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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham at
Galeed Chapel, Brighton on
Sunday morning 27 March 1927

TEXT: 1 PETER 2 verse 25

"For ye were as sheep going astray, but are now
returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of
your souls"

There is but one way from sin to holiness, from condemnation to justification, from a deserved hell to a heaven, freely bestowed. That way is revealed in the everlasting gospel. It is the glorious scheme of redemption found by the Trinity, resolved on by the Trinity, and accomplished by the Trinity. It does not leave anything for the objects of God's electing love, and the subjects of His mighty grace, to do. Merit has no place, that is human merit, so-called. And this does open a door of hope for the vilest sinner out of hell. It does not leave one little excuse, it just opens a door and it says in effect what sometimes we sing

The vilest sinner out of hell
Who lives to feel his need
Is welcome to the throne of grace
The Saviour's blood to plead

and if I could not, by the help of God, preach this gospel, I would stop preaching altogether. There is a crown to be put on the man who is saved, but it is the crown of God's lovingkindness. The crown of merit, of conquest, of everlasting victory, the crown of sovereign grace, the crown of salvation, must be put on the head of God. The Lamb has many crowns on Him, and we, if we get to heaven, shall put a crown there, yea, while in this wilderness, we shall crown Him sometimes. Salvation has not its origin in the new-birth. Its origin is in God, in eternity. It has its rising spring, as to experience, in the new-birth. The new-birth is the beginning of the application of salvation. It is not the beginning of salvation, but of the

application of it to a person. One of the best evidences that ever is in the experience of a child of God is that he became, in God's time, the subject of the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, and the seal that he is the Lord's is the Spirit's gracious work in him, and witnessed in him, that he is a child of God. We go our own way naturally. Born in this world of sin, born in sin, we go astray from our birth, speaking lies. There is nothing in us naturally, but sin, since the fall. The best that is in us naturally is evil. The thought of a man's heart is, according to God's testimony, only evil and that continually. Whatever some of you may think about human nature, whatever embellishments you may think human nature is capable of having, whatever judgments you may form about mortality, and however you may grow into pharisees, you will find this, either in this world, in God's mercy to you, or in the world to come, in condemnation, that you were born in sin, that you did sin naturally, that you loved it, that you loved darkness rather than light, that you turned your back on God and not your face; that you hated Him and said in all actions of your lives, in all the thoughts of your hearts, though there was no such form perhaps, in your mind you said to Him, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. And what a terrible thing to live like that, and what an awful thing it will be to die in that state. O sinner, may the Lord open your eyes to see your state, and quicken and enlighten your conscience, to feel your sinfulness, and give you power to pray and faith in the Lord Jesus. The Apostle here, by divine inspiration, lays down the great doctrine of Christ's death. That will ever be the foundation of hope and the reason of all godly experience, Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree. That is redemption, that was the removing of sin, once in the end of the world. That was casting the sins of the sheep into the depths of the sea of forgetfulness. That was putting the church into this state, without blame and spotless. O what a work it was. Think of it. The holy and only-begotten Son of God, becoming Man, taking on Him our nature, and having put on Him, by imputation, the sins of His sheep. And, suffering and offering Himself to God without spot, He put them away. O the heaven of that word "It is finished", we can never fully enter into here, never. Think of

