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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 5 February 1922

1 Peter 1 verses 6 and 7

"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season,
if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold
temptations, 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"

Can you measure

My dear friends the hymn you have just sung is true, (758) true to all gracious experience. More or less distinctly it is known to be true by all the people of God, and blessed he whosoever shall not be offended in the path of tribulation. There is an appointed time to everything, an appointed season of affliction, and happy is he who shall never have affliction after this life. And happy also is he who, in his affliction, finds that solemn, but sweet word, "in measure". The only measure is that which God's love has fixed; not our sins, but His love. And the measure that will be through eternity in the wicked, as they experience wrath, will just be the measure of their creature ability; held up by the creating and preserving power of God to bear His unending anger. But here it is not anger in the curse of the law, but fatherly displeasure manifested in chastening. Do you ask the Lord that you may grow in grace? Is it your prayer that He would make Himself more fully known to you? Do you seek that you may be brought nearer to Him? be made more like Him? follow Him more fully? O then, you may expect an answer with a good deal of trouble, but heaven at the last. This "season" in the text is a season of heaviness. "Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop", dries up the spirit, wears out patience, brings a poor, sinning creature to wonder where the scene will end. It is a season when the rejoicing is not wholly killed, as to the spirit; a season when the Lord seems to hide His face and cover Himself with a cloud, that your prayer cannot pass through, and yet the Spirit of God is there. It is a season of manifold temptations, many kinds of temptation. Temptation here is to be taken more largely than respects the temptations of Satan. It

is to be taken as embracing all kinds of trouble that comes, and the manifold nature of these temptations makes those who experience them very feeble and much needing the sacred promise of God - "I will help thee". It is a season in which it seems to those who are in it, as if they have made a great mistake and they are brought to searching of heart. "Come let us search and try our ways and turn to the Lord". It is a season when there will be considerable searching of heart with respect to what seems like a controversy on the Lord's part, the Lord's controversy with Zion, and it does not look well for a professor who, in trouble, does not search for causes of controversy. When a man can hold up his hand in trouble, as if God were not dealing with him, I say it does not look well, but when he says - Come, and the Lord help me to search and try my ways and turn again to Him, then good will come out of it in God's own time. And it is more particularly set forth as the trial of faith. "That the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth though it be tried with fire". So let us look at this, the trial of faith, then at the preciousness of that. Not only is faith precious, but the trial of faith is precious. "That the trial of your faith". Trial means proving, testing. Whatever means God uses to prove and test people, that is a trial. It is not an approbation; it is not something that God does to prove whether a person will be right or wrong, to prove whether a person is a Christian or not, and to prove whether he is good at heart or bad at heart. No, it is a trial to bring out the graces that God has given, to reprove for sin, to make it bitter, to wean from the world, to draw the heart more and more after God and to make time things very unimportant compared with the things of eternity. Viewing trial in this light, what a mercy it is to be tried, to have manifold temptations. An untried faith is an uncertain faith and can never be depended upon. Faith, where real, wrought by the Spirit, may sometimes not be known to be real by the possessor of it, and some trial is given, and that brings out the nature of faith. Let us look at two or three Scripture illustrations of this. We read that God tempted Abraham. He had given him the promised son and Abraham could rejoice as he looked on that promised son. In Isaac all the blessings of the covenant were wrapped up. All the nations of the earth had a blessing promised through Isaac. "In him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed". Here was the line by which the Redeemer should come into the world. Here was a child,

on whose life, so wonderfully given, depended all that God had made promise of in the covenant made with Abraham, and now the Lord comes to Abraham and says, take thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him up. This was trial, trial of faith, a fiery trial. Only a God given faith could have stood that trial; it was a trial. Take thy son, in whom all the promises are, and offer him up; slay him. And you know how God sustained Abraham's faith and turned it into the path of obedience and unquestioningly, as far as the history goes, Abraham took his son Isaac and offered him up, and when Isaac asked the question "My father, behold, here is the wood and the fire, but where is the Lamb?" we may be able to picture a little to ourselves the anguish with which such a question would fill Abraham's heart, already surcharged with sorrow, and yet directed in the path of obedience. God tempted Abraham, a fiery trial, but his faith honoured God. "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb". His faith stood the test, the blessed test, and the issue was glory to God in the highest. You have the case of Jeremiah. The Lord said to him, "They shall fight against thee but they shall not prevail against thee". Later on they did prevail, apparently, for they took him and put him in the low dungeon and cut off his life, apparently, and Jeremiah said to the Lord, I have not gone with the mockers; I stood alone, because of Thy hand. Thou hast filled me with indignation; wilt Thou be altogether unto me as a liar, as waters that fail? A man tested, God's Word in him tested, God's promise to him apparently contradicted, the prevalence of his enemies, against the promise, and his weakness, and his captivity, against the promise, and he used these solemn words, Lord wilt Thou be altogether as a liar unto me? I have trusted Thy promise and now it has failed. It was a fiery trial. And the Apostle speaking of trial says this, "The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." A fiery trial shall come to every child of God, though in the first place that chapter and these words particularly refer to fiery trial coming to a minister's work to prove whether he built well, and only gold and silver and precious stones, or whether he mixed them with wood and hay and stubble. And then, to prove what can only be proved by fire, a fire was put to the building and then, if wood, hay and stubble were found, the fire would soon consume them. Then we may enlarge that word and apply it to all the Lord's people. In some way there is a fiery trial. Faith is God's gift and one of the best gifts we have in this life. That spirit of

