

SERMON

PREACHED BY MR L S B HYDE

AT

'SALEM' CHAPEL, CARSHALTON

Text
Psalm 28, verse 1

Thursday evening
12th June 1980

Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock; be
not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent
to me, I become like them that go down
into the pit.

We shall not have to go further than this verse to declare that David had a religion that was living. It wasn't a religion of the letter; it was a religion of the Spirit. He needed God, he felt the loss of God's presence. To him, the presence of God virtually meant everything. At the same time, he looked upon God as his Rock; and in so doing, he was looking at God Who was his foundation. We are reminded of the parable of the Lord Jesus, where He spoke about the man who founded his house upon a rock. This was the place that he looked unto, when he was in the distresses that the Psalmist speaks of in this Psalm. 'Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock.' 'My rock' directed him to stability. Now there are many things which come against us in life and they seem to be calculated to under-mine our stability. What is written by the Psalmist is an experience common to the church of God. They are not unaware of the many occasions when, if possible, their faith could be undermined.

Perhaps more particularly in the 35th Psalm that we read, we see there the attention which was given to the soul of the Psalmist. 'For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul.' Not everybody would know anything about the designs of our arch-enemy, the devil, in digging a pit for our souls; that is, for our souls'

destruction. The whole purpose of Satan is to destroy the seed royal, and he will not stop at anything in an attempt to accomplish such a design. But being born again of the Spirit, the Psalmist had a foundation to his religion. There is and can be no other foundation laid than that which is laid. Jesus Christ. It was to this Rock, this corner-stone, this tried corner-stone, that the Psalmist was looking in the time of his distresses. 'Unto thee will I cry.' Perhaps he was like the woman that had tried so many physicians without success and then pressed through the crowd, saying: If I could but touch the hem of His garment I shall be whole. But whatever the situation, one thing is clear: he had a single eye to God. 'Unto thee will I cry.' Evidently we can come to this point, that he had discovered by painful experience:

No help in self I find,
And yet have sought it well;
The native treasure of my mind
Is sin, and death, and hell.

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Nevertheless it brought him to a clear, single eye in his religion. 'Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock.' We find here the activity of faith. It is true that faith must reside always in the new man of grace, that which is divine, but circumstances are needed in order that that faith may be brought into active operation. Indeed, this is the application in the natural order of things. There are many things that we would never think of doing, apart from circumstances coming along to demand that such and such things must be done. John Newton says:

Could the creatures help or ease us,
Seldom should we think of prayer;
Few, if any, come to Jesus,
Till reduced to self-despair.

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Now the Psalmist speaks as though the situation here was quite beyond him, quite beyond him. Here he was troubled by people attacking his soul, and he cried unto God. But it would appear from the words in this verse that God was silent unto him. The purpose of this was to intensify his cry; it was to sort out any hypocrisy, so that his crying was revealed as real and having the force and power of the Spirit of God in it. It wasn't a cry which he

could make and then as quickly forget for what he had cried, but it was a cry from his very soul; because having prayed, having cried, he didn't hear the Lord answer; and to him this was death, this was destruction in all its terrible armour. How do we feel? Do we pray? Do we cry? Do we cry from our very hearts? Is it not true to say that circumstances have come whereby we have to cry from our hearts, because being in the circumstance of needing God's help, we need God to speak. We sometimes hear from the lips of some that God has not spoken to them, but they do not necessarily seem to be unduly worried. Well, they should be; because in the tenth chapter of John the Lord speaks concerning His sheep and says: My sheep hear My voice. David doubtless had many thoughts about the people of God under the idea of sheep. He speaks of it in the 23rd Psalm: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Being a shepherd himself he very well knew the idiosyncrasies and variations of temperament in the sheep. Sometimes they wandered, sometimes they were entangled in trouble of one sort or another. But what was consoling to these sheep, even naturally, was to be aware of the approach of the shepherd, or to hear the shepherd speaking unto them.

