

A Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton on Sunday morning 30.9.28

1 Chronicles 4 v10

And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me ! And God granted him that which he requested.

Of one thing we may be sure, that in looking back, Jabez would thank God for the granting to him of that which he requested. Back looks are good when there is goodness to look back upon. Many a time might Jabez say, in memory, what he had got from God. How good He was to give two things – felt necessity, and the Spirit of prayer; and on the top of these two things send him answers, give him that which he requested of him. We are told to remember the way the Lord our God has led us, and perhaps some of you may have very pleasant memories of past mercies, answers, gracious answers to prayer, and as that may be the case God grant you may be enabled to offer to Him the sacrifice of praise, even thanksgiving unto His great name. I can say that it is not pleasant to me naturally ever to obtrude myself on the notice of people, and yet some of you know that I have something to remember and thank God for, with respect to my coming here, and the many years of His goodness which He has granted me. Until just before coming to the service this morning I had no thought of even mentioning the fact, but things have come to my memory of certain kindnesses of God and I want, as they were public kindnesses, to thank Him publicly for them. The occasion of this is the fact that today I complete forty-six years of the ministry, very poor, among you. The changes I have seen, the things I have known, the mercies of God to me personally and the deliverances He has wrought. Well, I can never sufficiently thank Him for them, but I would acknowledge His undeserved kindness to one so utterly unworthy. When I look at the congregation as it now is, and remember that it may be true to say that I have buried this chapel-full of people, scarcely any left except some who were then children, young people of the congregation and church to which I came, [and God has been exceedingly kind both to me and the church and congregation]. We have had our sorrows but mercifully we have had no quarrels. That is a wonderful thing to say. I have had my afflictions but one thing I have never had, and that is, I have never had an unkind word from this church and congregation as such, and that is very wonderful when one remembers how undeserved one is even of the kindness of words and so I would just acknowledge this kindness of God to me and thank Him for it; because He did grant me, has granted me the thing which I requested. It came into my mind this morning to remember how that forty-seven years ago on the twelfth of last June, which was the first time I occupied this pulpit, He in a very signal way spoke to my soul and to me about the preaching of that day and He granted me that which I requested, and has done many and many times since.

And now here I stand, not for you to say, well he is a wonderful person, but rather for you, with me, to give God thanks, from the unworthiest person and a congregation and a church for these many years in granting us tokens for good. It has pleased Him to grant that some have drawn their vital spiritual breath in this place, and to give liberty to some and confirmation and establishment to some, and how can we thank Him enough for such a mercy.

“He granted him that which he requested.” And He has granted to you, many of you and to us as a people that which we have requested from time to time; and may He answer that prayer of David for Israel: “O Lord, ...keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people...” May He keep it in our memory, for the more we remember His kindness, the more ashamed we are of our sins and undeservings. You will never remember God’s kindness to you in a proper way without being ashamed of yourself and standing in wonder that God could be, and was, so good to you. His goodness always leads to repentance. You will never be a big person in your own judgement as you are under the influence of the goodness of God; always down goes self, up rises the Lord as we remember His kindness to us.

Now I pass away from that and do not want you to occupy your time in thinking about myself, but would direct your attention to this prayer of this honourable man; and Jabez was honourable, more honourable than his brethren. In speaking of this word last Wednesday I made some observations about that and also with respect to that great thing that is said of him, he “called on the God of Israel.” As I then said, so I say now, be careful of the object of your prayers. There is only one proper object of prayer, that is the God of heaven. Holy, Holy, Holy Three in One, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We are told what he asked for when he called on the God of Israel. He asked to be blessed indeed, “O that Thou wouldest bless me indeed.” No real blessing apart from God; and what He gives spiritually is a blessing indeed. The Lord bless thee and keep thee. God the Father bless thee, and keep thee, God the Son make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee, and God the Holy Ghost lift up His countenance and give thee peace. This is a blessing indeed, and all outside this is perishing. Uninterrupted health for a season, a sufficient supply of all needs, kind indulgent friends, home life with all its comforts and living in a protestant country and having many good things there; these, good as they are in themselves, and very highly to be prized, will end, and shortly, very shortly with some of us. But the blessing of the Lord which maketh rich and with which He addeth no sorrow is a blessing that the Eternal God gives in and by Jesus Christ through the ministration of the Holy Ghost, and the rest we can afford to leave.

