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SUBSTANCE OF A SERMON PREACHED BY MR. OLDFIELD, AT GOWER
STREET CHAPEL, LONDON, ON SUNDAY, 6th DECEMBER, 1891

Text: "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters" (Psalm xviii.16).

This psalm was "a psalm of David, the servant of the Lord, who spake unto the Lord the words of this son in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of Saul." It is, then, a psalm which contains an epitome of David's experience, almost a lifelong experience. The day referred to was evidently a day towards the close of his life, when he was favoured by the Holy Spirit of God to take a retrospect of all the way the Lord had led him, when there were brought to his mind the many things which God had done for him, and he felt constrained to give utterance to those things for the glory of his God and the encouragement of His tried people. The Lord has occasionally favoured His people with such a day as this. Jacob had such a day. His life was a very trying one, a very chequered one. He at one time said: "All these things are against me" (Gen. xlii.36), as though nothing was right, but everything wrong. Did he continue in this state of mind? No; he did not. A day came when he spake very differently of his God and of the dealings of his God. A day came, as you know, when he blessed all his sons and all his grandsons; but, above all, he blessed and praised the name of his God - not for everything having been against him, but for everything having been for him. He blessed his God because he clearly saw what mistakes he had made during his life - what wrong conclusions he had come to concerning the dealings of God with his soul. He blessed his God because, notwithstanding all his own mistakes, everything had been done rightly by God, for His own glory and for His servant's good. And then he says: "The God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads" (Gen. xlvi. 15,16). O that they may be blessed as I have been blessed! We must come into trials before we can come into blessings. Trials are as much ordered of God as are blessings; and we must have the bitter before we have the sweet. And so we find that, when the sweets came, Jacob could die sweetly, he could die comfortably: "he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost" (Gen. xlix.33). Oh, what a day was that to him; and what a day this must have been to David when he was enabled to look back and see the way the Lord his God had led him in the wilderness! He had had great afflictions, sorrows, and temptations; but how sweetly and blessedly he speaks of the Lord his God, of the wonders He had wrought for

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him, of the consolations He had given him, of the blessings He had bestowed upon him in the world - in a word, that He had ordered all things right for him. He therefore begins the Psalm by saying, "I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength"; and why would he love Him? Because, as he tells us, "the Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." I dare say some of you would like to be able to say this with the same measure of confidence and assurance that David said it; but you must have his trials, afflictions, sorrows, and depths before you can have his blessings, consolations, or his peace. You must come into trials to prove these things, or it is not possible for your soul to prove them. The Psalmist had proved them. One might have said to him: "These are great things to say, David. Can you prove the truth of them?" He rejoins, as it were: "I will let you see whether I can or not, and then you may judge for yourselves whether God is what I have said He is." Then he goes on to tell what the Lord has done for him, and he begins at the beginning. What a favoured place when one has got a right beginning, and can go back to the time when the Lord began with their never-dying soul.

Now the Psalmist tells us how his religion began, and it was when the sorrows of death compassed him. And this is how my religion began, and I believe this is how the religion of many of you began. "The sorrows of death compassed me." Oh, when life enters the soul, then the soul feels death, then death is known as it was not known before. A feeling sense of death and dread of eternal death, which leads one to prayer and supplication, is an evidence of divine life in the soul. "And the floods of ungodly men (margin, Belial) made me afraid." The spirit of Belial in one's own soul, the spirit of Belial always around us, made us afraid. How well some of us know that this was our experience! I can say that it was mine. I was surrounded with ungodly men when earning my bread, hearing their oaths and curses from day to day and, more or less, from hour to hour, and feeling what I was myself. Oh, what fear this worked in my heart and soul! It seemed as though - what with the sorrows of death and the floods of Belial - there was not a shadow of hope of my soul's salvation. But what is impossible with men is possible with God.

Then, as though this were not enough, he says: "The sorrows of hell (of Satan, the wrath of God upon the guilty conscience, and the worm that never dies) compassed me. Each child of God knows, even in this time state, in a faint measure, what the ungodly know in the bottomless pit. They know what a guilty conscience is; they know what the apprehension of wrath

is if ever they have had a drop of it falling upon them - only one drop of it falling upon them, I think, would send them in a moment to the bottomless pit. There is an apprehension, a faint knowledge of it; and so David says: "the sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me." He was praying, searching the Scriptures, and death was written upon everything, death appearing upon every side, all the sentences of Scripture bearing upon death, damnation, and curses standing out in large letters before him.