Now in the spiritual aspect of these things we can see the Psalmist crying unto God and being greatly disturbed when he could not hear the voice of God. Are we greatly disturbed when we do not hear the voice of God? Should we be greatly disturbed if we were in the shoes of Jeremiah when he said: I cry and shout, but He shutteth out my prayer? Would you regard that as one of the experiences of the church of God and look at it in abstract feeling, or lack of feeling, should we say. But those things which are spoken of in the Scriptures are painful things, painful experiences. Jeremiah, in his Lamentations, was certainly not going through an act; he was not just dramatizing the situation. God had not spoken, and therefore he was troubled. It was contrary to what had been declared; it was contrary to what had to be declared yet again. 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.'

From this background we may notice the reason for the intensity of the Psalmist's crying at this time. 'Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock.' We shall notice also, in the next place, that evidently the Psalmist knew his Lord, and he knew Him as his Rock. There are many experiences described, many petitions which are set down in the Scriptures that pertain to the christian life as we proceed. Every part of the christian life is covered, every day; whether it's the first day, when we hear a still small voice, perhaps, or a stirring, to the last day, when the saints of the Most High lose themselves in Jesus quite and pass in to the holy places in heaven. Every aspect of christian experience is to be found in the Scripture. Some things may be recurring. Perhaps we might say that this which exercised the Psalmist at this time was something that recurred. He had prayed before and God, maybe, had hidden Himself; for we read in Isaiah that the Lord is a ^{God} ~~Man~~ that hides Himself. ^(ISAIAH 45:15) Job tells us also that He hideth Himself, and who then can behold Him? But he knew his Lord. Do we know our Lord, the One that we profess to worship this evening? Have we reason, in retrospect, to think upon His faithfulness and sound His praise abroad?

I often think, in connection with these kind of experiences, that it is good to remember that the Lord has told His children that they shall not seek in vain, and they shall not wait in vain. 'They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me.' It is good for us to bear this point in mind, as although the Lord may be silent it never means to say that He will not speak. Now we may reflect upon the words in the Hebrews: 'For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.' Now the will of God is certainly crying unto the Lord, and also believing that He is my Rock, the Rock of my salvation. But then, having done that which God has commanded, we have need of patience to wait until God answers, to wait until He delivers us out of our trouble and distress. So we find in these words of the Psalmist a true experience which speaks of crying, and also waiting. It reminds us of the words of our Lord Jesus as He counselled His disciples:

'Watch and pray; and again I say unto you: Watch.' We may watch for the ascendancy and progress of our enemies, and the more we watch that kind of thing the more disconsolate we shall be. What did the Lord Jesus mean, then? Did He mean anything else in saying Watch? Surely He did. Watch to see what God will do; watch to see how God will deliver; and in the meanwhile, whilst we are watching, we are to sing praise unto God.

Jehoshaphat prayed a well-known prayer when he had a great company against him; he said: 'Neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.' The Lord spoke to him in it, in the company, of what He would do, how God would appear, how God would deliver him from his enemies on that occasion. But there was one thing that he must remember, and that was to praise the Lord. When the people began to praise the Lord, then it was that the Lord sent an ambushment that caused his enemies to help to destroy one another. 'Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock.' A recognition of what God is. Shall we find the spirit of praise and thanksgiving rising up in our hearts as we think upon this great truth? Surely it will be good for us if we feel that "Here is my hope, here is my salvation, here is the only place that I can look to, the only Rock upon which I can rest." 'Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock: be not silent to me.' How important it was that David should hear the voice of God! How concerned are we in regard to hearing God's voice? The voice of God may speak to us in various ways. Sometimes we hear the expression: There is a voice in this. But is it the voice of God? Sometimes God indeed speaks in the word of Scripture. We find many instances in the Scripture where God speaks plainly and clearly. But we have to remember that the canon of Scripture is now closed and there will be no fresh voice from God. So what God speaks will be in agreement with what is written in the Scriptures. It is important just to issue a warning here, because you can meet people in the present day who will tell you that God has spoken to them, and what He has spoken to them, according to their profession, is not in agreement with the Word of God. But God will not speak anything fresh. There will never be

any new salvation; there can never be anything that is to be added. This is proved by the solemn warning which is given in the last chapter in the Holy Scripture. It tells us that 'If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.' But at the same time: 'If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.' Therefore, if anyone should suggest to you they have had a word from God, and it is outside of the Scriptures, you may know that that person is an impostor. You may know that the word which he or she professes to have received from God is not from God at all.

