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PASTOR'S ANNIVERSARY SERVICE

The substance of a sermon preached by Mr.J.O.Pack at Ebenezer, Clapham, on  
Monday evening, 27.5.74.

Hymns 180, 139, 721.

Reading: Hebrews 11

Sermon: Hebrews 11,v.27. "For he endured, as seeing him who is invisible".

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If I am not deceived I believe the Lord dropped this word into my heart in the early hours of this morning, when this service was lying with weight upon my heart, and as the Lord may be pleased to help we want to speak a little on it in three particular aspects: as it applied to God's faithful servant Moses of old, secondly as it applies to your faithful pastor and minister, and thirdly as it applies, we believe, to the whole church of God, and many of you here doubtless who have come today to join with our friends in the commemoration of our aged friend, the Lord's servant's anniversary of his long pastorate amongst you. I am sure he will not object to the term 'aged' for it is indeed of the Lord's mercy that he has been spared to you so many years. The sweet Psalmist of Israel, David, only lived to the age of 70, and yet you will find in Psalm 71 which appears to be one of the last Psalms that he ever penned, he says, "Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not", and again in that Psalm he speaks of this, "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth", but as you will see if you turn to that Psalm in private though he was old and greyheaded still his enemies were watching for his halting, saying, "persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him".

First of all we would like to look a little at this as it concerns Moses of old, "for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible". O! what Moses had to endure even from his early days! and what temptations during those years when he was brought up amidst the pride, luxury and learning and treasures of Pharaoh's palace. Yet we read that he was given grace to choose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt". A year or two ago in London there was an exhibition of some of the treasures that were found in the tombs of the early Egyptian Monarchs, some very wonderful things which may have been some of the very

things that Moses himself saw. Many people queued for long hours to see them and no doubt looked on them with covetous eyes, but Moses was enabled to view them as Paul viewed his righteousness and his earthly attainments, as "Dung that I may win Christ, and be found in Him". In view of the temptations of Pharaoh's palace in which doubtless many, many snares were laid in his way - for we must remember he was a man of like passions as we are - what conflict he endured we know but little of beyond what we have in this wonderful chapter. Again what a trial it must have been, knowing as we well believe he did know that he was to be the deliverer of God's people from Egypt as Stephen tells us, "he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them, but they understood not". So it was evidently made clear to Moses during those years he spent in Pharaoh's palace that that was not to be his resting place, and he chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God", but God was there fitting and preparing him for that great work, for the deliverance of His people, out of Egyptian bondage, but his brethren did not understand this. But what a long trial those forty years - at least the latter part of them, must have been to the faith of God's faithful servant, for we read he "was faithful in all his house". Then he had to flee to the backside of the desert, where he kept the sheep of Jethro his father-in-law for another long forty years. No doubt the same word was true of him as it is recorded concerning Joseph when he lay in the prison house in Egypt, "the word of the Lord tried him". We are not told, and we do not want to be left to conjecture, but knowing something of the conflict of God's people, no doubt he often wondered during that forty years, 'can it be true that I am to be the deliverer of the Lord's people out of Egypt, how can this be the way, a poor fugitive being hidden in the backside of the desert?'; yet "he endured as seeing Him who is invisible". We are not told what revelations Moses must have had while yet esteemed as the son of Pharaoh's daughter amid all the grandeur of Pharaoh's palace, but I feel it is clear that he must have seen something of the beauty and glory of the Lord Jesus, for he esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward"; and so in the same way but under vastly changed circumstances he endured those forty years in the backside of the desert. But O! what he had to endure when he came before Pharaoh! One sign after another and still Pharaoh hardened his heart, one plague after the other and still that unrelenting monarch would not bow