Notwithstanding all this, he goes on to say: "In my distress I called upon the Lord." Ah, was it not the case with you? It was with me in my distress, indescribable, terrible distress, "I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: He heard my voice out of His temple." Did he know then that the Lord heard it? Did he at that time know that God heard his voice out of His temple? Did you know then? I did not know then. I cried, but I did not know then that God heard my voice out of His temple; but God has revealed to me and proved to me since that "He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him, even into His ears." Then what follows? Did mercy come? Did love flow? Did pardon enter the heart? Did salvation flow at once into the soul? Oh, no; but he goes on to speak as though matters became worse and worse.

"The earth shook and trembled." But, David, did the earth shake and tremble, or was it not you that shook and trembled? I have shaken and trembled when I have thought the earth shook and trembled. Ah, many of God's people know what it is to shake and tremble, and it seemed as though the earth was shaking and trembling. Then apprehension seizes the mind, and it seems as though it will open its mouth and swallow one up as it did Korah, Dathan, and Abiram: but it did not swallow up David. "The foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was wroth." Not wroth with David, but with his transgressions. God is not wroth with His people, but with their sins. He has loved His people with an everlasting love, but He never loved their sins or iniquities. No, never!

The the Psalmist goes on to describe the majesty and power and glory of God in His law and in His dealings with some of His people more especially than with others. He shows what a number of things took place. "Then the channels of waters were seen." What channels of waters? Why, his own heart. The channels of waters of sin and iniquity in his own heart. There was enough in himself to drown a world, enough in himself not only to send his own soul to hell, but the iniquities of his heart (were it possible for the iniquities of his heart to bear upon a whole world) were enough to send the world to hell. There was enough in the sin of Adam to drown his whole race,

and there is enough in our hearts and minds to destroy a world. "The channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at Thy rebuke." The foundation that the world was making for their souls' salvation was discovered. will discover the foundation we have laid for our own souls; He will discover its rottenness, its sandy nature, before He discovers the foundation that He Himself has laid in His own dear Son for His church and people. I never saw Christ as the foundation God had laid until the false, rotten, sandy foundation which I had laid for my soul was discovered to me.

And then we read: "At Thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Thy nostrils." Oh, there is a rebuke in God, and there is a blast in His breath; for it blows this sandy foundation away - scattering it, as it were, to the winds of heaven. And until these foundations are taken away, there will not be a sense of being built upon Jesus Christ the foundation which God has laid in Zion.

This brings us to the words of our text: "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters." He did not send from above, then, until the channels of waters were seen and the foundations of the world were discovered. When one is almost entirely beside himself, God appears on the scene in a different way, and there is a revelation of His own dear Son. Not only so, but there is an application of the merit of Jesus and a bringing of the sensible sinner into the consolation and enjoyment of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters." Now we may take for our headings the verbs that are in our text:

- I. He sent (from above);
- II. He took (me);
- III. He drew (me out of many waters). We have, then, sending, taking, and drawing.

I. "He sent from above." Then there is in the first place a sending. Who has sent? God the Father. He is not that Person which many take Him to be, He is not that hard One "reaping where He has not sown, and gathering where He has not strawed." Oh, no. He is not unkind, unjust, harsh, cruel; but He is a God of love. He sent a salvation which rose to the height of God the Father, a salvation which flows from the heart of the eternal Father. Hence we read: "God so loved the world (or His people in it) that He gave His only begotten Son." Here is the sender; it reveals the Father's love, His faithfulness, His determination to save, His pleasure in the salvation of His people. But there is not only a sender, there is One sent. "He sent from above." And whom did He send? He did not command someone below to run to the rescue, but He

sent from above. Whom did He send? Not an angel, not an archangel. Not all the angels above combined would have been of any use in a work so great as the salvation of such a sinner as David felt himself to be, as I have felt myself to be, and as, no doubt, many of you have felt yourselves to be. Angels are "ministering servants sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb.i.14). But He put one on the field, He sent one greater than them all, wiser, more suitable than all the thousands of angels. He sent, then, His own dear Son, His own co-eternal and co-existent Son. "He sent from above." He sent Jesus Christ.

