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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 20 February 1927

1 JOHN 3 v 1

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath
bestowed upon us, that we should be called the
sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not,
because it knew Him not

When we can comprehend the great Three One, we shall be able to comprehend the manner of God's love. It is infinite. We cannot contain it; only a little of it can we bear in our present state. It is astonishing to all to whom it comes, that the blessed God could and would love such vile wretches. There is no condition attached to it; therefore it cannot fail. It is like Himself, immutable. Israel had a conditional life, a conditional promise, a conditional inheritance, and they forfeited everything. Israel after the Spirit has an unconditional life, an unconditional promise, and therefore it cannot be lost. No wonder that, by the Spirit, John says, "Behold". See this wonder of wonders, this miracle of miracles; see the eternal God loving the vilest of vile sinners, the chiefest of all sinners. O my dear friends, you will never be at ease in Zion if you know the love of God, and while you feel it. You will never sin wilfully when this love is in your soul. You will never turn your back on the Lord Jesus when you feel this love. You will always want to be near Him, to stand on His side, to be His friend, and to walk with Him. This love will explain many things, as for instance, if you are under chastisement, it will tell you that love lays the rod on. If you have bitterness in your cup, love will take all out of it that looks like a curse. There is no curse in it. If God administers reproofs to you, this love will tell you that it is a Father who is reproving you, and when you have changes, this love will tell you, He changes not. "I am the Lord I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed". And this love effects wonders in the soul. There is no stone left, no ice left when this love comes; no distance, no shyness, no bondage, but reverence and liberty and warm love and gratitude, very inadequate gratitude. That is acceptable to God. O

this love does make a change, a great change in the soul's experience. You may be saying sometimes, how could God love such a sinner? You may be looking for evidences of being alive, and not find one evidence. You may be saying surely I am deceived, thinking that, because you cannot find evidences, therefore He cannot love you. You may cast back looks and say, O but I have been so inconsistent. The plague is in my heart, it is in my head, it is in my speech, it is in my conduct. I am wrong, I have been wrong, I have done wrong, I have thought wrong; that is I have gone in wrong ways. How can the Lord love me? Now I will tell you what this love will do. It will show itself in its infinite superiority, in its sovereignty. It will cleanse your foolish thoughts and tell you that you are not to condition this love on what you feel, on what you see, on what you have done. It sweeps away everything. I know it does. I have been sitting sometimes objecting this and objecting that. I am wrong here, I have been wrong there, and there is nothing right in me, and nothing good in me, and I have lived an unprofitable, untender life all my days, and how could God have anything to do with such a sinner? And the answer has come "Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend,.... according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel." They say if a wife leave her husband, shall he return unto her; shall not that land be greatly polluted? If a land should permit such things, would it not be greatly polluted? Would it not be considered gross immorality? But, says the Lord, this people, these Israelites, they have gone astray, they are guilty of idolatry, and having pronounced all their sins, He says, "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, My Father, thou art the the guide of my youth?" If God speaks like that to you, you will melt into contrition, you will shed the sweetest tears that you can shed and you will simply believe; you will believe. O what love this is, no tongue can tell; on its wonders let my soul for ever dwell.

What manner of love. Love expressed in a certain manner or manners. What manner, what degree, what kind of love is this? Let us look at it. It is sovereign. There is no child of God in heaven, beginning with Adam fallen and redeemed, coming down to the last saint that entered heaven, that would stand before the throne and say, I deserved to be loved. It is sovereign my friends. O nothing can hinder it. It displayed itself in the predestination of the

wickedest people unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, and remember this, my friends, that adoption is the cause of salvation; children first, then redeemed. O what manner of love was this that gave poor sinners to the Lord Jesus and predestinated them to be the children of the Most High, and because they are fallen children they must be redeemed, and they are redeemed. O the sovereign love of God. "On its glories, let my soul for ever dwell". Why did Jacob get the blessing? Why did Saul of Tarsus become a child of God and the friend of Christ, and an Apostle? And why did you, a poor, wild creature, come to fear God and seek His salvation? You will get no satisfactory answer but in this - He loved me. "Who loved me" says Paul "and gave Himself for me". Love is the moving cause. Love gave sinners to Christ and then Christ came to redeem them. They were His first, they were God's first, and then they were redeemed. That is the manner of it. Above reason, above imagination. "High beyond imagination is the love of God to man". Above all human thought, before time, and through time, and beyond time. In eternity past, in time the little speck, and then through eternity to come there is this precious sovereign, undesired, undeserved, unsought, love of God. Well, what a wonder. We are obliged to God; we lay no obligation on Him. If He had made a covenant with us and conditioned it on what we were to do and then we had done that, fulfilled that condition, we should in that case lay an obligation on Him. He must fulfil the condition on His part. O, but no such thing enters this love of God. Is not it encouraging though? O think of it, think of it as coming, as being set upon the very worst of people. Not being deterred by all the sin that God saw you would do, all the unworthiness that would attach to you, all the turpitude of your lives and everything that you could mention as against yourself. This love was not deterred by all those things. It is imperious love. Bless God for imperious love in Himself.