until at last he said to Moses, "Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die". What a trial there he endured "as seeing Him who is invisible". Following this another long forty years' journey in the wilderness, and they had not travelled far before they came to Pihahiroth. What did the people say when they saw the Egyptians marching on them? "And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?" They would gladly have turned back into Egypt, and then later we read how they murmured when they came to Rephidim and there was no water, and the people spoke of stoning Moses but again "he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible". So if you follow his history through, you will find all the murmurings and other various trials he had to endure, until in one place he cried out saying: "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if Thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in Thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness". That, however, was not the end of his trials. Again we read of the rebellion of Korah and Dathan; O, what poor Moses suffered then as they said to Moses and Aaron, "Ye take too much upon you" - and that was not all, for even Aaron and Miriam rose against him eventually. O what a trial that must have been to poor Moses; he might have understood the rebellion of the people, he might have understood the opposition of Korah and Dathan, but when even Aaron and Miriam rose against him, what a trial that must have been, but still "he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible". He had evidently been given a faith's view of Christ, as Abraham saw Christ's day and was glad, and looked forward by faith to the coming incarnation of Christ. What these early patriarchs and prophets and psalmists were favoured to see by faith of the coming Messiah we can have no conception of, but they must have been given very clear views as they looked forward to the fulfilment of the promise given to our fallen parents in Eden's garden, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, and as they looked forward to that slain Lamb as typified by Abel's offering, for "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain", not excellent indeed in its outward appearance. I believe Cain's sacrifice of the precious fruits of the earth was outwardly far more pleasing in appearance than that slain lamb of Abel, but it was what it pre-figured - the Lamb of God - that precious Lamb of which John the Baptist testified many centuries later as he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and as it was revealed to him that He was

the Christ, exclaiming: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world". There is something very striking in the experience of John the Baptist, for though he had every advantage naturally, of knowing of the wonderful birth of Mary's son Jesus, having no doubt heard of it through his own mother, Elizabeth, yet we read plainly in the first chapter of John's Gospel of him twice saying "and I knew Him not". "And I knew him not: but he that sent me, to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God". How true it is that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.

Moses "endured, as seeing Him who is invisible", but we must not understand by that that Moses was blessed every day with such views as he had of the glory of God as on that particular occasion when the Lord commanded him to lead the people out of Egypt and he said, "Thou hast not let me know whom Thou wilt send with me....And He said, My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest. And he said unto Him, If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence"; but even that did not satisfy Moses who prayed for one more blessing - "I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory", as much as to say, if I get a sight of Thy glory that will strengthen me for this great work. The Lord said, "Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock. And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by. And I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts; but My face shall not be seen". The Lord passed by and declared His name, and that is the way the Lord manifests His glory still to His dear people. "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation", and under that declaration of God's glorious name Moses saw all that he longed for, and that he desired; "Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped" - did not ask for anything else. Yes, "he endured as seeing Him who is invisible", but he did not get a sight like that of the Lord Jesus every day or of the glory of God, but he would never forget that, nor

did he ever forget those early manifestations that he had of the glory of God whilst I believe he was yet in Pharaoh's palace and under which he was able to esteem the treasures of Egypt, great and wonderful as they were, dung and dross compared with the excellency of the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

Once the Lord Jesus has been revealed as Paul describes it, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us", the blessed effects of that revelation can never be completely lost. Moses did not have a view like that every day. No doubt he had to go many days, many weeks, perhaps many months, may be even years without getting such another view of the glory of God, but the effect of the sight of that glory he never lost, though clouds and darkness might have come between and he was brought into such weakness and dejection where he said, "kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in Thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness", yet still, having once seen the glory of God in the face of the Lord Jesus he never forgot that sight. We see the sun shining in the heavens today; if tomorrow and the next day the heavens are veiled with clouds, though we shall no longer enjoy the warmth and light of the sun we shall know the sun is there though hidden by the clouds, or by the mists and fogs that rise from this earth; - so it is in the experience of the Lord's dear people, once the Lord Jesus has been seen by the eye of faith and the glory of God seen in Him, that never will be completely lost, however low we may sink, however tried, however fearful, there will still be that looking to Him by faith.

"He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible". So much for the case of Moses, but this does apply, as one felt this afternoon as your dear pastor and our friend was speaking of some of those visits he had had many years ago when he saw the Lord by faith as altogether lovely, the Chief among ten thousand. During these long forty years that he has been pastor here, or nearly that time, he has not been indulged with blessings like that every day, every week, or perhaps every year; here and there he may have had a glimpse through the clouds but no doubt he has known what it is to walk for many days where neither sun nor stars appear,

"Days of darkness and distress  
Are my portion here below;  
Thorny is the wilderness,  
And the Lord will have it so.

"When enlarged in faith and prayer,  
His dear face by faith I see,  
On the Lord I cast my care,  
Satisfied he cares for me."