Now what I apprehend the psalmist to mean here is, that He opened to David's heart what had been done in the counsels of eternity as to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ - in His incarnation and the whole of His work and life, burial, resurrection, ascension, and glorification. He opened these things up to his view. And there is no comfort for a sensible sinner until there is some opening up of this glorious Person, the Lord from heaven, sent by His Father.

What an expression is this - "from above" - far above devils, men or angels! This Person who was sent occupied the highest place before He was sent; He has one glory with the Father and the eternal Spirit. He is the most High; He is sent from above; He is not beneath a creature, but above every creature. He is not above God, for He is God Himself sent from above. He is a Servant (Isa.xlii.1), yet one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. But where did He send Him? He sent Him beneath. Who can tell how low Jesus Christ came in His condescension, humiliation, incarnation, sufferings, death? He came unto His people, and He came under the law, that His people who were under it might be redeemed (Gal.iv.4,5). He came down as low as they were - yes, and lower than they were; He got underneath His people, He is underneath His people (Deut.xxxiii.27). Jesus Christ was sent from heaven, and was, so to speak, sent below the foundations that hell had laid for the destruction of God's chosen: as we read, "deeper than hell" (Job.xi.8). He came down below, got under, exploded and so destroyed all the works of the devil.

"He sent from above." He sent Him from above to do something. I cannot put it in more graphic and striking language than that used by Daniel: "To finish the transgression" (ix.24). What a strong word that is - "finished"! It is a plain, homely word; everybody understands the meaning of "finished". Sometimes it is used as meaning death, one having breathed his last breath. And so Jesus Christ has finished transgression; He has silenced, subdued, absolutely quelled its destroying power. Sin now has no damning power over those for whom Christ has died. He has finished transgression. But

there is much in it to distress our hearts and fill us with fear now; but, so far as its final and eternally destructive power is concerned, God has finished it. What a work, then, He has accomplished, and thus, says Daniel, "made an end of sin." Striking expression! In the margin it reads, "seal up"; then it is not only "sealed up", but He has made an end of it. As one writing a letter seals it up and posts it, so it is no longer the sender's; it belongs to the person to whom it is sent. Jesus has sealed up the sins of His people, put them in a bag and cast them behind His back (Isa.xxxviii.17), into the depths of the sea (Micah vii.19), never to return. He hath made "reconciliation for iniquity" (Dan.ix.24). Oh, what a reconciliation this is! A sensible sinner, such as Davud was, needs reconciliation; he feels himself to be at war, there is conflict within, and so he is concerned about peace. God is not at war with His people; it is His people that are at war with Him. The work of Jesus Christ is to make reconciliation for the sins of His people. He was sent from above to do this and to bring in everlasting righteousness. The Lord, then, will not have His people anyhow. Do they come naked before Him at His footstool? No; He will have them clothed with the righteousness of His own dear Son. He will weave it ready for them, and give them faith to receive it and to put it on. Thus there are both the revelation and the application of it:

II. "He took me." This brings us more particularly to the enjoyment of divine things. "He took me." What a sweet word it is! He did not steal nor borrow me. He did not ask me whether I would go: "He took me." Here, then, is a God of sovereignty. If He had left us until we were willing, He would have waited a long time; but He comes to His people and He takes them. As the Apostle puts it, He apprehends them: "for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phil.iii.12). So God comes to His people to apprehend them; and He comes just as an officer of the Crown comes to a law-breaker, puts his hand upon him, says, "You are a law-breaker", and charges him with his guilt. Thus the Lord takes hold of His people, and charges home on their consciences their guilt. They cannot deny what God charges them with, for they know they are guilty.

Where did He take me? He took me to prison, and if God has taken you, He has taken you to prison. I dare say you feared, as I did, that you were going to death as well as to prison. Did it end in death? No; death did not come. God brought me before His tribunal, judged me in the court of justice, revealed to me how He could maintain His righteous law and yet pardon me. When God takes His people thus to prison, it is to proclaim liberty, to bring them out of their present difficulty honourably, and to make them feel that they are

sinner saved by free, rich, and sovereign grace. This taking, then, is for God's honour and glory, for the soul's consolation and salvation, and, finally, for its glorification.