it. The law, with its terrible curse, finished; sin, with its burden, finished. Sin, and all that was in it, the filth of it, the power of it, the guilt of it, finished, put away for ever and ever, and all these poor people, as wicked as others, O as wicked as anybody, these poor people, rendered spotless and without blame in the sight of God. The greatness of God is in this, the wisdom of God is in this, the glory of God is in this. It is indeed the glory of God to conceal a matter, and to conceal the great matter of sin, and leave not one spot or speck or stain of sin. This was the work of God. And this being done, the Spirit moved His servant Peter to say that the people for whom it was done were dead to sins - "That we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed". Legally - therefore justly - the church is dead to sins, in and by the body of Christ. Whatever their experience is, to the contrary, from time to time, that is their exact position in the sight of God. In the Person of Christ, in the death of Christ that is their standing before God. It is hard to realise it. It is impossible to believe it, and it indeed is impossible of belief, except in the witness and testimony of the Holy Ghost, that the sinner who, in the conviction of the Spirit, and the teaching of the Spirit, finds himself to be indeed a sinner, and full of sin, steeped in sin, full of it in his thoughts, in his wishes, in his hardness of heart, in his prayerlessness, in his unbelief, full of sin, doing that which dishonours God in his mind, that that sinner, notwithstanding all that he feels and suffers, stands in this condition, and state, spotless, and without blame before God in love, and notwithstanding that painful experience, that person is dead to sins. And one proof of it is that he grieves that sin is in him, that he mourns at times that he has a body of sin and death, that he can say - I would be holy, I would follow the Lord Jesus, I would hang to His cross, I would be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness. He comes to a real, and hearty, and thorough renunciation of himself, and a hearty cleaving, by faith, to the Lord Jesus as his only hope. By whose stripes ye were healed. What a wonder, the stripes of the Saviour healed the wounds of a sinner, the stripes of justice laid on Him, made room for the mercy of God to come into his heart, and heal him. He says at

times - "Heal me O God for I have sinned. And then the wounds of the Lord Jesus, and the death of the Lord Jesus come in the power of the Spirit and heal him. He is made whole; he has perfect soundness through Jesus Christ, and faith in Him. Having laid down the great doctrine, the death of Jesus Christ, he now comes to the experience of this people, these sheep. Yes, it will always come to that in the scripture; you will always be able, as enlightened to trace it thus, and it will be so in your own experience. Bought with blood, born again, you returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. For ye were as sheep going astray, and nothing could bring you back but the death of the Saviour. Nothing could have made a way for God to come to you, and for you to reach God, but the death of Jesus Christ. This, as believed, and perceived in the heart by faith, enhances the Saviour's merit, glorifies His Person, and makes Him the chiefest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely. An atonement wider than our wandering, deeper than our guilt. An atonement so rich as that God blesses all for whom it was made with the gift of the Spirit, and the gift of righteousness, and the gift of holiness, and the gift of grace, and the gift of perseverance to the end. So rich that the people interested in it can never die of poverty. Durable riches and righteousness are with Jesus Christ. They are His possession and He gives out of that fulness. My brethren, there is no scant supply in Jesus Christ. No scant supply of pardon, of justification, and of grace, and of wisdom. Therefore, all that a sinner needs, he will find a full supply of in Christ and His precious, efficacious death. Going astray as far from God as sheep could run we went. What foolish, wicked, wandering marked our life up to regeneration. We said in our lives, if not with our tongues, we said to God - depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. But when eternal realities were laid on the heart and mind, by the Holy Spirit, when the greatness and holiness and justice and glory of God were made known to us, and when the weight and worth of our immortal souls were also discovered to us, then, then we knew what wandering from God meant. Born in sin, we went after sin, till grace stopped us, in the madness of our lives, madness of our hearts, for madness is in the heart of man and he is fully set in him to do evil. O what songs there will be in heaven and what

beginning of the song there is in this world. When grace comes and makes a sinner, a happy sinner, then he sings of sovereign grace, and says, looking to eternity - Heaven with the echo shall resound. O what a good God He is to His people.

"But ye are now returned". The first returning is when the sinner is a passive receiver of eternal life, when the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost comes to him, when he is born again. When that scripture takes effect on him - "I will give them a new heart" That is a wonderful day, not known perhaps distinctly to the subjects of it, but a wonderful day, when the new-birth, that blessed blessing of the gospel, comes. O, may we, who know we are born again, as we hope, be enabled to praise God for it. Let not such a mercy lie in forgetfulness, and without praises die. Present troubles do not alter that, cannot alter that, cannot lessen the mercy of that. When you can say - now I believe God has given me a new heart and a right spirit, set my heart toward Himself, and turned my back to the world, when I say such is your hope, do praise that blessed Spirit, that dear Redeemer, that Holy Father, for such an unspeakable mercy. We can never thank Him enough for giving us this return. We left God in the Adam fall; we left Him in our own practices, and when regeneration comes, then we were returned to Him, as if the Spirit should take us, in that new birth, and present us to the Saviour and present us to the Father and say - here is the purchase of Thy blood, here is the one whom Thou hast loved from eternity. O it is great to be returned to God. In this return the sinner is passive, but not passive when he is born again. His heart begins to feel what sin is, and pant to know what grace is, what forgiveness is.

