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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 24 February 1926

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"Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel,
all the knees which have not bowed unto
Baal, and every mouth which hath
not kissed him"

Elijah is a remarkable, interesting person. As a prophet of the Lord he appears before us in two particular aspects; the first a bold, remarkably bold, defender of the faith, standing against the whole of the apostate nation and before and against 450 prophets of Baal, and he brings the nation to a test. "If the LORD be God follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him". And the people, thus challenged, said not a word. He brings them to a test; let your 450 prophets build an altar and let them slay a bullock and I will do the same and the God that answereth by fire let him be God. And the people were convinced, to use the word, of the fairness of that proposal and they said, it is well spoken. And you know how the 450 prophets of Baal laboured from morning until the time of the evening sacrifice and there was no hearing; "O Baal hear us; O Baal hear us", but there was no answer. Elijah mocked them - he is a god, cry aloud; he may be asleep and must be woken, or peradventure he is in a journey; cry aloud. And you know what they did, they leaped on the altar after the fashion of that time and cut themselves with lancets. "O Baal hear us". What a scene! A nation favoured, in covenant with God, deceived by false prophets and false gods. There they stand and the gods they had lately come to profess took no notice of them; who could have expected them to? - dead, like the worshippers. And Elijah comes at the time of the evening sacrifice; his altar is built, his bullock is slain; he tells the people to bring water and pour it on the altar; he had a trench dug round it, and the trench was filled with water. O remember that wonderful, short prayer; how he entreated the Lord to turn back the heart of the people and give them that token that He was, that proof that He was, God, that they could not resist, and God heard the prayer; fire came down from heaven and consumed the

offering, licked up the water, and the people said - The Lord He is God, the Lord He is God. Demonstration, demonstration, as far as it went, turned back the heart of that people. Demonstration we must have. Elijah had the 450 prophets slain; it was in exact accordance with the law which God gave by Moses that if any should turn the people away from God they should be killed; it was God's own commandment that all who deceived the people, who turned them away from the living God, should be killed. There is Elijah the great man of God, and bold, and now Jezebel, who deceived Ahab, and made him cruel and more and more wicked, and turned him away from the Lord God, threatens and sends the threatening to Elijah, that within twenty four hours his life should be as the life of those men, false prophets who he had slain, and Elijah hearing this fled, fled away. He had withstood a nation, had resisted the false teaching and false prophets, and now the voice of a woman frightens him and he flees away. We are all weak people; sin and the devil will weaken us. If we be strong one minute in the faith of God, the next we may be as weak as water and turn away from the living God. We do need God my friends. No child of God who knows his weakness will turn upon Elijah and say, what a coward; what a foolish, weak man he was, and reproach him. Depend upon it, there is not a single Christian in the world who, left for one minute to the unrestrained power of a temptation, would not fall. We need to cry "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe". But though Elijah fled, God did not leave him; He dealt mercifully with him, and when asked what he did in that Mount Horeb he spake as you know, twice: I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts. The people have forsaken Thee, they have broken down Thy altar, and left Thy service, and they have gone, all of them, astray, and I even I only am left and they seek to take away my life. It would seem that Elijah knew of no number meeting together to worship God in any Synagogue here or there, and he concluded, because he knew not any such body of people, that there was no such body; concluded that his knowledge - which was not knowledge indeed - of the condition of the people was just correct, that he was the only godly man and prophet of the Lord. Now the Lord, in the words of the text, corrects him, and brings forth a great truth, which I would desire, by His merciful help, to bring before you this evening. Yet although the condition is evil, and although three evils are yet to come on the people, a cruel king - many evils will he do - still I have left, I have reserved, kept to