But when the days of darkness come, and they do so soon come, do they not? - I believe that with the Lord's people there is a little glimpse here and there, but I believe it is like it was when the Lord appeared to His disciples after the resurrection, no sooner they looked upon Him and realised Who it was He vanished out of their sight. By faith "he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible", and that is how your dear pastor has endured we believe these many years, and not only during the years he has ministered the word of life in this place, and testified to the Gospel of His grace, but ever since the Lord called him by His grace and revealed His Son in Him that he might preach Him and set Him forth before his people. "For he endured ... invisible". In the first chapter of Peter's first epistle we have a beautiful experience of this set before us where the apostle, writing to those in temptation, says, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen;" - that is with the bodily eyes - "ye love; in Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls". Has the Lord Jesus been revealed to you? It takes one's mind back many years when sitting in Hanover Chapel, Tunbridge Wells, listening to Mr.F.Kirby of Staplehurst (who was then drawing near to his end), and as he was preaching from that text in John, "And ye now therefore have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you", and as that dear man of God described one or two visits he had had from the Lord, where he had had a glimpse of Him by faith, one I remember he referred to was on London Bridge when he was so blest that he lost sight of all that was going on around and even missed the bus he was waiting for, at the time being so taken up with the Lord's glory, it melted him in repentance and love and peace and joy at the footstool of the Lord. And as he described these visits I can hear him saying, 'Have you seen Jesus?' and I remember now how one's heart responded, 'I believe I have seen Jesus - seen Him by the eye of faith'. But it is not very often that the Lord's people are favoured with these special visits when the Lord is made so real and near and precious to their souls and they are

enabled to clasp Him in the arms of faith the Antidote of death. They have to go many days mourning without the sun, and Satan may try and tempt them to discredit these revelations they have had of the Lord's face as He is seen in His Word, yet there is still that steadfast looking to Him Who can never be completely forgotten when once revealed by the Holy Spirit, for though clouds and darkness hide His face still they look to Him, and pray to Him, still they cry to Him out of the depths of darkness and out of those many extremities into which their souls are brought, that He will manifest Himself afresh to their souls. No doubt your dear pastor has found he has had to walk this way, "seeing Him who is invisible", seeing Him - not at all times in those special visits - but as He is revealed in His Word, in His Gospel and also in remembrance of those former visits, those Mizah's hills, as David expresses it in the 42nd Psalm, who in his deep distress was panting after God as the wounded hart after the water brooks, "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts; all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me". His enemies were persecuting him while his tears were his meat day and night, but David said, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" I cannot praise Him now, I am weeping, mourning His absence and the persecution of the enemy now, but - "Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance". He knew what the light of God's countenance was, he knew what it was to bask in the beams of the light of it, and he could not forget what the Lord had been to him. Doubtless even when a shepherd boy the Lord had appeared to him and blessed him, for in Psalm 71 he refers to the days of his youth, "Thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come". So David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, endured those long trials, those spiritual nights through which he passed "as seeing Him who is invisible". I was thinking too as your dear pastor was speaking this afternoon, of the sufferings Paul had to endure, and how did he endure? - in just the same way "as seeing Him who is invisible", though not blessed every day or every week or month, or perhaps every year with those rich blessings, with that nearness of access, those special days, yet he endured. By Ananias, when he was sent to Paul, the Lord said, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake". How did he endure? "as seeing Him who is invisible". There is this, I believe, in the experience of every child of God, although not always blessed with those sweet and intimate

visits from the Lord, there is that steadfast looking to Christ, - "Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith". In your deepest darkness, in your heavy trials and sorrows and temptations, in your weakness and infirmities and even under the hidings of God's face, are you not still looking to Him, pleading, praying, that He will appear to and for you: "If thou press on, the crowds will fly".

"He endured as seeing Him who is invisible", and that is the secret we believe of our dear friend's endurance these many years as God's servant and your pastor, and in preaching both here and elsewhere these many years.