credence that receives the promise and depends on it, that receives Christ and lives by Him, that looks to the atonement and finds hope in it, that receives and rejoices in the righteousness of Christ, that looks into unseen things, and passes by tangible things, that says trouble is for a moment, and good things are for eternity; that is faith; faith that receives the testimony of God concerning Christ and the testimony of God concerning the soul, for there are these two testimonies. Let us look at them for a moment. There is the testimony of God concerning Christ: "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". Do you receive that testimony? Did you ever get a sight of Christ crucified and believe in Him as the very Son of God and the very Son of Man? If so, that faith in your heart has made Him precious to you, your boast, your hope, your beauty, your glory, your all and in all. It has made Paul's word something to you, "I am determined to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" for you see worthiness alone in Him, goodness alone in Him, love alone in Him, and infinite merit in His death. That is God's testimony. The testimony of God is this, too, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. Have you received that testimony and felt, in your heart, that you could worship, and did worship, Christ as you worship the Father? This shows that there is a distinct exercise of faith on the Person of Christ, as well as of faith on the Person of the Father. That testimony brings salvation to all to whom faith is given to receive it. Then there is the testimony that God gives to the soul about its own condition, about its state for eternity. He says in the Scripture, whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. He says to such a person, thou art all fair My love, My sister, My spouse; there is no spot in thee. The testimony is that God justifies freely the ungodly through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and further, that God has predestinated His people unto the adoption of children to Himself by Jesus Christ. And further, that it is God's good pleasure to give the little flock the kingdom. Now if you, if I, have life divine in our souls, can there be any solid satisfaction to us, any real rest in us, short of that testimony? And if we have received that testimony, that is a faith that will be tried. Take these two things then. Here is the ground, here is the work, here is a grace given, here are truths which it has received, relied upon, rejoiced in, and everyone who has received these testimonies, in the reception and the

enjoyment of them there has been no suspicion, for the moment, of what must come afterwards. We walked with joy toward heaven, did we not? We thought that, as the Israelites saw the Egyptians no more when the waters covered them, so we should no more see our enemies; that, as we found the love of God in our hearts, all the enmity was removed; that, as sin was forgiven, the love of sin taken away, we were now secure; that, as the Lord had smiled and we were happy, we should no more have misery. "Let him forget his misery and remember his poverty no more". You know I speak the truth, those of you who have walked in the light of God's countenance. If anyone had told you that in a short time your new found joy and peace and love and holiness would, as it were, vanish and be as though you had not had them, you could not have believed them. So happy, so sure, so sweet, were you in your feelings, so humble in your heart, so tender of God's honour, so feeling now that the only thing you loved was holiness as you saw that in Christ, how could you think that days of darkness would come and be your lot, and that you would eat ashes like bread and mingle your drink with weeping. I remember my old minister saying to me, sing while you can, for the days of darkness will be many. I knew not what he meant. I was singing, could sing, with this in my heart and spirit; I little thought of what was coming. And so it may have been with you, you were so satisfied. Now the trial of faith comes. This faith that you have got, that you then had unclouded, undimmed; this vision bright and penetrating into the mystery of God, Jesus Christ; this faith that had received the testimony of God concerning Him and concerning your own state, telling you that you were forgiven; this faith has had to be tried. The trial of it is very solemn.