Myself, seven thousand men, seven thousand who have not bowed down unto Baal, and whose mouths have not kissed him. Seven thousand in a nation. If a mere man had said it, what a strange and harsh word it might have sounded, but God said it. A nation, a nation to whom God had given the oracles of God; a nation having the worship of God given to it in the particular form; a nation surrounded by mercy and by statutes; only seven thousand faithful people in it. You know he said in one other place, I will take you one of a city and two of a family, and one out of one city and two out of a whole tribe; what a solemn thing. Now if we have any realisation of what the kingdom of God in the heart is, and what the terrible imitation of that in a foolish, and light hearted profession is, we may have jealousy about ourselves. If, in an apostate day like this, if Baal in the form of religious infidelity as now - the bulk of the people, professors - if false religion prevails to such an extent, as that we can scarcely discern anything that is right, will it not make, has it not made, with some of us, a feeling of jealousy respecting our own case? If this religion on the right hand, and that religion on the left, be wrong, where is the right and who is right? So you may feel, so you may be exercised, and the enemy may come and speak to you and you not know it for the time and they mock at you and they say - You think that all these people and all these religious teachers are wrong, and you, a poor ignorant creature, only right, and you may not know what to say for the moment. You may seem to have no answer at all to give to the enemy, and be so confused as to wonder after all if you have made a false judgment of things and of people. Now may the Lord help us to look honestly to this. I have left Me - that is to say I have just surrounded with My mercy and My teaching - seven thousand men. Elijah you do not know them, but I do. You do not know a dozen of them meeting in any place, but I know where they are, and I have left them, reserved them, kept them, and they have not bowed the knee to a false god, nor have they kissed a false god. Baal was a heathen deity; men bowed the knee to him, and seeing an image of him they kissed him or kissed their hand to him, a form of adoration, of worship, of reverence.

To be reserved, to be left by God, is to be sanctified by Him in the gospel sense. "Sanctified by God the Father". It is to be preserved; "preserved in Christ Jesus". It is to be called; "and

called". That is a divinely inspired word in Jude. Preserved from the deceiving of their own hearts, preserved from the deceiving of the devil. If it were possible the very elect would be deceived, but God makes it impossible for them to be deceived finally.

Now let us look then, as helped, at this being left, that is kept by God from the idolatry that is condemned in the Scripture. That is a great word in the law and it is as true in the gospel: "Thou shalt have none other gods before Me". But we do not know the true and living God any more than other people naturally; we have no means of knowing Him by nature. We have no wish to know Him by nature. This is our case. It is the case of everybody born in sin; a very solemn and humbling truth. Just reflect on it for a moment; what are we? who are we? what is our nature? what is our understanding? what is our capacity? what means have we of knowing the living God by nature? To every question this must be answered - we are no better than others. "Who maketh thee to differ from another?" Now when God keeps a person or saves a person from idolatry in any form, He does it in the first place, by that word "called". There is a quickening operation on the heart, a new life is imparted, grace is bestowed; a new light shines, and the sinner feels himself a sinner; he is called by God to God. It is knowing God that makes a man know himself. It is knowing the purity of God that makes a sinner know his impurity. It is the holiness of God shining on a sinner that teaches him his own wickedness and iniquities. It is the justice of God coming against a sinner that teaches him that he is an unjust person. Nothing else will save a person, nothing else will keep a man from walking after Satan in some form, and worshipping a wrong thing. It must be something communicated to us by God that will save us from false gods. There be that are called gods many and lords many, and after one or other of them men go by nature, but to a sinner, this comes to pass, there is but One God and Father and we by Him and One Lord Jesus Christ and we in Him. So it comes to pass that men are preserved from idolatry. And if we are enabled to beat this out for a short time, we shall come to this, that they are kept from idolatry by a manifestation of the true and living God, and that true and living God is in the Person of Jesus Christ, and the word will come to pass in the conscience, in the soul; worship God. John's case in Revelation may show to us how easy it is to be deceived. John was a godly man, an inspired Apostle, but he had