To be enlarged indeed in our coast in the best sense of the word is to be divinely increased in knowledge, in understanding and experience of God. As you know God you are enlarged. As Christ comes to you and you walk up and down in His name you are enlarged. As you get glimpses of the Godhead in Christ, glimpses of the Persons of the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost you are enlarged. Knowledge increases, experience grows, practice according to experience follows. “And enlarge my coast.” Take away the contraction of our spirits, the bondage of sin, the influence of vile affections, the guilt that we get on our consciences, that these

might be removed from us by the enlarging of truth in our souls; that that prayer may be answered in us, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

"And that thine hand might be with me." In scripture the hand of God is taken variously; generally it means His power, and there is always that before us in the Word of God, and particularly it means the fulfilment of the word of His mouth as Solomon said, that God in raising him up had fulfilled with His hand, that which He had spoken with His mouth, to His servant David, Solomon's father. It means then the fulfilling of a promise, the carrying out of a purpose. This you have in the remarkable instance of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm God delivered Israel from the Egyptian bondage under which they had been groaning. When you get deliverances, ascribe them to the hand of God. He does this wonderfully. Well, God's hand was with Jabez. We have no particulars of his life, we have just this, beautifully mentioned of him, and the honour that he had upon him, better and greater than that of his brethren; but doubtless the hand of the Lord would be upon him in fulfilling some words, and carrying out some purposes. So with you, you have had promises and you have had the fulfilment of them. The hand of the Lord has been in that. Whatever He says He does. What He speaks with His mouth to your hearts He will, if He has not already done so, accomplish, and that will be His hand. He has done with His hand, or will do with His hand, what He said to you with His mouth.

"That thine hand might be with me". The working of God is the moving of His hand in grace on the heart, in providence working wonders, and what may be truly in some cases called miracles. The way in which God works for some of His children in providence, as well as in grace is very beautiful. "That thine hand might be with me." The hand of the Lord is when He strengthens people. The hand of the Lord was with Elijah so that he ran before the chariot of Ahab. "By Thee," said David to God, "I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall." He ran through difficulties, leaped over a wall of difficulties, all by the hand of the Lord. When God strengthens a saint of His to bear affliction, to walk in a path of tribulation, that is His hand upon them for good. The hand of the Lord is in strength. This strength comes from His joy."The joy of the LORD is your strength "said Nehemiah to a weeping nation; and when men do weep for sin, [and other weeping, Bunyan says, is sinful weeping], when men do weep for sin, then confess, then comes the joy of the Lord into their hearts through Jesus Christ. That is their strength. The hand of the Lord is with them, and the hand of the Lord is taken for an immediate dealing of God to be with His people, His church. He deals immediately with His people. The church of old knew this, and knew that she could not bear the immediate hand of God, so she prays - "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself." No child of God can wish for the hand of the Lord to be on him immediately and without the Mediator, [the man of God's right hand in that psalm is the Mediator, Jesus Christ], and the prayer that God let His hand be upon the man of His right hand, was this, " Lord, deal with us in Jesus Christ. Bless us for His sake. Smile on us in Him. Take us up into union with Thyself in Him. Guide us by the light of His countenance, sustain us by the arm of His power and bless us with justification in His righteousness."

“That thine hand might be with me.” Can you ask this? That the good hand of God may be upon you in the person of the Lord Jesus? Well, it will be a great thing if the hand of the Lord is on us in these particulars. This petition, this part of the prayer, runs on thus, “and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!” Strictly there is but one evil existing, and that is sin. Through our deadness we call other things evil that may turn to good, through the grace of God. We call afflictions evil. They are not so in themselves, but they are evil to many people, and to the people of God they are not joyous but grievous. Let us look then at this by the help of the Lord. “And that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me.” Take the first and the only meaning of evil, that is sin. This was before the Lord Jesus in that mediatorial prayer that we read this morning, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.”- from the sin, the enmity, the wrath, the bitterness, the pollution and the condemnation of sin. Here is a large subject.

