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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 20 December 1936

1 JOHN 4 v 16

"God is love"

Last Lord's Day in the afternoon, when in some acute pain, this dropped into my heart and with it a question. Could you say that now? And solemnly, out of my heart, the answer was, yes. I felt it and the joy of the Lord was my strength. What is the joy of the Lord? It is in that Scripture: "It is finished". Joy, set before Him in regard to His redemptive work, then came, and that joy is what He wills His people to have.

With the text, came four particular points to my mind, and they were expressed mentally thus, "when", "why", "how", "where". When was this love? Why is this love? How came this love? Where is it made known? "God is love". This is an inspired declaration and if one may use the word description of Jehovah. His nature is love. He must love Himself. The Trinity has that marvellous intercourse, communion, each Person with the other, and He is under no necessity to reveal Himself. I would clear that point if I could to you. No necessity in Jehovah to do any work outside Himself. If you say there is necessity in Jehovah to do any work outside Himself, in my view you destroy His Being, you place Him under a necessity which is not consistent with eternal Being and liberty. He is free. His nature is love, but it was not necessary that He should exhibit anything outside Himself. God is sufficient for Himself. His Being is glorious. His Trinity is just the wonderful, eternal, uncaused existence of the Three Persons who bear these essential, glorious Names, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. But His goodness is of a nature to be communicated, if it is His will. In the wonderful chapter I read just now, there is this. "He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will". Every manifestation of deity, of omnipotence, of wisdom, of goodness, of providence, of salvation, just all according to the good pleasure of His will. What a wonder of greatness and of glory are the manifestations of God and we have in Holy Scripture the

wonder of the Lamb slain, washing away the sins of His people and making them kings and priests unto God and the Lamb. The wonder of the Lion of the tribe of Judah prevailing to approach the I AM and take out of His divine hand the book of universal providence, all circumstances in heaven, holy angels, all men and all providences, and all devils and their movements, all in the hand of the Man whom nations despised, but who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Let us look a little, if enabled, at when God loved His people. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me" said Jeremiah, and said this "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love". It sprang up, if one might use such a word, in the Being of Jehovah and took the wonderful, glorious movement, which is called predestination. Predestination means reprobation too. In one field, one taken and the other left. Two women grinding at the mill, one taken the other left. A searching word that to a tender conscience who would fain be with Christ, know and love and embrace Him. Still, there it is. One taken, taken to be born again, taken to be convinced of sin, taken to be forgiven and united to Christ the living Vine. Eternal love. Predestinated before the foundation of the world and predestinated to a very particular thing, to the adoption of children to Himself by Jesus Christ. Every one born again is born to that wonder of wonders that the likeness of Christ should be on Him, that the holiness of Christ should be in Him, that the liberty of Christ should be given to Him, that the Name of Christ should be named on him and the grace of Christ be sufficient for him at all times, in all circumstances. O how can the objects of divine love and the subjects of effectual grace praise the eternal God sufficiently. We shall be in glory indebted, beyond all expectation of payment, and yet no interference with happiness and glory there. Loved of God. Do you love Him? Love may be a smoke in you, a fervent desire, a fainting desire, a sickness in your spirit. O shall I ever reach Him? Shall I ever be united to Him? Shall I ever have His likeness stamped on my soul? Such longings and pantings are the fruit of His grace. The grace of Jesus Christ is effectual in begetting these longings and pantings after Him. Do not think little of your desires if the object of them is the Lord. If you say, there is nothing in the world that can satisfy my soul, nothing in my own personal circumstances, though they may be easy, that can satisfy my soul; Christ and Christ alone will be a satisfaction if He

will have me, if He will come to me, if He will give the Spirit of judgment and of burning, if He will cleanse me from my dross and tin, grant to me His holy presence. Well, it is wonderful to be after Christ. Those in this congregation who can say they are after Him little know perhaps at this moment what He has in store for them, the love that He will give them, the grace with which He will grace them, the clothing with which He will cover them, the holiness with which He will fill them, the glory with which they shall one day be clothed. All these are in Him and they are all meant for poor sinners predestinated to be conformed to His blessed image. When did this begin? In eternity it sprang up in the heart of God and He gave His Son. The grand evidence in all God's love to some men is this, "He spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all". What an evidence. That grand text much abused by Arminians, but still its nature is untouched and unspoiled. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Think of it. You cleave to Him, you cry after Him, you go to His throne of grace which is Himself, You ask Him to forgive you, you pray to be holy, you mourn over your sins. "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Value faith, value the motions of faith in your hearts, those motions being after Him who is the Head of His body, the church.