been shown such wondrous things by the angel that he was overcome and he fell at the feet of the angel to worship him, and the angel said, worship God, We do not know how our own hearts, and how appearances, may deceive us if we are left. We need to be constantly shown and constantly taught and to have constant manifestations in some way and measure to keep us worshipping the true and living God. No child of God has any warrant to say in himself, now I am never going to worship a false god. I am not going to be deceived. I know the living God, and I will follow Him. Depend on it, if any child of God says that in himself, and by himself, he will fall in some way. Dependence is the thing for you and for me. Depend on Him, thou canst not fail. Depend on yourself and you cannot stand. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall". Now how shall I know that the God I believe, the God I profess, is the living God? Well, said Elijah, the God that answereth by fire let Him be God. What is the fire that will tell you that the living God is your God and make you know it? That holy baptism, the fire of the eternal Spirit, coming into your heart and consuming, for the moment, the unbelief and scattering the darkness, and bringing true and saving and humbling knowledge of Jesus Christ, through whose sacred humanity the beams of Deity and of eternal love and kindness will be shown. They will fall upon your eye, upon your heart, upon your understanding, and you will say, this is the God, this is the God; this God we adore, our faithful, unchangeable Friend. You will know it; there will be such an influence and power and grace, as that you will certainly know when you get such help, such manifestation of the true and living God. Let us follow this a little. Here is a child of God very very strongly disposed by his nature to turn aside and forsake the living God. He contracts guilt on his conscience, he gets defilement on his spirit, he is greatly discouraged at times, that this is the case, and he may again and again seriously put this question to himself - Now if I were really a child of God, could I depart as I do? Could I turn aside as I do? Could I get as dead as I am? Could I be as blind as I feel to be, and would the things of this life, which I have seen to be vanity again and again, appear to be substance? And when he puts such questions to himself, he is not able to answer them satisfactorily to himself. But this will do the turn, when God in some gracious way checks the motions of sin in him, reproves him for his waywardness, and draws him by giving him another

sight of Himself. It is a beautiful word that we have in the Revelation: "He shewed me" - I do like that word. Said John, "And He shewed me a pure river of water of life". All created rivers would die away from his eye and his mind and his affections when he saw that river. Now many false things may be presented to us, but when we see the true and living God, Jesus Christ, they all die; no place for them. And this will explain what at times we feel, namely the energy we feel in seeking the Lord, the revenge we feel against ourselves for our waywardness and folly; the desire we have that the Lord would not allow us to do what we have done. Not able to promise that we will not, we pray that He may not allow us, and this is the effect of knowing the true and living God, and you will find in that case that you are one of the seven thousand, one of the few comparatively speaking, the Lord has left to Himself. Let others go; He keeps the few. And you, at that moment, will find this in your heart, as to the substance of it,

Let all fruitless searches go
Which perplex and tease us
We determine nought to know
But a bleeding Jesus

Now can you stand this? Do you find the kingdom of God in you in this way? that blessed kingdom that is not in word but in power. No Dagon can stand before Him. Every time Jesus Christ, the Ark with the law in it, and the Mercy Seat, appears, Dagon falls; Baal comes down. "Quick" Berridge puts it

"Quick my idols all depart
Jesus gets and fills my heart"

Now that is a wonderful way of being taught who is the true and living God. He answers by fire; He comes down; the baptism of the Holy Ghost, His blessed operations. And where He is known in this way there is a following on. The Apostle speaks of stretching himself forth, reaching forth and seeking the prize. Pressing toward the mark for the prize of his high calling of God in Christ. There is no other calling that is high. If you are called away in your spirit by some vanity, that is not a high calling. You do not get above the

earth then, nor above yourself. If you are called away to gaze on some trouble, inordinately, and think only of that, then you are called unto yourself, and unto self pity, and if you get tired of the labour of seeking God, then you sink into the earth. But when the Lord brings that high calling to you in new operations, then you are after Him. It is a high calling in its own nature; worship God. Think of it; worship God. He is a Spirit. The Lord said to Israel, you see no form, no similitude, and thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image. What the law says in that particular, the gospel enforces and accomplishes. You will find it so. O to seek that Spirit who is set before us in the gospel. I have left Me seven thousand who have not bowed down to Baal, who have not kissed him. Now there is another thing I want to bring before you and that is this, that there is no purging of the conscience by anything, any means, any religion, but only by the blood of Jesus Christ and this is the door that is set before the saints of the most high God continually as the Spirit moves upon them. Every fresh contraction of pollution means a sensible separation sooner or later. Your sins and your iniquities have separated. I wish we were all more sensible of this. It is our unlively state that leaves us so easy under separation from our best Friend. I know that is true; I wish we all were more conscious of it. Whenever we do what brings separation, if we are lively, then we are sorry. But sin in itself is of a hardening, deadening nature, and so, whenever we commit sin we harden ourselves, unless the Spirit comes immediately to prevent it. Think of it and watch your spirit; if you get easy under a separation from the Lord it is because your heart is hardened and there is great need in us all to take heed to that word: "Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin". There is no such thing as a fatal hardening and losing of your soul, but there is such a thing as a hardening that brings separation between God and yourself, and this is a solemn consideration for us. As I have found it solemn for myself, I just name it to you; every sin has in it the nature of apostasy, and when anyone apostatises then he has a false god, a false hope, a false strength. Now if you think of this, if you believe it, when you commit sin (I speak to you who know the Lord) when you commit sin, in that sin there is the very nature of apostasy, and as you believe it, it will make you tremble lest you should be

