or woman does if but left of God. And then concerning his seed, how soon they went astray. Even Solomon who was gifted with such superior wisdom so that there was none like him before or after and in all his day, yet we find he who was renowned for wisdom, also became renowned for folly. It is a remarkable thing that again and again we read in the Scripture of one and another of God's people that their greatest virtue for which they were renowned was where their weakness lay. Moses was a meek man above all men upon earth, but his failure was due to want of meekness. He became angry, spake unadvisedly with his lips. And Job, what a man he was for patience and endurance, yet he was impatient; O what bitter speeches he poured out under the weight of his trouble. Abraham is called the "father of the faithful", and those who are blessed with like precious faith are said to walk in the

steps of that faith which Abraham had, yet he failed twice in his life through unbelief. And so we might go on and see in every one of whom we have sufficient record, some blemish, some proof of the Scripture that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God".

But how good was God to David, how the mercies of the Lord compassed him about, how mercy undertook for him, how mercy subdued his enemies, and the mercy of the Lord restored him when he was fallen. O what an example we have here of the wonder and power of divine mercy, that after such a profession as David had made, having sung such blessed songs in praise of his Lord, and after speaking as he did of the coming Messiah, he should fall so foully and so deeply. Yet nevertheless this mercy was equal to the occasion, mercy restored him, mercy would not let him go. It was mercy that brought David to repentance, it was mercy that indited in his broken heart that 51st. Psalm, and it was mercy that enabled him to sing of the happiness of the man whose transgression is forgiven and whose sin is covered. You remember in the 51st. Psalm he spoke of his need of having his lips opened, "Open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise". His lips were silenced. Do you know what it is to have your lips silenced by your sin? silenced because of your faults, because you have gone contrary to the Lord, because you have brow-beaten your conscience, because you have done the thing that is not good? Maybe you have sinned with your eyes open, as Hart says,

"That mariner's mad part I played,  
That sees, yet strikes the shelf"

and have you been reduced to confusion and to silence? David knew that. "Open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise". But mercy opened his lips again. Ah it did, that sweet, that powerful mercy of God opened his lips again, so that he was restored to sing again the high praises of God, and to show forth the honour of His name. O what a miracle of restoring mercy was David!

But now here in our text we have a greater than David spoken of. We have David's greater Son. You remember how again and again the Lord Jesus was addressed by some needy folk who went to Him, who came believing in Him as the Son of David. "O Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me". But the house of David had fallen into a very low estate in those days. Who cared for the house of David? They were in deep poverty. He came as a root out of a dry ground", yet He was the Son of David, and these two blind men who cried out to Him recognised in Him (and it must have been by the inspiration of the Spirit) the Lord, the Son of David. Now here we have the counsels of God before us, His purpose concerning Him. "Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty, and I may tell you in passing that many years ago this Scripture was made very great

to me, "I have laid help upon one that is mighty", I have exalted the chosen out of the people". "I have laid help", help for whom? Why, for a multitude of miserable, guilty and helpless sinners, who have no help in themselves and nothing of any worth in themselves, who come under that solemn word, "There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that doeth good, there is none that seeketh after God". There is a multitude of such people in that helpless state for whom help was laid upon one that is mighty. He could deliver sinful wretches out of such a state, when they could not deliver themselves. No man "can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him". Why, these people who are led captive by the devil at his will, have no desire to be delivered. They have said, some of them especially, "I want nothing to do with God, with Christ, with religion; I want nothing to do with it". "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways". I knew a godly man who told me that in his early days he made his godly mother weep by saying that he would go on all his days in his sinful ways, and was quite content to continue in that course. His poor mother wept and she did not live to see the wonderful change that was wrought afterwards, the mighty change God accomplished. But O what that poor man had to go through when under conviction of sin.

Now, for these people, so helpless, so utterly ruined, so dead to God, as all sinners are by nature, help is laid upon One that is mighty. Sin is mighty, the law with its condemnation and its curse is mighty, the devil is mighty, hell is mighty, a fearful reality; but says the Lord, "I have laid help upon one that is mighty", and this One that is mighty is Almighty, Jesus is the mighty God, the everlasting Father, and therefore He is Almighty. Who is there that can be matched with Him for power? He is higher, we read in the Psalms, than the kings of the earth. Take all earth's mighty ones and great ones and put them together, and the Lord Jesus Christ is infinitely mightier than them all. Yea, take the devils in hell, all the powers of darkness, and their might is something to tremble at, it is very terrible to think of, but the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is infinitely mightier than them all. For after all, the devils in hell are but creatures, but the Son of God is the Creator. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever". "I have laid help upon one that is mighty, I have exalted one chosen out of the people". And there is need of a mighty One to accomplish salvation for these ruined wretches; He can overcome the devil for them. He can overcome sin for them. He can deliver them from their guilt, He can save them from the power of darkness, He can enlighten their dark benighted minds, He can melt and break their hard hearts. We read in Isaiah that He is mighty to save, mighty to accomplish salvation in all the needful branches of it.