"Are now returned". Now then, is it not solemnly true, let me draw your attention to this, that this congregation is divided into two parts. There are two peoples, two parties here. One happy people, laid hold of by sovereign grace, in the operations of the Spirit, and carried therein and thereby to God, as the purchase of His blood; the other wandering wide, going as far as they can from God, getting away from all right things, as far as possible. What a division this is. Social divisions, divisions

of circumstances, temperaments, and all that kind of thing are nothing, nothing at all compared with this - the living and the dead; sinners born again and sinners dead in trespasses and sins. Sinners fearing God and loving Him, and sinners saying we do not want Him. Sinners hanging about Jesus Christ, and sinners saying get as far from us as possible, depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. O sinner, loving sin, your condition is beyond all words terrible. May you be brought to believe it, and feel it. God owes you nothing but what He owes to Himself, that is justice in punishing you. What His law demands must be fulfilled and given to it, either in Jesus Christ on the cross or in your own condemned and punished persons. Heaven is for people who are made a heavenly people, and hell for people who have lived and died in the hell of sin. Think of it, here we stand before God, naked in our hearts and thoughts, naked before Him with whom we have to do. May God in His mercy make us contemplate this. Look at the living people. O blessed people. They must be blessed people whom God praises, of whom He speaks well. And He does praise and speak well of His people. He does praise them. He says - "There is no spot in thee". He speaks well of them - "Children that will not lie." He speaks well of their works and He will never forget their work. Their work of love, their labour of faith, He will never forget. O it is a great thing, is it not, to be one of whom God speaks well, of whom He takes a kindly notice. Why, when there is a desire to fear His Name, He notices that, and speaks well of it. Now look at this. Sinners are returned to God in the act of regeneration. They are carried, as it were, on the wings of the Saviour's merit, and by the power of the eternal Spirit, unto God the Father, who sees them as being His own. And there is a way in which these wandering sheep go back, return with their feet. Said God of Ephraim, I taught him to go; I taught him to walk; I taught him to take certain steps. And this is true of every child of God; he is taught to walk, and in this walk he returns to God. This is the walk of faith. We walk by faith and not by sight. Now let us look a little at this, by the help of the Holy Ghost. People do return to God, and we have it in that that Bunyan calls that blessed 8th chapter of John. "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." A coming sinner. How does He

come? He comes, not as a pharisee - God I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are", but as the publican "God be merciful to me, a sinner". How is it he does not mistake the way? The Holy Spirit guides him, teaches him. The prodigal said "I will go and return to my Father, and a poor sinner, unable to claim the relationship of a child of God, says "I must go, and I will confess, as well as I can, my sins" And he goes and opens out his trouble, the heart trouble, the soul sickness, and the wickedness of his fallen nature, and all the things he has done, as he remembers them. He goes with faltering steps and many fears to the throne of God's heavenly grace, and says "God be merciful to me a sinner." That is returning, a leaving the ways of sin and folly, and enmity and wickedness. Leaving the ways of deliberate sin. He goes with his burden and his sorrow and says that, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Not at the first only, but all through his life. Now, returning sinner, take courage, for the Lord Jesus said I will never cast him out who comes to Me. Take courage. O there is more beauty in a coming sinner and more music in his confessions and petitions, than in all the beauties and music of the whole of God's beautiful creation. All His works praise Him, but there is not one that can be to Him, what the returning of a sinner is. How the whole heart of the sinner is in this business. He says "Soul and all's at stake, I must go" Yea he has got that now in his soul that will prove him to be a prince and he will have power over the angel and will prevail and get the blessing down that he seeks. Nobody would call Jacob an innocent man when, on the first night of his departure from his father's house, a guilty sinner, driven away by the enmity and vengeful spirit of Esau, but now God came to him, and spoke to him. And then, when he was going back to his father's house, what happened to him? That, that brought his sin to his memory afresh. He was told that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men. What did that? Worm Jacob got the biggest blessing of his life up to that time. As a prince hast thou power with God and prevailed. He returned, and every returning sinner has a principle of faith in his heart and that principle of faith will go out in a blessed acting, and get the blessing down, even as Jacob did, and as the publican did. This is full of encouragement. A minister may indeed, standing on the ground