'Be not silent to me.' The fear of the Psalmist was that if God was silent to him, and He continued to be silent to him, then he would become like those that go down into the pit. This lays the emphasis upon the importance of hearing the voice of God. Those that go down into the pit, those that are lost, those that perish in their sins, will never hear the voice of God; not in any way. They will not hear the voice of God in the Scriptures. If God should speak, and speak loudly, warning the wicked, yet they do not hear His voice. If He should speak to them in trials, sicknesses, adversities, losses; yet they do not hear it. I say there are voices in these things, but the wicked do not hear these things. This, of course, is the meaning of 'them that go down into the pit.' What distinguishes the lost from the saved is the voice of God. How important it was to David! Is it not important to us that God should speak?

Now what happens when God speaks? In the 85th Psalm we read: 'Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?' That is what happens when God speaks. Sometimes there is a reviving. O, to hear the voice of God! A reviving. A reviving from what? A reviving from worldly-mindedness, a reviving from hardness of heart, a reviving from going after forbidden things, a reviving from going after those things which are short of

Christ. We can easily descend but we cannot recover ourselves. The anxiety of the Psalmist was just here: Be not silent to me. "Without Thy continual communication I shall slide, and it will not be long before I have backslidden to such an extent that you will not know the difference between me and the world." Now surely that is an anxiety which ever exists in the exercised hearts of the true children of God. One thing that is to be feared above all others is to be so worldly, to be so carnal, that people cannot distinguish us from those that are always carnal, those that are ungodly and are not quickened by divine grace. The anxiety of the Psalmist here, I believe, was very intense. 'Be not silent to me.' For His own sake, for His own sake. But in the 35th Psalm that we read you may have noticed that there was more to it than just 'for His own sake.' Toward the end of that chapter we read: 'Judge me, O Lord my God, according to thy righteousness: and let them not rejoice over me. Let them not say in their hearts, Ah, so would we have it: let them not say, We have swallowed him up. Let them be ashamed and brought to confusion together that rejoice at mine hurt: let them be clothed with shame and dishonour that magnify themselves against me.' This was the reason why David's cry was so urgent. "Be not silent to me, lest I bring a reproach on the cause of Christ, on the cause of my God. O be not silent unto me." We find the Psalmist speaking like this elsewhere. 'Shew me a token for good, that they that hate me may be ashamed.' A token for good would undoubtedly be the voice of God heard in his soul, rejoicing his spirit, reviving him; because reviving and rejoicing go together, as we have already quoted: 'Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?'

In our opening hymn (288) we sang about the feelings, the inmost feelings, of a prisoner; bound up in himself, by himself; and there is no joy in being a prisoner. One would not be wise to count this as a part of christian experience whilst he or she is a prisoner. It becomes a part of christian experience as and when that person is delivered, when the person has the

sentence squashed and he goes free. Then his prison experience, negative in itself, becomes a real evidence, being related to release. Then it is a true christian experience. But until you are released you cannot really say, you would not be wise to say, that your prison experience is an evidence of grace. Now, taking that line of thought into the words of our text - Be not silent to me - whilst God was silent to him, this could not be taken as an evidence of grace in him. The effect that it had on him could perhaps be taken as an evidence, the longing desire that he had for God to speak. But he knew this, that when God spoke then he would have a witness, he would have a testimony, he would have a token that he was numbered amongst the people of God. Then his spirit would rejoice and his enemies would have to be quiet. There are enemies of the soul which are carnal; or rather, carnality is an enemy which is not always outside of us. We should not really be right to blame a carnal person for the carnality of our own minds; not when we realize this, that to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. This is what David felt, surely. "If only God would speak!"