He is able to do it. Christ "displays superior power and guardian grace". "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins".

He comes with almighty power, He comes with all the infinite resources of Deity, to this great work of saving His people from their sins. "I, the Father, have laid help". O it is the Father who made choice of His own dear Son, it is the father whose will it is that His own dear Son should take upon Him human nature in the womb of Mary, should be born of a woman, be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and that He should be the Saviour of His people, the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in. It was the Father's appointment. O how the wisdom of the Father as well as the love of Christ is to be viewed in this, that He appointed no less than His own co-equal and co-eternal and co-essential Son to this great work of salvation. It is written "He shall send them a Saviour and a great one".

"I have laid help upon one that is mighty, I have exalted one chosen out of the people". The Son of God became one of the people. As we have said, He was born of a woman, made under the law, He took upon Him true and proper human nature, and there is something very wonderful, and beautiful and glorious in the union of the two natures in the one person, the divine nature and the human nature, the Son of God and the Son of man, constituting one glorious Christ. There is something very beautiful in it but we can only see a little of this great mystery of godliness, but the Father looks upon His incarnate Son and He knows how to appraise His worth. Ah, He knows the excellencies of His Person, He knows the value and sufficiency of all that He has done and suffered in accomplishing salvation for His people. The Father well knows the preciousness of Christ. The Father's choice was set upon Him, the choice of infinite wisdom, love and goodness was set upon Christ. "I have laid help upon one that is mighty, I have exalted one chosen out of the people". I have often said that what the Father has chosen and provided must be sufficient. You know, if you feel yourself to be a ruined sinner, you want a great Saviour made known to you. It is not any sort of Saviour, if I may so speak, or any sort of salvation, that will do for you. It must be an all-sufficient Saviour and it must be a salvation that is glorifying to God. As well as a salvation conveying blessings and deliverances to poor sinful men, it must be glorifying to God, and the Father has raised up in the Person of Jesus Christ one that answers to all the demands of infinite wisdom and justice, righteousness and holiness. The eye of the Father can rest upon Him with infinite complacency and satisfaction.

"I have laid help upon one that is mighty, I have exalted one chosen out of the people". How this speaks of the near relationship of Christ to His people "A Brother born for adversity". He says to His church in the Song of Solomon, "My sister, my spouse". Beautiful relationship, "my sister". His sister because He took her nature into union with Himself, His spouse

because He has betrothed her to Himself in righteousness and in judgment and in mercies, and the day is coming when the marriage will be consummated and there will be a marriage feast in heaven, and happy they will be who sit down at that feast. "I have exalted one chosen out of the people", exalted Him to this office, this great work of a Saviour, exalted Him to be a Priest on behalf of the people. "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec". The Father has exalted Him to be the captain of salvation to His people. But what does this mean, "I have exalted one chosen out of the people"? What a strange way of exaltation it is! For this exaltation means humiliation, it means that first of all He descended before He ascended. Before He was exalted He descended into the very depths. How He descended in His life here upon earth, in His poverty, in the reproaches He bore, the temptations He suffered, the tears that He shed, the groans that issued from His lips, and all that weight of tribulation which He as the great captain of His people's salvation must bear, as "a Brother born for adversity". And then He descended still lower, humbled Himself even to the death of the cross; it was love to sinners that made Him willing to suffer, love to sinners. O that our hearts might be affected, that we might get such a sight of the Lord Jesus Christ in that deep humiliation even to the death of the cross, that we should weep tears of sacred grief for Him. I was very much moved on Friday, I think more moved than I have been by anything that I have seen in my life, when in Edinburgh in the churchyard of Greyfriars Church I stood before the monument erected to 18,000 people who suffered for the truth's sake. There was the long inscription and the reproduction of an open Bible beneath, and a passage referring to those who came out of great tribulation, and as I looked upon it I bared my head. It was almost more than I could do to control my feelings, but O that one might have such a view of a suffering Redeemer, who in His sufferings went far beyond all His people put together, that one might be moved, deeply moved, to weep for Him, and to weep for one's sins. "He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross", and there never was a death like that of Christ. His death meant victory, His death meant the "death of deaths and hell's destruction", His death meant the putting away of His people's sins by that mighty sacrifice, His death was defeat for the devil. Jesus conquered death by dying, saved poor sinners from its power. "I have laid help upon one that is mighty, I have exalted one chosen out of the people".