of the atonement, say to returning sinners, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart. Be of good courage, this is the plea, this is the ground. this is the reason of God's goodness manifested and of His giving out blessings - the atonement of the Lord Jesus.

Do not disconnect these verses, though I have only read the latter of the two, but look at the former. "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." That is the atonement, my friends, that is our ground, that is our plea, that is our hope, that is our acceptance - Jesus Christ died. Now when you can plead this, you plead that, that pleases the Father. Nothing ever pleased the Father in creation, as the atonement pleases Him. That is the, the pleasure of all, these people returned to the cross. "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree". Here is the cross, that of which Paul speaks, when he says "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Have you any glory beside this? Nay, says the sinner, I have no hope but this, therefore, what should I do to glory in anything but this. Glorifying in the cross of Christ means that Christ's precious death is everything to your soul, and glorying in it means also, there is a real heart felt cleaving to it. There is a true approval of it, there is a hearty acquiescence in it as God's remedy for the soul sickness that is afflicting one. It is God's remedy, it is the sinner's hope, and it becomes his peace and his joy and his glory. Returning to the cross, is coming to it by faith. By faith we look on the Lord Jesus. By faith we receive Him, having received Him, having received the atonement, or the reconciliation. And when this is received, this blessed atonement is received, there is a sweet reconciliation to God, and it is felt, it is really felt, and a sinner in that feeling looks into the perfect law of liberty and he walks as a freed man of Christ. Christ's freed man. Freed from the law as a condemnation that was in his conscience, and freed from the guilt of his sin that was on his conscience, and freed from death which he felt in his heart and mind. He is free, delivered, brought into an experience of forgiveness. Did you ever come to the cross? O sacred place, door of hope, door into

liberty and door into heaven is the cross of Christ. A fountain of goodness, a fountain of life, a fountain of justice, that is of righteousness, a fountain of holiness to all the people of God, is the cross. Nothing but that will do, nothing less than that will satisfy. My dear brethren there is enough here for life, enough for death, enough for heaven and eternity. Coming is not easy, returning is not easy. Why not? One says, is not Christ enough? Yes, but then this is to be known - the world, the flesh and the devil hate the cross and they stand in the way of a sinner as he is going to it. If there were no world without, I have enough within me to hinder me, if it were possible. Everyone has. Every child of God has, and knows it painfully, for you cannot for one moment aim at reaching the cross in your heart's desire and not have some opposition to it. O this flesh, O this awful flesh, how it stands in the way. What hindrances we meet in coming to this sacred spot, and yet we return to it.

"Are returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls"
There is a return in the sweet hope that the child of God has. It is called a good hope through grace. A good hope, a hope of acceptance in the Beloved, a hope that God, in His great mercy, will receive you. And this is very great, when you think, as you do, and feel, as you do, that there is no reason in yourself, and there is no excuse for your sins. You have got no excuses to make, but nothing but accusations of self from beginning to end. And then, notwithstanding, to see by faith the infinite merit of Jesus, as dying, that alone inspires a real hope of a happy reception, of being accepted in the Beloved.