We are all sinners, and blessed would this congregation be, if every member of it knew that. We are sinners, and no gilt of religion, though it may shine in the eyes of men, can really make this evil anything better. It is just an evil thing, and the Holy Ghost describes this evil in Genesis where the remarkable word repent is used with respect to God. “It repenteth me that I have made man.” Why? Because “that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” This is in Jeremiah where the Holy Ghost says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” – fully, absolutely? Well, this is a solemn truth, a terrible word, but happy he who knows it so as to repent of it. This evil has in it these things. First, condemnation; because a breach of the law brings condemnation to the man who commits it. Condemnation is not condemnation by man there, but God. Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. Why, sinner, that is just your case and my case, as we are sinners. How can we be kept from the evil of this condemnation? By the blood of Jesus Christ, by justification in His righteousness. No other way. No other remedy can be found. God has provided this remedy and there is no other, and if you are delivered from this evil, kept from it as to the continuity of it, it will be an amazing thing; and heaven will never hear the last of your praises, for you will be with the company that you will hear singing – “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

There is the evil also in the next place, of sins working, and who can enlarge much? After all that could be said, there would be, so to express it, an infinitude of evil behind. The evil of sins working. The thought of his heart is only evil, and that continually.

Now grace made Jabez hate it. Doubtless he could say as the Psalmist later on said, “I hate vain thoughts...” Vain thoughts are empty thoughts, foolish thoughts, wilful thoughts, mad thoughts; for mans heart is mad, and he is said to do evil. Thoughts against God – the worst thoughts that any man can have. You may think badly of men, you may think wrongly of this and

of that, but the worst, the guiltiest, the maddest, the most foolish, the most terrible thought you can possibly have in your mind is thinking God to be such an one as yourself, (as the modernist does) then you think the worst thought that is possible to your mind. O sinner, this may work in you. Thoughts against His providence; He is neither kind nor wise to nature, fallen. Thoughts against His dealings with you in your family, rebellious thoughts. Why does He do this and why allow that? Thoughts against His Son, against His Holy Word, inspired Bible. Thoughts against His condemnation of man, and thoughts against the election of some men to life, leaving others to fall and fail and sink into perdition by their sin. Awful thoughts, and yet they are natural to us. Painfully some know this. Every man's heart is full of evil, and thought is the result. We think evil. We expect no good from time to time because we think evil thoughts.

Now Jabez said, Lord, keep me from evil. Thought is a very wide thing and often very uncontrollable. You may be very painfully conscious that you have got wrong thoughts, and yet entertain them and find an inability to arrest them and stop them. A very strong current and you cannot stop it. Violent feeling, violent thoughts hurrying you away into rebellion against God. Or, they may be very pleasing to you. Some project, some pleasing prospect, something that you are aiming at, something that an ambitious heart wants to reach and obtain. O how pleasant, pleasant to the mind, yet guilty in self. May the Lord keep us from evil thoughts, from entertaining them, living in them. You may be very clean before men, but you may have polluting thoughts and be an unclean person in the sight of God. Mind what you think. Thinking is natural and thinking is inevitable; we must think, but it is a good thing to think rightly, think rightly of God. "Keep me", "O that thou wouldest keep me", from the evil of evil thoughts, that Thou wouldest keep me from a deadness of soul, from a prayerless condition, from the prevalence of unbelief, from hardness of heart, from unthankfulness.

If one had time and ability one could occupy, I was going to say, days and a whole life in setting out the evil of sin, it is so terrible. Everyone born again knows something of it. Terrible, and we think nothing of rebelling against God if we are thwarted in the things we want, and no doubt we are. A particular self will is a person's predominant evil. A selfishness, a will determined to have its own way and fulfilment. There is the greatest temptation to rebellion against God and perhaps against men. If any child of God here is plagued that way, may the Lord help that person to say, keep me from the evil of a strong will. To give up your will is to give up your life. To give up your will and to say, the will of the Lord be done, is very gracious but very difficult.