Why did this love come? Because it was sovereign. Divine sovereignty is deeply stamped upon every act of grace toward and in the church and every individual member of the church. Free grace, sovereign grace, effectual grace, mighty grace, loving grace, tender grace, a drawing grace. Nothing but grace will do.

How does this love come? Just in the way I have said. No other way.

Sin to pardon without blood
Never in God's nature stood

The perfections of deity are such as that not one of them can be dishonoured and all of them are honoured and glorified beyond all expression in the Person and death of Christ. The joy that was before

Him was the joy of redeeming His people and for that joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despised the shame, and having finished the work His Father gave Him to do, He said "It is finished". bowed His head and dismissed His spirit. No greater, brighter, more wonderful, more glorious, more full of divine meaning and love, you will find in all the Holy Scripture than that word "It is finished". It peoples heaven, it makes saints of sinners, living souls of stones, melts the hardest heart. O what can it not accomplish! Ah God made this world to be the scene of infinite things, to be the workshop of grace. There is, and there will be while it stands, people to honour God in this, His free and sovereign grace and infinite work. A work in the soul, a divine work more wonderful and more glorious than the work of creation and all the dealings of divine providence.

Where is this? In the world. The men Thou gavest Me are in the world. They are not of it; they are in it. They are in it for a testimony, for witnesses of God. God is love and He makes it known wonderfully. And now take two or three words in this great matter of the Lord's work in the church. He has a church and He adds to it constantly such as are ordained to eternal life. This is called regeneration, being born again. Regeneration is the implantation or breathing into a dead soul eternal life. "I give unto My sheep eternal life and they shall never perish". That life, being divine, at once arrests and changes and turns the subject of it round. He is converted, he is turned round. He may not know what has done it, may not and will not for the moment know why it is done. He is full of trouble about his soul, the mighty work of the Spirit in regeneration. God has not tied Himself and will not let us tie Him to any particular mode of procedure in any case. He does just what He will and how He will but this is true, that if we are born again, there was implanted in us in that act of the Spirit a nature contrary to our fallen nature. Why are you troubled about your soul and what is that mocking spirit in you? Two principles in you, a principal which is called death in trespasses and sins and a principle which is called eternal life. You could sooner make light darkness than you could unite these two principles, and as they can never agree the subject of them must always have some trouble. This is the very essence of the tribulation which the people of God are to experience in the world.

Outward things come, but this is the very essence of the tribulation. This life of God in you says, seek Him and the death in you says why do you pray? This life takes the form of faith and faith says I want God and nature fallen says who is He. Faith says, God is in Christ and I see Christ and want union with Him. I want His love, I need His blood. I pray for His blood and for His righteousness. If you are enabled to follow the workings of your heart, you who have divine life, you will find these things in you, an opposition to God, and an effectual longing for God. All the polluted waters that flow from our wicked hearts cannot quench the life of God in the soul. "I give unto My sheep eternal life and they shall never perish". Follow the workings of grace in you and you will again and again say, I know I want Him and that want takes me to His throne. Sometimes it will be this with you; faith will be so strengthened and led by the Holy Spirit that you go walking quietly into some part of the gospel, You know not how, but it grows in you. Some part of the gospel, such as the free forgiveness of sins. You look on it, think of it, wonder at it, grasp at it, though it seems to allude you. Still the truth that sin can be forgiven, that God honours Himself by forgiving sin, that though to you your sins seem infinite, yet they are in their nature finite. Then the blood of Christ is infinite, and O that does meet arguments that you again and again urge against yourself. I have been stopped from arguing against myself by the sight by faith of the infinite worth of the blood of Christ. No matter how long you live you will be sinning. No man doeth good and sinneth not. But O when you reckon up your sins. You say I cannot reckon them, they are more than the hairs of mine head. Sin was born in me and I lived in it and I loved it, will be your confession and you say it is in me still. It is in me now; it is working in me and it takes unutterable shapes and works so craftily, so insiduously, so powerfully that I am overcome again and again by it. Yet how is it with you? I cry, and though violence is offered to my soul, still I cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner". Save me from sinning wilfully, from living deliberately in any known sin. The Scriptures do afford great comfort here. We see the best of saints backsliding, committing murder, adultery, denying Christ. These were written for our learning that we may not be overmuch discouraged by our sins. They wont lead you to sin - do not misunderstand me - these will not lead you to sin, but when you are mourning over the sins that you commit, they may come in and say