left. O, it has made me shake many times, but God in His mercy preserves His people. He preserves them in many blessed ways. I have mentioned one or two of them; now let me mention others. He preserves them from false doctrine. We read of the doctrines of devils. False doctrine, false thoughts, false creeds, false notions of God. We have much ignorance; we have much ignorance. I do not know if any of you are particularly troubled about ignorance in you, but I am a good deal troubled about my ignorance of God. I do not reckon knowledge of the letter of the word of God to be knowledge indeed of a spiritual nature. Some may have more than others of that, but not be better Christians. When I speak of ignorance I mean that ignorance that is in our hearts, that ignorance that leaves us at liberty to turn aside. Now who can remove this? Who can prevent the bad effects of it? Only the Holy Spirit, that heavenly teacher who points out the way to heaven, the way into the Holiest of all, even Jesus Christ. All the doctrine of Christ is heaven. The doctrine of Christ in heaven, His divine Person in our nature; His miraculous incarnation. This is doctrine and this alone will take us to heaven. Now where does faith find her rest, her centre? What has she for a plea before God? How does faith come to have an energy in it that will not let the Lord alone? Only by seeing this Person, Jesus Christ. No man is safe but as he is here looking on, by precious faith, the Lord Jesus. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us". You must believe that if you go to heaven, and if you take as many steps as you have to take in this life, if you take them by faith in the bleeding Lamb, you will then be among those whom God has preserved and kept. "Kept by the power of God" and the power of God is in the doctrine of Christ, that great doctrine of Christ. Now I think this is one of the most encouraging things we can ever have before us; it says to the worst of sinners - Here is the Saviour; to the vilest of sinners, here is the cleansing; to the naked and ashamed, here is the covering; to the distant, this is the new way, the only way to God; to the lost, behold the Saviour. This pure holy doctrine, Jesus Christ, is that that will preserve us. I have left me seven thousand.

Now this is that that will enable you at times, if you are enquired of it, about it, to give a reason for the hope that is in you. You will say perhaps,

I saw Him hanging on a tree
In agonies and blood

What a thing to see. Perhaps you will say I got a sight one day of the Lord Jesus and it had such an effect on me I had to turn aside, and bow down and worship Him, and I felt a hope that He would be my eternal life, my refuge, my Saviour, my God, my All in All. Now this is one way the Lord does preserve His people from heresy of doctrine. They are preserved by this pure doctrine of Jesus Christ, and this is so vital to salvation that the Apostle John says, "If any shall come to you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not," for all the love, and wisdom, and grace, and goodness and purpose and power of God are centred in, have their fulness in, the Person of Jesus Christ. If I knew Him as I want to know Him sometimes, I should be able to preach Him much better than I can, but I would look at this and have you look at it, and fix here, fix here, Jesus Christ died for sinners' sake, and this is the centre, this is the circumference, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last of a living hope. The first and the last of that that makes a Christian, the first and the last that makes a saint out of a devil, that makes a pure person out of an impure one, a righteous person out of an unrighteous one. This and this alone will do it, and this is how God preserves people. If trouble is alone with us, it drives us away. O Baal hear us; O friend help us; O friend come to us and help us. Nature! Nature! Faith says, "O Lord heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee" Lord, I have no helper except Thyself; do help me. I have no refuge but this; let me come and hide in Thee. I have no strength but Thine, no strength; let me feel it in my soul. And this is how the Lord keeps people. It is the Lord's wise love that keeps us, keeps us hungry, and gives us bread; keeps us hungering more and more and then gives us bread to nourish us. So we bow the knee to Him. Every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess to the Lord Jesus, but there is a difference, there is a difference. Some bow in mockery; they mock the Saviour. Some bow in solemn feeling of need of Him; some confess Him to be a mere Man, a wonderful Man but a mere Man. The saints confess Him to be Almighty God. Well now, have we been brought to that point? Come my beloved friends and let us see if we have been put to this, that without Christ we are lost entirely. And if we have been enabled to come to this, I follow after, I follow after. I have got ruin, I follow after