"O that thou wouldest keep me from evil". What more shall I more say on this solemn point? Well, I will follow on with the word, "that it may not grieve me," and you may be grieved in several ways. First, grieved because your vain wrong thoughts bring a distance between you and God. This is painfully known by the people of God from time to time. You indulge some evil and then you may say in spirit with Samson, "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself," not wisting for the moment that the Lord has departed from you; but when the enemy comes and you find your strength is gone, that is a grievous and a grieving thing sooner or later. The

man who has had access to his Saviour, has felt the love of God in his heart, has rejoiced in Jesus Christ, for that man to indulge in wrong thoughts, take pleasure in them for a time; there will come inevitably this grief; there is a distance between him and his God, and though the hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save, a man will know this – your sins have separated between you and your God. O brethren, mind that. Thought is very powerful and it has power to bring a distance between a wrong thinking person and a gracious God. None can go to the Lord and say, “I have never had wrong thoughts.” One of the griefs I feel in these my latter days is this, that I can never go to God, and never address the Holy Spirit, and say to Him, I have not grieved Thee; I have not vexed Thee, I have not rebelled. Israel vexed, and rebelled against, the Holy Spirit and grieved Him. You may grieve Him by thinking, you may grieve Him by doing that in your thought which conscience will tell you is an evil thing; and then to repeat what I have said, then will come a distance between you and your God, and you will enter into that – “your iniquities have separated between you and your God.”

The evil of unthankfulness – it is charged against Israel, that they were not thankful. “Neither were they thankful.” Deliverance from Egypt, manna daily falling around their wandering camp, water from the smitten rock following them all through the wilderness; guiding by night, direction by day: these things slipped out of their memory. “Neither were they thankful.” They forgot God their resting- place days without number – unthankfulness. It is very solemn to have been the recipient of countless mercies and not to be thankful. Is there an innocent child of God here in that particular? – No. But there is mercy, there is grief for it; the Spirit makes us remember it and grieve over that evil. We grieve the Lord by this evil. Count your mercies; count them as well as you can. You will find them countless, but count them as well as you can; and as you count them try to give God thanks for them. Praise is comely, comely for the upright; and God is pleased with it. Indeed he takes it as glorifying to himself. He says, “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.”, and I think reckoning up mercies and speaking of them before the Lord is part of the ordering of our conversation aright. When Israel took the first-fruit of the land to the Lord, he was to say- “An Amorite was my father, a Hittite was my mother”, and they brought him into a good land, and here is the fruit of it.

Well, my brethren, count your mercies up as well as you can, and then carry them up to the Lord and say, I was a wretch, I was dead, I was distant, I was ignorant, a fugitive, a vagabond, but grace laid hold of me. I was born again, I have had many blessings and many helps and thoughts; now I bring to Thee the first-fruits, even the offering of my lips, praise unto God.

And there is the grief also of this: they have not obeyed the Lord according to the Holy commandment by His prophets and apostles. You may have had some scriptures on your hearts and some guidings in the providence of God. But then depravity has worked in you and you have fretted and rebelled and gone against what you knew to be right and it has been grievous to you. You must have noticed in reading the scripture and the life of Israel of old, that the chief sin of that nation was turning from the true worship of their God. Other evils grew out of that. I think

that that is, so to speak, the original of all our wandering away- forgetting the worship of the true and living God.

“That Thou wouldest keep me from evil that it may not grieve me”. If you have bowed down to self, and worshipped yourself in some way, or had some little god in your waistcoat pocket to look at, and as it were set up above everything else, you then departed in that particular and for that time, from the worship of the true and living God. Has not it grieved you? Yes. It is one of my griefs in my latter days that I have so often departed from Him. Departures from God are always troublesome in the long run because the Lord is jealous, and His jealousy burns like fire in a person’s heart and conscience who has departed from the living God.

And now, just a moment, “and God granted him that which he requested.” An answer to prayer locked up in your breast is one of the most blessed shining jewels that you can have. To have this given to you, that the hand of God may be on you, that you may find Him with you to keep you from sinning wilfully, to keep you from sinning the sin against the Holy Ghost, to keep you from evil in providence that you may have feared, or to sanctify some evil in providence that you had to painfully experience: this, this is very wonderful. “And God granted him that which he requested.”

Now look at your requests and can you say of them here and there, God gave me that. He granted me the other. He blessed me with answers, answers in my soul, in my conscience; in my business, in my person, in my relationships. Well, it is a great thing to get answers to prayer. They are amongst evidences of God’s being; of His being a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and amongst the best evidences that we belong to Him. There are other evidences, and some clearer and sweeter and dearer, particularly when you get a revelation of the Lord Jesus to your soul. Mind the value of answers – you can hardly ever exaggerate. “And God granted him that which he requested.” Now look at this word, “ And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren ... Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me !” When you pray, God give you to experience this, - “And God granted him that which he requested.” Amen.