I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith and love and every grace

every good thing, and the prayer was heard, yes, heard in heaven, and the prayer was answered, answered in the experience of the sinner, answered according to God's purpose and for His glory; and here comes the trial. Someone might have said to you, are you quite sure that your faith is right? And in the light of God's countenance, and in the powerful enjoyment of Christ's love, you could have said, yes, I know whom I have believed, and I know I am going to heaven, and God will never contradict, but He will put to the test the faith that has

so rejoiced, and the test is trial, fiery trial. And two or three particular trials only will I name this evening. First of all, there is the trial that comes from the presence and working of indwelling sin. None can know the piercings of indwelling sin, but the man who has found and felt them, and the bitterness of it is, that it goes against Him to whom you have felt all your love go out; in whom your faith has been centred; who has been the ground of your hope, and the only cause of your rejoicing. When a child of God loses his first liberty, it is a great loss, and if he loses it through some sin rising and prevailing, it is a very solemn loss indeed. Some of us will never forget that loss, that first loss; it was so solemn. The piece of silver lost; the sense of God's goodness gone; His presence gone; all the brightness of hope, gone; the warmth of love, gone, and in the place of those precious graces, some sin or sins rising, working, clammering, soliciting, pursuing, and pressing claims, and you hardly able to say, I cannot consent; hardly able to utter Joseph's word: "How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Yea, you have fallen. It may be no man knew it; you only. O, the sighs, O, the heaviness, the bitterness, the anguish, the questions. Was I deceived? Did I make a mistake? Did I take that to myself when I thought God spoke it to me? Was it an imagination of mind that I had only, when I thought it was a revelation of Christ? Was it only a natural peace when I thought it was a peace that came by the blood of Christ? This is a heavy season, a very bitter season, and a severe trial. The burning fire of sin. Where love burned to Christ, sin burns now; some awful sin, some darling lust, some master iniquity. That is one trial. Another trial is that the devil is allowed to persecute you. Persecute and take him; there is no help for him in God, persecute him. The devil is Herod here. It is written of Herod that he sought the young child's life to destroy Him, and when Christ is born in a sinner's heart then the devil seeks to destroy the young child as born and living there. If you have descended into your heart and found your Saviour there, the devil has tried to come into your heart and slay that Saviour, and no easy thing is it to hold fast. O, to hold fast. John found a sore test when he was put in prison. It was not the prison, it was not the chain; no, it was not the captivity. It was this, that Christ apparently sent no word to him, gave him no look of recognition for a time, and so the trial was very severe. The enemy would go into that prison and say, John you made a great

mistake, you got a false vision when you thought you saw the Holy Ghost descending on Jesus Christ; and, proclaiming Jesus Christ to be the Lamb of God, you made a great mistake, and the proof of it must be this, that you have never heard from Him since you came to prison; He has sent no relief, given no comfort, paid you no visit, darted in no look of love. He would have done if He had been the Jesus Christ you proclaimed. And that tried John and he made it known to the Lord, how tried he was. It was not his faith - and yet there was faith at the bottom, and love at the bottom - but it was his poor heart's unbelief and sinking that sent the message: "Art Thou He that should come or look we for another?" If you have faith, and unbelief stirs, and the enemy persecutes you, you may send out some such message as that to the Lord. You would never do it without real faith; you would give all up then. Christ condescends to send John a message, but it was a message that was brought to the disciples of John, into their very hearts, by seeing what Christ did. "Go and tell John of the things you have seen" and He added this "Blessed be he whosoever shall not be offended in Me". Blessed is that faith that can stand its ground. There is another word I would draw your attention to where Christ had been teaching His disciples. He said to them at the end of the lesson, so to speak, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men", as if He should say: You listen to Me now; now remember these things, for I, who have taught thee, I who am Almighty God, I in whom you believe, in whose deity you believe, I shall be delivered into the hands of men and shall be apparently weak and incapable of helping you or delivering Myself. Therefore let these sayings, which shall be tested, the truth of which shall be put to a solemn test, let them sink down into your ears. Every word Christ speaks is tested - the fiery trial, the trial of faith.