Then the question will sometimes arise, how can the death of one man be sufficient to atone for the sins of a multitude, how can that death have a vicarious efficacy for a multitude of sinners? Were it the death of an ordinary man, a mere man, it could not be sufficient. No man "can by any

means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him", but this Man who died upon Calvary is the God-man. Even the centurion had to say, "Truly this was the Son of God". It was the Son of God, who hung there, and every pang that He suffered, the blood that He shed, bears the impress and preciousness of immortal deity, and it is because of that that His blood, viewed by faith, the mighty sacrifice seen by the eye of faith, purges the conscience from guilt, and will melt and break the heart before the Lord. O it is wonderful, the effect of a sight of this Jesus. One says,

"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 when a sinner gets a view of that and sees that it was for his sins that the dear Redeemer died, for his dreadful sins; that his awful, shameful guilt was laid upon that sinless Head, how it will sink him down into the dust before the Lord. It will fill him with self-loathing, with hatred to sin, but O what love to the Saviour, and what desire to love Him, what desires to be His, and to be kept near to Him. One says,

"Hold me fast and keep me near Thee,  
For Thou knowest I'm but a worm"

"I have laid help upon one that is mighty, I have exalted one chosen out of the people", one who was in every respect qualified to perform the work of salvation, the work of redeeming unto God a countless number of sinners who otherwise would have been lost for ever. "Help upon one that is mighty". Well, the Holy Spirit, if He takes a dealing with us, will convince us of our own helplessness, He will make us know in some sufficient measure our sinful weakness, and we shall not be able to make our weakness an excuse. "Well, I am weak and therefore I cannot do otherwise, I do not see how I can be blamed since it is through my weakness that I do this and do that". All such language as that will be cut off from the lips, and all such thoughts as that will be silenced in the heart when the Holy Ghost takes a dealing with a sinner. He feels himself to be helpless, but O how guilty in his helplessness. There are three things which if they are made to meet in a poor sinner's heart and conscience will bring him down crying "What shall I do to be saved?", and they are just these, man's responsibility, man's inexcusability, and his utter helplessness. These three inescapable things, when a realisation of them is brought into the heart and conscience, will bring a sinner in his feelings to be just a poor, ruined, helpless, worthless wretch before the Lord, with no hope of any help in himself, and his feeling will be, as I believe mine was years ago, and is still, that if my soul is saved it must be by an arm of almighty, sovereign grace reaching down from

heaven to pluck me as a brand from the burning.

"I have laid help upon one that is mighty". Ah, my sins are too much for me, I am overcome again and again.

"The more I strove against sin's power  
I sinned and stumbled yet the more"

There is evil continually springing up within me. Bunyan speaks of "iniquity that would be continually pouring itself out within me" and the poor wretch has no power to subdue it. Day after day brings him shame and increases his guilt. He perhaps thinks in the morning of the day, Ah if I could but keep from sinning today, if I could but keep my thoughts and my tongue today, if I could but keep from wrong actions today, how much better I should feel about it, if I could come to the end of the day with a clean sheet. But what happens? He goes through the day as before stumbling into one hole and one snare after another, and that day is as bad as other days. He comes to the close of it filled with shame and disappointment, more unhappy than ever. "God be merciful to me the sinner" is the word most suited to his case; he is helpless. You see, this is how he learns it. He does not learn it merely by hearing the minister talk about it, but has to learn it as a matter of more or less daily experience, a sad reality. He has to feel the terrible truth of his own guilty, sinful helplessness, but O how the realisation of this prepares him for the good news of sins forgiven, of victory over sin and death and hell through Jesus Christ.

"I have laid help" - help for sold-under-sin wretches, for those poor things that are being so driven and scattered by the devil day by day - "I have laid help upon one that is mighty". These poor things feel themselves in the grip of mighty foes, but here is One who is almighty, He has all-sufficient power and He is able to save unto the uttermost, able to do it, able to overcome sins, able to heal diseases, able to break and soften hearts of stone, and reveal Himself as the Saviour. Help is laid upon Him for helpless sinners, and that help is communicated. It is not in Him, if I may so speak, to be looked at there, but it is there for use. "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion". And He does help and strengthen poor people. He brings His gospel into their hearts as the gospel of forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation, and by that gospel there is raised up hope, a "who-can-tell" in their poor souls. Like poor Joseph of whom you have heard or read, when he heard the minister speak of these things, that the God who made all things came into the world to save sinners and the chief of them, he said, "Poor Joseph never heard that before, and if God who made all things came into the world to save sinners, then why may not poor Joseph be saved?" and the poor fellow clung to it, clung to it until his dying minute. There was his hope, his gospel hope, a hope that was fixed upon Christ, upon His doing, upon His dying, upon

His power to save. And Christ said, you remember, "I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore". O He lives to make His salvation a blessed reality in the experience of poor people and He comes to them in His gospel and He blesses them. He makes the gospel to be the gospel of their salvation by which He brings forgiveness into their hearts. The Holy Spirit applies the blood of Christ and their consciences are purged. It is a wonderful thing to have lost the burden of guilt and to feel that there is not a sin between one's soul and God. Forgiveness! O the sense of a forgiveness that is righteous and just is wonderful, and how happy the soul that gets it. O it is good to think that God can and does overcome sin, and in such a way, with such a marvellous display of His justice, His grace, His wisdom and His power. "I have laid help upon one that is mighty, I have exalted one chosen out of the people". O may this mighty One, this chosen One of God, be exalted in your heart and mine, that all our hopes may be built upon Him, and that we may be constrained so to live as to be to the praise of the glory of His grace, for His name's sake.

Amen

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