The blood of Christ, a precious blood
Cleanseth from all sin, doubt it not
And reconciles the soul to God
From every folly, every fault

Paul was the chief of sinners and God had in His mind and purpose a reason for permitting Saul of Tarsus to sin as he did. It was no little thing to try to make a saint blaspheme and curse the Name of Christ, but Paul did that, promised liberty to professed Christians if they but spit at the Name of Christ and blaspheme that Name. God permitted Paul to do that, that there should be a pattern in Holy Scripture for convinced sinners. I am the chief of sinners and God has set me up to be a pattern to all who should come after me and be made believers that they should see in me an extreme sinner and be encouraged to go to the throne of grace and ask for the same blessed grace that the Apostle Paul was favoured with. Christ accomplishes His great work in the worst of people. O it honours Him; He gets out of sinners the highest praises; He gets the highest glory from greatest sinners when He converts them, calls them, saves them, fills them with His glorious grace. This is the love of God in the place where He shows it. And now when you come to a point, you say has He shown it in me? Did it please Christ to come to my father's house and call me? Did it please the Spirit of God to come to me amongst my fellows where I worked, where I was studying, and call me? Did it please the Holy Ghost to say to me, leave your shop, leave your father and your mother, forget your father's house and forsake your own people? So it pleased Christ to go to Abram and say to him, leave your father's house, get out of your own country and I shall show you a place I have chosen for you to give you for an inheritance. He says to a sinner, leave your world, leave your business, leave yourself and I will show you a land which I have provided for you. A righteousness which I will give you, grace which I will fill you with and a glory in heaven. This is what He does. The gospel is a wonderful gospel in the world. It pleases God to honour Himself in the world which is against Him, an apostate world. He gathers people in this apostate world, the men His Father gave Him and He says to His Father, I have lost none of them. The only one I have lost is the son of perdition and he betrayed me and went to his own place. The men Thou gavest Me to redeem I have

redeemed. This is the place where God shows Himself. What, this little bit of the world, and this little piece of Brighton, here, poor sinful people, and God has said to them "Come unto Me". Have they got something to leave? Yes. Peter said we have left all for Thee and you may say sincerely and humbly, I had to leave the world for Him. You say I had to leave some companions for Him. When I was young and had a companion I did cleave to him, It came one day as if the Lord said either God or your friend, not both. You will have to give up something. But if you had all the world and gave it up what would it be? Giving up dung and dross for the gold of grace for the glorious Person of Jesus Christ.

Well, dear friends, if the Lord loves us we shall love Him and we shall never get tired of Him, yet our nature says: Who is He? Faith says, He is the very Son of God, He is the beauty of heaven, He is the glorious Redeemer, His Name is Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. He preaches peace, He gives peace, He loves His people into peace, He takes away their rags and gives them His robe. He takes their filthiness, purges them with hyssop and makes them clean and gives them Himself.

When is this love? In eternity. Why is this love? It is sovereign. No man has a claim on it. It gives itself in predestination. It gives itself in effectual working. "Predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son", a wonderful word. A wonderful word too is that in the Romans: "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you". (Romans 6 v 17) So is the gospel and this world is the place where He shows it. I am come and I preach Thy Name in the church, Thy great and glorious Name.

Now I leave it. "God is love", and when you get that in sweet power you know it. "I love them that love Me". When you find that love in your heart you love Him from whom it came and wish you could love Him more. His religion is a wonderful religion. I found this in my illness from time to time, a wonderful religion. One of these days you may be mourning over your sinfulness and barrenness and wickedness and it may come into your heart: Go home, go your way, eat the fat and drink the sweet and be no more sorry, for the joy of the

Lord is your strength. The joy of the Lord is the joy of having accomplished the work His Father gave Him to do. He said: "It is finished". And in the Psalms Christ praises His Father and said: "Thou wilt show Me the path of life". The path of life to the Lord Jesus was the cross and the grave. Then He found the pure river of water of life opened to Him and everlasting joy at His Father's right hand. And all these things are not His own only, nor to be enjoyed by Him alone, but they are to be the property, the inheritance, the peace, the happiness, the joy of all His people. "God is love". The Father is love, the Son is love, the Holy Ghost is love. It is One God, one love, given to one body, the church, even by Jesus Christ world without end. Can you say "Amen". I believe some of you must say "Amen" to it. It is so wonderful, so glorious, so suitable, so free, so effectual, that you must say "Amen". Let Him be crowned, let Him be honoured not in heaven only but on the earth, in the church, world without end, Amen. Here I leave it.

AMEN.