And therefore it manifests itself in various ways. First it manifests itself in the gift, the greatest gift God could give. He could give no greater gift out of His heart and bosom than His only begotten Son. "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins". That is the first thing, the first thing the Scripture mentions as the effect of the love of God, the love that is in Him. The love that is in

Him flowed in the election of, and gift of, His dear Son to redeem the predestinated children. So the Apostle says - he puts it in that beautiful way - "Who loved me and gave Himself for me". God gave Him; Christ gave Himself. You will never measure this; it is incomprehensible. It is beyond imagination that God, the offended God, the uncreated Trinity, the glorious Trinity, should love a poor wretch and say, My Son shall redeem him. This is the manifestation of it. All hell stood in the way, but Christ came; Christ came. Sin and law and curse and enmity of men, and the chastisement of His Father and the curse of the law and the desertion of Him by His Father, these were all before the Son when the Father gave Him and He said "Lo I come; Lo I come". This was the manifestation of the love of God, God the Son. "I come". We get discouraged when little hindrances are in our way. It is written of Christ "He shall not fail nor be discouraged". Think of what was before Him. The whole law to obey, the curse of the law to suffer, the withdrawing from Him of His Father, the enmity, the bitterness of men, and the malice and power of the gates of hell and the devil. Time, poverty, misrepresentation, malicious words spoken against Him, false witnesses suborned to bear false testimony against Him, law coming, and justice drawing her sword against Him. These all stood before Jesus Christ and He said to them all - hinder Me not; I came forth from God and I must go to Him. But You must go through all these. Yes, I will go through all these. These briars and thorns I will burn them up. For love of My own, of My dear people given to Me, I will go through all these; I will burn them up. "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in His apparelI that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." "Behold what manner of love God has bestowed upon us". O my friends, the centre of love is in this blessed Person, the fulness of love is in Him, and that spot where it shines most illustriously is Calvary. "See where it shines in Jesus' face". See poor sinner, where this love is - in the Person and in the work of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ. That is the manner of it. You will never comprehend it, never be able to hold it. Our souls could sooner hold all the earth than we could hold all the love of God. The earth is finite; love is infinite. Infinite, and it expresses itself most wondrously and powerfully and gloriously in the work of Christ. And there are moments when those three words in the gospel of John shine brighter than the sun and all created light - "It is finished".

An end made of sins; transgression finished, everlasting righteousness brought in and Jesus receiving a kingdom that can never come to an end - of the increase and peace of which there shall be no end.

And the third manifestation of this is in the gift of the Spirit, the gift of the Spirit. The Holy Ghost is a Person; He is as true a Person as the Father is, as the Son is. Each Person in the Trinity is equal in nature and glory and power, and each Person in the Trinity is equal in salvation. The work of each is distinct and the three works make a glorious whole. Each is distinct. The Father's work is in choosing and giving sinners to be saved. The Son's work is in saving those given sinners, and the Spirit's work is to bring, by divine operations of grace, those sinners to Calvary, to unite them to Christ, to give them access to the Father through Christ, to give them a pure conscience, a justifying righteousness and a divinely glorious holiness. This is the work of the Spirit. This work is not in exactly the same distinctness and external work as in the case of Abram - Abram, get thee from thy father's house and from thy country, and I will make a covenant with thee - but there is a divine distinctness in every soul seen and realised sooner or later when the Spirit said "live". "Live", dead soul; "live" when He said "let there be light and there was light", in the conscience and the understanding. Now one of the greatest mercies we can have is this, to become a sensible sinner. To be made, that is to say, to be made aware that we are sinners; that we have sinned against God. That, no matter how moral we may have been in our life, among our friends, we are sinners in the sight of God, sinners in our nature, sinners in our birth, sinners in our conduct, in our hearts. O it is a great thing to be a sinner; I mean in the sense the Holy Ghost makes a sinner sensible of his sinnership. You who are feeling your sins but perhaps have never yet felt redemption may not be able to believe what I say, but you will come to it one day and say it was a mercy for me that God convinced me of my sins. Now when one is convinced of sin he is sure that he is wrong; he knows he is wrong in the sight of God; he knows he cannot make himself right. However much he tries he cannot become holy. He knows he cannot. He may be told what he ought to do, but he cannot do it. The Scripture tells him what he ought to do but he cannot do. The Scripture tells him what he ought to be but he cannot