But then, 'Be not silent to me' may be brought into a right context when we do not necessarily expect comfortable words. In the prophecy of Habakkuk we find that when he stood upon the tower and watched he did not expect God to speak to him in a comfortable way. 'I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd.' 'Let the righteous smite me,' it says elsewhere, 'and it shall be an excellent oil.' Even that would give an evidence that God had not left him. "Even if He showed me my sins, even if He spoke words so severe that my very soul was rent, so to speak, in two by reason of the severity." Yet the love of God could be seen in those words. Well, Habakkuk expected to be reprov'd. Would David expect to be reprov'd? Well, the Lord was hiding His face. What is our conclusion if the Lord hides His face, if He doesn't speak? Is it not the conclusion that we must be guilty of something? Perhaps we are unaware of some secret sin causing God's

face to be hidden. You see, it becomes a serious matter when we look at it in this light; that one sin can multiply. One sin unconfessed and one sin unforgiven can multiply and can overwhelm us. Where will it end? So it is good to be blessed with a tender conscience.

Now Habakkuk evidently was looking for reproof. Perhaps he was looking for reproof because he had been lacking in his watching, looking for reproof because he had been lacking in his praying. 'Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock; be not silent to me.' We can be very lax in our praying sometimes, and even more lax in our watching. Then the time comes when a hunger and a thirst and a longing is created. 'When shall I come and appear before God?' 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.' Habakkuk was expecting a reproof, and the Lord answered him. So the Lord did speak. He said: 'Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.' Now it may seem that the Lord answered the prophet very differently from what he expected. It may seem that the words were comfortable. It may seem that he was encouraged to wait on. But we must not overlook the reproof which, so to speak, is hidden in the midst of kind words. 'Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him.' Who can tell whether your soul is lifted up? Only God can tell you whether your soul is lifted up; no-one else can tell you. So do we discover the reason for the Psalmist's feeling, the Psalmist's confusion, the Psalmist's anxiety when he said: 'Be not silent to me; lest if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit'? Now God tells the prophet here: 'Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him.' Lifted up, dependant upon oneself. You see, how easily we may express our strong feelings toward salvation by grace, and yet in our natural mind lean towards salvation by works. If there should be any

encouragement to that aspect of things our soul will soon be lifted up. But then the counsel of the Lord is given: 'But the just shall live by his faith.' 'Faith in Jesus can repel all the fiery darts of hell.'

Now undoubtedly in this verse of the Scripture David was under the fiery darts of hell. Perhaps you can feel to be in the experience of the Psalmist, if you have uttered: Be not silent to me. If you have been concerned, if you have been amongst Jeremiah's people who cry and shout yet their voice and their prayer does not enter in, then you will perhaps know the fiery darts of hell which have come into your soul, the suggestions that have come from Satan, the keen watchfulness of his eye, waiting for you to fall. O, the Psalmist says in the 4th Psalm: 'There be many that say: Who will shew us any good?' There was only one answer to that: 'Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.' Now that will be the answer; and if the Lord lifts up the light of His countenance upon you, it will be as though God had spoken. It will have an effect upon our spirits, it will revive us, for the expectation will not be cut off; and therefore, being revived, we shall rejoice in God.

Now there is this phrase at the end of this verse: 'Lest I become like them that go down into the pit.' We read in the Hebrews of those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Now that bondage, the fear of death, is not in those that go down into the pit. They not only pass out of this world after death naturally, but there is the judgment, and after the judgment there is eternal death. If you are born of the Spirit, what can be more terrible than the prospect of eternal death? Eternal death may be said to centre in these very words: Be not silent to me. In hell there will be no voice from God. The wicked, so to speak, will be left to themselves, to condemn themselves, to know nothing else but the lashings of conscience and the fire of the tongue, but no God. I say, no God. So the Psalmist not only looked at the present, we may say he not only looked at the future, but he looked at the future beyond the grave. He considered the dreadfulness of

the wicked that go down into the pit, and throughout eternity will know nothing else but everlasting burnings where their fire is not quenched and their worm is continuously gnawing.