salvation. I am weak, I follow after divine strength. I am ignorant, I follow after the teaching of the Spirit. I am a poor, fallen creature, I follow after Him who alone can save me, and I am often distant but I follow Him who is able to give me union, so as that I shall be near to the Lord. Has the Lord left you to Himself; kept you? It is a great thing to be kept. Here is a solemn example in this nation - "All that the Lord says we will do" was their profession, and when Judah and half the tribe of Manasseh set up a pillar on that side Jordan, when Moses gave them their inheritance there, you know how jealous the others were. They were for going against Judah. Think of that very nation, with all that jealousy, with all that profession, apostatising and worshipping false gods. You say, we will never do that. Do not say it. Do not make hasty and loud professions of loyalty. Peter said it once; what a cure he got; what a cure he got. Then writing his epistle, he said to the brethren, the scattered ones, you are kept by the power of God, you are kept by that and that alone through faith; so do not say you will never turn your back on the Saviour. Rather ask Him - with a sense of your liability to do it any moment, if allowed, if left - to keep you following after. The apostle says, "I press". He was in earnest; there was energy in his faith. "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ". What was the prize? The crown of life, the crown of glory. The Psalmist speaks of a crown of pure gold, a crown of eternal glory, eternal love, everlasting righteousness; this is the crown. What a solemn thing it will be to be found right. Very solemn when you are found worshipping, loving and trusting in Jesus Christ. There is no solemnity in the world like that; no reverence like that. Faith, O what a grace it is. It will bring you to this - "The Lord He is God" And sometimes you may say, He has answered me by fire and the stone melted and the guilt went. He has answered me by fire; He sent an answer to me here and there and I got some blessing in my soul. He is God and I know He is God. It is a very great thing to have some reality, something from God, something of which you can say, now I did not fetch it; He brought it. I do not deserve it, I could not, but He gave it me out of His own heart and love and grace. Things do come and when they come, come from heaven, they have their effect, and their effect is like their nature. As their nature is heavenly so is the effect. Now the Lord has His own. There is a remnant according to the election of grace, and when you believe that it will cause searching

of heart - Am I one of them? You may say, O if there are only a few going to heaven, I would like to be one of them. Then one says, I will be right. No you wont in that way. God can make you right. I am glad that the worst of people can be made the best of people, that pieces of sin can be turned into saints, and that people who are blackness and darkness can be made light in the Lord, and when you believe that you will follow after it. O you will want the blessing you see to be in the Scripture. Any word here that tells you of the true and living God being gracious to sinners will make you say, O do be gracious to me. Any testimony of union with Jesus Christ that you read as you are a living person will make you say, do give me that union, and the one plea you will have in this respect, is for the sake of Jesus Christ. That, that is the plea, the only plea, that a poor sinner has. Now I have gone on in this way very informal to tell you as well as I have been able what real religion is, that it is, as the Word says, in power. The kingdom of God is in power, and God has yet a people scattered about here and there, some in some districts more than in others. It is very solemn when you consider the sovereignty of God in dispensing His grace and mercy to some towns and some villages while He denies it to others, but there is this great thing, I want to say it ere I close, this great thing, namely, that in the Word of God there is a door of hope and in a living soul there is an eye, and to that eye, called the seeing eye, which the Lord hath made, is shown this door of hope and when this door of hope is thus seen, then faith in its motion, in its energy, its begging, pleading, arguing and urging, will be seeking to enter into that door that leads into the Holiest of all, that leads to the worship of the true and living God, and that, in its turn, and in God's time, leads to heaven. May we be found there.

AMEN.