As I have said, this is an act of divine sovereignty, for we find that God takes whom He pleases. "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left" (Matt.xxi.40,41). Sometimes two persons will be sitting in a pew; one is taken, the other is left. God has a right to take whom He pleases.

And there is not only a sovereignty in His taking, but there is an omnipotence. He was able to take me. We by nature are unwilling for God to take us in His own way and by His own grace; but He is mighty, and there is omnipotence. He took Mary Magdalene, He took Saul of Tarsus. Then they were no longer what they were before being taken. The thief on the cross was no longer what he was before being taken. The Lord takes from something, then, and He takes to something: He takes from the powers of darkness into the kingdom of His own dear Son; He takes out of an ungodly world into His own church and His own family.

There is also immutability in this; for the psalmist does not say: "He took me, and then, finding what I was, how unworthy, how good for nothing, what a vile wretch I was, He thrust me away again!" He does not say that. The word here implies "kept." He has retained me, He still has me; He is mine, and I am His, notwithstanding ~~all my fears~~, all the workings of unbelief, and anything else found in my depraved nature. He has not cast me away; "for the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away" (Mal.ii.16).

God's taking is wonderfully illustrated in His Word. We read of the Lord causing "a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen.ii.21-23). This taking, then, was to make a woman and bring her unto the man. They loved each other and embraced one another. So with the man Christ Jesus: His church is His spouse; they love Him, they cleave unto Him, and they will cleave unto Him.

This taking is again set forth in the case of Enoch: "he was not; for God took him" (Gen.v.24). God came down from heaven to earth and took him body and soul. Is not this a grand taking? Is not this God's wonderful power and favour? This taking shows us how soon God can fit not only our souls but also our bodies for heaven. How quickly He can change them, make them meet for heaven, and take them there! I do not know that

Enoch had five minutes' notice as to when he should go, but God took him.

The working of our God is wonderful. Some He has taken slowly; He has enabled them to speak of His having taken them above (that is, in a spiritual sense), although they cannot do it so sweetly and feelingly as they would like. And if God has laid His hand upon us, it is still upon us. Whatever our darkness and fears may be, whatever our sorrows and trials may be, whatever unbelief and Satan may suggest - if God has taken us in hand, He still has us in hand, and He will continue until He bids us come up higher and enter into the joy of the Lord.

III. "He drew me." He drew me out of many waters. What a precious word is this! "He drew, and does not He draw His people? But how solemnly His word speaks about the wicked! He drives the wicked. "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death" (Prov.xiv.32). "The ungodly... are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (Psa.i.4-6).

Though God lets His people sink very low, they do not get beyond the reach of His arm. They may have a thousand fears, and Satan may suggest a thousand things to them; but God has a cord to reach them: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hos.xi.4). Here is a threefold cord that Solomon speaks about: "a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccles. iv.12); it is a very strong cord. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: here is the threefold cord of divine love by which God draws His people, and draws them out of many waters.

Just a word in conclusion about the waters. These are waters of trouble. He has drawn me out of many waters- out of the waters of sin, the waters of Belial, the waters of an ungodly world, and the waters of apprehended wrath. I feared these waters of His wrath would enter into my soul; but He showed me that His wrath was appeased, that His dear Son had put it away, and so He drew me out of many waters. Since then I have been in many waters, so have some of you, and so had David: waters of bereavement, trials, losses, crosses, waters of one torrent and then of another have come, as the psalmist says: "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts: all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me" (Psa.xlii.7). But He drew us; His cord was round us, the cord of His love. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee" (Jer.xxxi.5). And if He draws out of

many waters of trouble, He will draw into many waters of pleasure and into many waters of joy. The waters of pleasure are spoken of in God's word as well as the waters of trouble. "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures (Psa.xxxvi.8). If He draws out of the bitter waters of sin, He will draw into the sweet waters of grace. If He draws out of the waters of the law, He will draw into the waters of the gospel; if He draws out of the waters of wrath, He will draw into the waters of love; and if He draws out of the waters of death, He will draw into the waters of life. Our experiences may vary in the measure of both the dark side and the bright side - one may have the bitter waters, another the sweet waters - but there is more or less of this experience in the hearts of all God's family. They all know something of the bitterness of sin, and they all know, sooner or later, the sweets of grace.

May the Lord grant His blessing!

Amen.