Now in our religion is it a light thing for God to be silent to us? Does it seem to be an indication of what hell is, or at least, one aspect of it? How solemn it is for a person to drift on in religion and never hear the voice of God, never feel lost, never feel concerned about the solemnity of God not speaking; until they come to their last moment. Yea, they pass out of time to stand before their Judge, and for the first time, and the last time, they hear the voice of God: Depart from Me, ye cursed. Depart from Me, ye cursed. Such a solemn consideration, surely, was one of the things that may well have moved the Psalmist to say: Be not silent to me. "Speak to me in this time of grace, in this hour of mercy. O speak to me. Be not silent to me."

But then, the temptations that may come upon our souls are very various. Sometimes we may well be tempted as the Lord Himself was: If Thou be the Son of God. To the people of God it may be a temptation like this: "If thou be a son or a daughter of God; if you are born of the Spirit." And the temptation is to presumption. How we need God to speak to us when we are tempted to a presumptuous act, when it comes to our mind: "God will take care of you." Now you see, in our unregenerate days, God does take care of us. It just comes to mind of a godly man who told his family he had had a promise from God that they would all be called by grace. He wasn't a wise man in telling his children before they were called by grace. When we can see God's work, then we can speak about the promise He has given. But there was a solemn result of this with one of his children who was engaged in a field of business which took him around the country. He went from place to place, and obviously he was subjected to many temptations. Now and again the temptations even affected his natural mind, but Satan would whisper in his ear: "It's all right. Your father's had a promise about you. You'll be

all right." Well, as things turned out, he was all right. But the time came when the Lord brought before his view all the sins of his youth, all the sins of his life; and then he read this precious Scripture: The Lord waiteth that He may be gracious unto you.^A What humility was brought into that man's mind, into his soul. He had not been worried about God speaking; he just consoled himself that as his father had had a promise about him, he would be saved.

Now if that is true concerning any of you, you cannot be saved by believing in a promise given to your father or to your mother. You need God to speak to you.

You know, the Psalmist was anxious to hear the voice of God; the Psalmist was anxious to know that God had not left him; he was anxious to have the knowledge that he was a child of God, that he was a son of God most High. How God will answer these urgent petitions in times of temptation we cannot necessarily, or accurately say. But God does answer. Sometimes He answers by giving you that mark of every child of God, the mark which only God can put upon you; His chastening hand. 'His chastening therefore prize, the privilege of a saint.' Now God's chastening must ever be regarded as loving chastening, loving chastening; and you will feel it to be so, too. The chastening hand was upon the Psalmist here. 'Be not silent to me.' You see, sometimes when people think about chastening, they look upon people; they see them afflicted, they see them perhaps afflicted over many years; they see them have losses in their families, they see them have reverses in business. And how many will join in the clamour that God is chastening him! But God may not be chastening him, except it be to bring that person into a correct balance of things. But what does the man feel in his own soul? 'Be not silent to me.' That is the chastening. That means much more to the man or woman or child under the chastening hand of God than all the pain of affliction, all the adversity, all the losses and all the trials into which they may come. 'Be not silent to me.'

If the Lord speaks, then we shall have consolation in our darkest paths,

in our heaviest trials. 'I am with thee, Israel, passing through the fire.' It will be sufficient. This is what the Psalmist was seeking after. This is what the child of God seeks after. "Be not silent to me. Speak to me in this present trial. Show me there is a purpose and a need for it. Show me why it has come upon me." God gives His own commentaries, you know. It can be very painful to us sometimes when people give their commentaries as to why this has happened and why that has happened, for they do not know the pain of the soul because of God not speaking. Sometimes when God doesn't speak, then other people seem to speak the louder. But if God speaks, then other people can speak as loud as they like, for God's voice is a powerful voice and will drown the multitude of voices that may try to cast you down.

Can we therefore see the reason for the Psalmist's intensity here?

'Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock; be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit.' 'Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth.' May we hear His voice, and have that question put out of question, that we are numbered amongst the sheep of Christ.

Amen.