There may be, in the third place, a trial which is like a fire in providence, as when God told Jacob to return to his father's house, and to his people, promising to be with him. Esau comes in between Jacob and his destination, and Jacob is sorely put to it. So you will find, when God gives out some word respecting you in providence, He will put it to a test. "Think it not strange" says Peter "concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as though some strange thing happened unto you". The same afflictions are accomplished in all

your brethren that are in the world; it is no strange thing; it is a fiery trial designed by God. There are two fires mentioned; there is the fiery trial which I have just mentioned, and into that the people of God all come. It is called the Lord's fire which is in Zion and His furnace which is in Jerusalem. O, blessed are the people who are in Zion and Jerusalem, even though they are in that fire, in that furnace. There is another fire spoken of by Malachi. He says that the wicked shall burn as an oven and they shall be consumed as stubble. What an awful thing that will be. If any of you, my dear hearers, are put into that oven, you will never come out of it, but if the Lord blesses us and puts us in Zion, though we be in His fire and His furnace, we shall come out of it. Yes, the fiery trial is for a season; remember that. God has measured it as to heat and time. Well may the Lord help us solemnly to consider this. Better be with Christ in affliction than in the world with the curse of God in you and over you.

Of this trial of faith, it is said, there is preciousness. It is more precious than gold that perisheth and the reason is that the Lord, by trial, purges away dross, and thus the trial of faith is found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. "I will purely purge away thy dross". It is a terrible thing to be lead, my friends. Some people are lead, and when lead is put into the furnace it melts, and there is nothing to be seen, but lead. But gold, precious ore, may have a good deal of earth about it, a good deal of dross, and the fire separates that precious metal from the base. He sitteth as a refiner of silver and a purifier of gold, it is written of the Lord. You say, sometimes, O, if these carnal thoughts of mine, if these rebellious affections of mine, if this base ingratitude of mine, if this, my chief sin, unbelief, were not so prevalent; O, if the Lord would cause me to grow in grace and subdue my iniquities; how thankful I would be. And He hears you, yes hears you favourably, receives your prayer. Then perhaps you felt some liberty in asking so great a favour, real liberty, and then the Lord puts you to a test. Did you ever wish you could draw back your prayer? Was it ever put to you, as it were, a question in the form of a solemn enquiry - You remember praying for such and such things? Yes. Would you draw back that prayer if you could? Would you unsay it? And what has your heart said? No, I will stand to it by the help of God, the

Holy Ghost. And He put it to the test; you have got into a fire. Nature says, let me get out. Faith says, hold me up Lord. "Hold up my goings in Thy paths". Hold me up in the narrow way, Cause me to stand in the good old way of tribulation.

Let us look, for a moment, at another word which bears upon this solemn experience. It is the threshing instrument, tribulation, the old fashioned tribulum that is put on the wheat like a cart wheel. What is the effect? One, ignorant of the effect, looking just at the crushing process, might say, why the ruin of it all. No, says one who understands, this tribulation is to separate the chaff from the wheat, just as the fire is to separate the precious metal from the dross. "That it might be found unto praise and honour at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Praise. Praise to whom? To the sinner, for his faithfulness, for sticking fast and holding to the Lord? No, no no. The sinner says, I should soon have proved a traitor; I soon should have gone away and soon have made, as concerning faith and a good conscience, shipwreck, if the Lord had not held me up. I praise Him for His love and for His faithfulness; for His goodness and for His moderation. He did moderate trouble, and there was a moderation in the fire. It might have been much worse; it might easily have been a great deal more destructive. God did moderate it. It was "in measure" that He might not bring me to nothing. It was measure indeed. "Thou most upright dost weigh the path of the just".

Our sorrows in the scale He weighs
And measures out our pains

O what a good God He is, and praise comes to Him. You say "It is good for me that I have been afflicted". I would not have been without that crushing trouble for all the world. It proved to me my weakness; it proved to me God's power; it proved to me my selfishness and unfaithfulness; it proved to me God's faithfulness and love. It proved that I am nothing but a base creature. It proved that God is all love to me. "Praise and honour and glory", for a suffering christian, as Peter says, has resting on him the Spirit of God and of glory. Therefore it is a great thing to be tested, a great honour to be tested. I have thought sometimes, the honour that God puts upon a creature to test him and afflict him, is very great. It is an honour

to be chastened and to be put to the test. Well, dear friends, the way to heaven is not going to be smooth. It is a certain way and the end of it is sure to all the people of God - heaven - but it is not going to be a smooth way. It never was; it never will be. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. But if it be rough, if it be difficult, if the hill be steep and the climbing puts you out of breath, and sometimes out of heart and courage; if the enemy says, you will never reach the city you are talking about and seeking; there is one in heaven who looks upon His poor people in their weakness and discouragement, and says, "Fear not little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". Victory does not depend on our courage, does not depend on the smallness of trouble. It depends wholly upon Him who has made a promise of it, and, having made a promise of it, He surely will perform that promise, for God is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent. The Lord give us faith, strengthen faith where it is, confirm faith where it is tested and tried.