be it. He is ruined. Every faculty of the human soul is depraved. All its power are paralysed. The sinner stands a helpless, forlorn sinner and comes eventually to be a hopeless sinner, hopeless, that is to say, in himself. Who does this in him? The Holy Ghost. He works this great work of conviction. He sets the truth of God on the mind. He puts the standard by the conscience and the understanding. He lets the sinner see what the law is and what the law commands him to do and be. Thank God for the gift of the Spirit in conviction. I know conviction of sin is very painful; I know it is very shameful. I have the shame of conviction in my soul. I am not thinking about it; I know it. But then, if I did not know it, if I were ignorant of my sin, if I were not ashamed of my sin, what would Jesus Christ be to me? If you do not know your sin you will never know the Saviour. If you do not know you are wrong, you will never be put right by the Saviour. If you do not know that you are distant from God you will never be made nigh to God by the Lord Jesus. This is the point then, that the Spirit does convince us of our sin, but He does not leave off here. O no, He does not leave off here. He does not make a man feel a hell in his conscience in this life to leave him. No man has two hells if I may say so. A man who has a hell in his conscience here, that hell being lighted by the Holy Spirit's teaching, that man will get a heaven here when his sins are forgiven him, and that is all the hell he will have that he has here in conviction. Now what a mercy this is. Behold the love of the Holy Spirit. See the love of the Holy Spirit in convincing us of sin, but not that only. No He leads to Jesus' blood. When a sinner thinks his sins are too many and the guilt of them too deep, and the defilement of them too terrible to be removed from him, then the Holy Ghost shows to that sinner the infinite worth of the death of Christ. Ah, my dear fellow sinner, it is pleasing to me to say "Christ is the Friend of sinners". "Christ is the Friend of sinners" and I would repeat Hart's exhortation "Be that forgotten never". "O what a Friend is Christ to me" says one. O what a Friend He is to a sensible sinner. He says to that sinner "Come unto Me". He says "Thy sins are forgiven". Where does He say it? One says, in the Bible. That is true, but how do you know that it is in the Bible for you? It is very evident from terrible experience in the world and we can observe it, that all men are not saved. Now how am I to know, how are you to know, that you in particular, that I in particular, were redeemed by Jesus Christ? How is any sinner to know that his sins

will not remain on him when he dies, and sink him into hell? Only one way, and listen to this; this is the way, when the Spirit of God takes the blood of Jesus Christ and sprinkles it on the conscience. This is taught under the law in a type. When a man was defiled under the law he could not enter the tabernacle to worship God until that defilement was purged away, and the way it was purged from the man was this - the ashes of an heifer that had been burnt and running water sprinkled on him, with a bunch of hyssop. That took the man's defilement away from him, and he was then permitted, he was then competent, to enter into the tabernacle to worship God. The anti-type is - you have it in the Hebrews - "If the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ who, through the eternal Spirit", that glorious, eternal, fire in His soul, "offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works". Now the whole of the type has to be brought in. It was not only that the heifer was burnt; plenty of running water there was, many bunches of hyssop, but not to stop there. The sprinkling, that was the fulfilment of the whole thing. Now the anti-type must be as complete. The blood is shed. The Holy Ghost, the blessed water of life, the well of water; He also is complete. But then He, in His operations, and the sinner, have to come into contact. Then a man knows. O what manner of love is this, that God reconciles sinners to Himself, reconciles them to Himself. How? In the body of the flesh of Jesus, through death. Dear fellow sinners, this is how you will come into the presence of God and know no shame. You say, I am ashamed of myself. You will be as long as you live when you are in a right state of mind, and the longer you live under the reign of God's grace, the more shame you will feel. But then, what you feel is one thing, and your state without shame or blame before God is another. It is this that the people of God come to understand more or less distinctly, but they stand bold, shameless. "Bold shall I stand". Is not it wonderful that you, guilty, shameful sinner should ever stand in your souls, in your spirit, without blame and yet be filled with shame of sin? "Behold what manner of love".