Take away his filthy garments. That sometimes gives a hope to a sinner, Here is Joshua, dumb, standing before the Lord. "O" said the Lord "take away his filthy garments". You cannot take them away. No man can strip himself, any more than he can clothe himself in those matters. But there is one who will strip him, one who will say "Take away his filthy garments. Give him a change of raiment." A hope of this, O how sweet it is. You say, but I have got my filthy garments still. Wait on God. We may see in Joshua's case that being clothed in filthy garments in the

way of experience does not forbid the approach of a sinner. He must go as he is. If you could strip yourself and go without these forbidding rags, then you might have something to glory in, but you must go as you do go in the power of the Holy Spirit, clothed with filthy garments. The Lord does not say take that wretch away, I cannot bear the sight of him. No, He does not say it. He will never say it. But He turns to those who shall be His ministers in that case and says "Take away these filthy garments. Leave the person; remove his filthy rags. Leave him with Me; remove his filthy garments. Then he turns to this poor sinner and says "I have given thee a change of raiment. I have done it." Ah my friends, it is a wonderful thing to come to Christ, to be returned, in the power of the Spirit, to Him, as a sinner clothed in filthy garments. Little do these people think at times, as they are approaching the Lord Jesus in their filthy garments, what a change awaits them.

Sudden He stands confessed
We look and all is light

O what a change. Very palpable this, very sacred this, as some know, and it has to be known again and again and again when there is a renewing and a making of all things new by the mercy of God. We come to Him again and again as weak creatures. Let the feeble say, I am strong. Why should he say it? What is the reason that a sinner, who frequently is overcome by his own sins and afflictions, should say - I am strong? Well, the Holy Ghost by Paul instructs us in this "Thou therefore my son" writing to Timothy Paul says "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Strength to have trouble, strength to submit to God's will, strength to run the race that is set before you. Strength to believe to the salvation of your souls. Strength to hold to Christ in the face of all opposition. Strength to resist the devil. Strength to pray without ceasing, strength to love the Lord with mind and heart. O, all this strength is in Christ, and it must flow from Him, and does flow from Him, into the soul. So let the feeble say, I am strong. They have got a strong Saviour, a strong Lord Jesus. They have strong sins, but He has more in Him of strength than there can be found of strength in sin.

Strong lusts, strong pride, strong unbelief, strong death in the mind again and again felt. But O the strength of Christ's grace. Paul speaking of a feeble person, says - God is able to make him stand, yea he shall stand, for God is able to make him stand. His tottering steps are no measure of the strength that is in his soul and especially and above that, the strength that is in the Lord Jesus.

"Are now returned" They return to Him for strength. The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger. Let the feeble then rejoice. O feeble believers, lift your heads up, now your salvation draws near. You have got a good Christ, a gracious Lord, a mighty Saviour, and the Lord will prove it, comfortably prove it to you, in his own time.

"Ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." They return to Him for wisdom. They return to Him for wisdom. I wisdom dwell with prudence. Christ is the wisdom of God. If any man will be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise. You wont know how to walk unless you have this wisdom. The way to heaven is not a straight way as we reckon straightness, nor an easy way, as we reckon ease, but we have got this before us. I wisdom dwell with prudence and find out knowledge of witty inventions. And Christ finds out a way of making loss a gain, of making trouble a blessing, of taking the sting out of every affliction; putting no curse into the cup, but a blessing. O what wisdom there is in Him in this. And, "though no affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous, nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peacable fruit of righteousness, unto them which are exercised thereby." O foolish person, do not despair. You feel foolish but, as Berridge would say - Haste away to Christ. He has got wisdom. "I am wisdom. I am understanding" He says. Then you say, how foolish I was in my wandering, trying to find a way of escape for myself, and trying to work out some good scheme for myself, whereas the only safe way for me to walk is this, to call on the Lord. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally

and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.

Now may He help us then to come into this word - But are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. Perhaps some may be saying, we are all wandering from the Lord and now made willing to return. Well, in that willingness there is a returning, and it will be made manifest to the comfort of the returned sinner in God's own time.