Now as to the church of God in general, does not the same apply? some of you have passed through long and heavy trials since the Lord called you by grace. In my own experience the Lord only knows the darkness and conflict of soul one has been passing through for many months, insomuch that I wonder often how I can go on preaching, and am brought to the place where it seems impossible to go on, whilst to give up would be black despair. But where are we looking? Are we not looking to Jesus, the Friend and Saviour of poor lost sinners? - looking to and pleading that He will appear to us and appear for us in the many heavy trials that beset us, and the Lord knows that we have some at this time which seem like a spiritual Pihahiroth, the sea before us and mountains on every side and our enemies pursuing us. Where are we looking? I trust, if not deceived, to the Lord Jesus, waiting upon Him, pleading day by day His name and merits before His Father, pleading that He will appear for us and make darkness light, crooked things straight, rough places plain, that we may see the display of His goodness and mercy before us in these difficulties and perplexities that beset us and out of which we cry day and night unto Him. "For he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible", and is it not so with some of you? - enduring - there is and will be much to endure, if we are to safely reach heaven. The Lord Jesus said, "he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved". Temptations, trials, the hidings of God's face, the powers of darkness, as the Apostle speaks concerning the fight of faith, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called". But in the second epistle to Timothy, the last chapter, the apostle could look back over his trials, over those many sufferings that he had been called upon to endure and which "he had endured, as seeing Him who is invisible", and could say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up

for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing". Who are those that love His appearing? Does this pick you up, sinner, do you love His appearing even if it is only a distant glimpse you get of Him here and there under the ministry of the Word? God's servants describe His beauty, the sweetness, the loveliness of Christ, His glorious Godhead, His real humanity, His lowly birth, His poverty, His temptations, His weakness, His weariness, His reproach, the hidings of His Father's face - for He knew what it was to be forsaken, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" You may get a glimpse of the Lord's glory as you read the Word, or in meditation or as on your knees before the throne of grace. You will probably have to walk a little in the same path, feel God has forsaken you and not realise that even there you are enjoying - not enjoying, one means, as to the present comfort of it, but as you will realise afterwards, the fellowship of His sufferings. "He endured as seeing Him who is invisible". In your temptations you may get a glimpse of Christ in His temptations that will enable you to endure. "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee". In your afflictions you may get a glimpse of Christ's afflictions, for in all His people's afflictions He was afflicted, inconceivable as that may seem when we think of the vast variety of His people's sufferings, and that He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin". You may get a glimpse of Him then in His temptations, in His afflictions. Many years before I entered the ministry, having suffered a comparatively small loss by someone having stolen a few things from my garage - it was not the value of the few things I had lost that troubled me, but what the enemy made of it to me, suggesting, 'If you were a child of God He would not have let this happen to you'. This brought me into a low state of mind and moreover he said 'you will not find anything in Scripture to meet your case', until to my comfort that word dropped into my heart, "They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots". The Lord Jesus among all His other sufferings had to see the soldiers plunder His few earthly possessions, and that was a bitter ingredient, though not the bitterest by far, in that cup of suffering He must drink. You may be suffering reproach and get a glimpse of Him; I believe I had a touch a month or so ago under a certain reproach, when the Word came, "Reproach hath broken my heart", and so the Spirit directs the eye of faith to the Lord when in trouble, and they thus endure, "as seeing Him who is invisible". It does not mean we shall always see Him enthroned in

glory, for oftentimes it will be in His sufferings. If we suffer with Him we shall reign with Him. If we be dead with Him we shall live with Him. Have you had here and there not only a glimpse of Christ the everlasting God, Christ the Son of man as now enthroned in the highest glory at the right hand of the Father - a similar glimpse in some very small measure of what Stephen saw at his martyrdom, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God". - but also a glimpse here and there of Him in His sufferings, and as you see Him by faith in His sufferings, poverty, and weariness and weakness you will be able to endure. I remember sometime before I entered into the ministry having been sent away from home on National Service and trying to find lodgings. As one evening I wandered miles, searching without any success, I was brought to that point where my case seemed hopeless; I had been temporarily lodged in one home for a few nights, but that was coming to an end, and, lodging or no, I had to stay in that area. But as I was walking wearily along a road between Beeston and Chilwell where I was stationed, I believe I had a little glimpse of Christ in His sufferings, only a little one, wherein He said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head". However, when I got back to my temporary lodgings there was immediate deliverance, the landlady said she found she could keep me a little longer, during which time I was led to quite a comfortable home near to the place of my employment.

May the Lord bless His Word. Amen.