This love is manifested in other ways which briefly I will name, as first in the gift of the Holy Scripture, and here I mean, not only as an inspired Bible, but I mean also that God does speak the

Scriptures into the hearts of His people. Yes, He speaks certain portions to them. The Scripture comes, surprising them. It surprises them and they say with Ruth, to Boaz, "Thou hast spoken friendly. Thou hast taken notice of me, thy hand-maiden, though I be not as one of the daughters of thy people." And you say, why the Lord spoke kindly to me. The words were there but you did not feel them before, but they came, they came sweetly, surprisingly, powerfully, and they were applied and explained and you said, "He spoke kindly to me." This puts a man straight; this is one of the ways of God's love. He says "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee". Now this is the beginning of heaven when God conveys Himself and conveys His atonement and conveys His word to a sinner's heart. Now he says "I know". It is a sad religion that consists in guessing and thinking and supposing. It is a good religion, that of which you can sometimes say, now I got this from God, I got this from God. He spoke to me. He said to Abraham "In blessing I will bless thee", and you may say, in blessing God blessed my soul. He shined into my heart, He gave me the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ, and I dissolved, I repented, I wept, I was happy, I was passive. There was no enemy against me, nothing to disturb my peace. I was happy in God. What does this lead to? "That we should be called the sons of God". Children of wrath, mind that, children of wrath, even as others. Now you will never point at another poor sinner and say, I was better than that man. We have all got the Pharisee in us by nature, but grace kills him from time to time. You won't point at a publican and say, I am not as this publican. You will say, if you see a publican sinner repenting and justified, I think that is my brother. I feel it would be an honour to get by his side and walk with him. You may say, looking at the thief on the cross, to whom Christ gave the promise, I would that I were by his side, and got his blessing. And when you get it, then you say, that thief is my brother. What a mercy it is to be brought here. "Called the sons of God", adopted into His family, They tell us that in the east there were two ceremonies in adoption, one private and the other public. When privately, the adopted child was received into the bosom of the family, sat at table with the family, and could call the parent, father. The other was a public recognition which made the adoption legal. You may have both, the private adoption, the ceremony, the blessed form of adoption, the Spirit crying in your

heart, Abba Father, and you weeping to the praise of the mercy you have found, happy beyond all expression, wondering at the love of God to such a sinner, saying, "Why me, why me, O blessed God". Amazed that he should deal so kindly, sovereignly, lovingly with you. Seek this private recognition my friends, seek it, this private ceremony, reception into the family. Nobody knows about it but yourself. It is done in secret. As Dr Goodwin says, "Jesus Christ is most glorified in secret". This is the secret, when God receives a man into His blessed family. And the other is in public, a ratification of the first, a recognition that others have some knowledge of, and when the church of God takes knowledge of you, when the saints to whom you are brought, with whom you are brought into union and contact, say, you are a friend, you are a brother, you are a child of God adopted into His family, and adopted into a visible church, as those to whom the Apostle wrote these words; they were recognised as children of the Most High. What manner of love has God bestowed on us that we should be called the sons of God. He won't give you up, He won't cut you off. The prodigal was a son. He smarted for his prodigality, he suffered for it and from it, but he was still a son and he came back, ashamed and shameful and penitent and was received of his father, had the best robe and the ring, and the shoes and the fatted calf. Seek this heavenly merry-making.

"Therefore the world knoweth us not because it knew Him not". You may be unknown in your family; you may be unknown in your family. The word "known" here means approved. "Knows not" means does not approve of us. "I never knew you". It is said Christ shall say to some "I never knew you". He always knew them as His creatures, but He never knew them as His people. So here, the world cannot approve of us. There is the principle of grace in the people of God that can never be approved of by the world. There is a tenderness, uprightness, godliness, a separation that the world can never never like. Have you a religion that attracts some people, and they say we would not like that religion? The world approves not of us. But why? What is the secret? This, "because it knew Him not". They did not know the Lord, they did not approve of Christ. They said "Away with Him, away with Him; crucify Him." When He was born his birth was such as to excite the jealousy of Herod who sought to destroy the young child's life, and all who live this blessed life are disapproved by

the world, disesteemed. Paul said that the people of God were as the offscouring of all things, set as men to be wondered at; not approved at all, because there is a principle of godliness in the people of God that must silently, if not in any other way, reprove the ungodliness of the world, of all you come into contact with.

Now may this high privilege, this infinite mercy, this sweet dissolving love be in you and in me.

AMEN.