

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 24 August 1919

3 Epistle John, v 4

"I have no greater joy than to hear
that my children walk in truth"

The truth in the text is the everlasting gospel; it relates particularly to Christ and to walk in it is an infinite mercy. The text naturally divides itself into three parts. First, the truth; and we must enquire what it is; what the truth is. The second is walking in it - "That my children walk in truth" - and the third is the joy that it was to the Apostle John, the Pastor, the Apostle and friend of the Lord's people, who watched for their souls as one that must give an account. And to see these, his children, walking in a godly way, holding fast the form of sound words, not deceived nor drawn aside, was to him a great joy; the greatest joy that he could have in the church of God.

I must first then draw your attention to the truth. What is the truth? What is truth? The answer in the blessed gospel sense is that truth is in God, that it comes from God. This is most comprehensive and leads up first of all to the fountain of truth, God Himself. And dear friends, let me say at once, that it is an infinite mercy given to a sinner, when the sinner can say, "I believe in God". Examine yourselves now and see if, out of your hearts, you can make that confession - "I believe in God". It is not half as common as men are apt to think. The man who really believes in God is a humbled, sober man. A right belief in, a true apprehension of, the Being of God is what only a new born person has. It is not natural to believe in God. Even Adam in innocency had no spiritual apprehension of God. Since the fall we are children of wrath and until enlightened by the Spirit we are enveloped in the gross darkness resulting from sin. Yea, the Scripture says "We are darkness" and how can darkness possess any knowledge concerning Him who made us, made us without sin? So it is a great thing for a person really to profess, out of his heart, that there is a God; to say with the

Apostle Paul - "Though there be that are called gods, as there be gods many and lords many, but to us there is but One God the Father and we in Him, and One Lord Jesus Christ and we by Him." And this is Christ's own teaching where He says - "Ye believe in God believe also in Me". Now I do press this question upon you - "Do you believe in God?" And if you say, yes, I ask you next, what does the belief do for you? Does it make you sober? Does it show you your sinfulness? Does it make you pray? Does it bring you down in your soul's feelings to believe that you are dust, the creature of a day, crushed before the moth? That nothing matters but this, to be loved by this God and saved by Him. Does it put the things of this life in their proper places, and you in your proper place, the dust of nothingness and wickedness. Belief in God is the fountain and the topstone. Belief in God is necessary to prayer - "He that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." If God were to open the eyes of professors to whom religion is a sort of fashion, and show them a little of Himself, O what a shaking there would be. I should say that some of you would be shaken to pieces, but it would be a good shaking. To walk in this truth then of the Being of God, is great, because you will walk in the truth of the Trinity; that is to say, you will believe in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Ghost. You will believe that a uni-personal God is an impossibility; that a Trinity - if there is a God - a Trinity is there. Unitarianism is impossible to a Christian; the Bible knows nothing about it. It is a great mercy to be a Trinitarian. And now, having said that about the Being of the Almighty, let me come to the truth as the truth is in Jesus, and what is that? It is the truth that God eternally set Him up, made Him the Head of all principalities and power; created the world by Him; upholds the world by Him, and gave Him to be the Head of the Church, the Head of life and all good things, holiness and blessedness. And this, He did from Eternity. If you believe in God you must believe in the eternity of His counsel; that He did not begin to look upon and decree, concerning creatures whom He would make, at some distance, remote from His act but not eternally. If you believe in God you must believe in the eternity of His thoughts; that those thoughts of His are immutable; that "He is of one mind, and who can turn Him" The truth is that He set Christ up as His Own Elect in whom He chose the Church, to whom He gave all authority, and power to rule in heaven and in earth; that He set up

His beloved Son and decreed His incarnation; that in that incarnation He should be made manifest to Israel, and that He should take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; that He should bring in everlasting righteousness, and that He should open a fountain for sin and uncleanness; that He should be the life of His Church and her righteousness, and her holiness, and her strength, and her all. And this is the truth respecting God's thoughts, God's purposes. He purposed all things in Himself, my friends. He purposed the being of man, decreed to permit the fall of man, and decreed to redeem some men from the consequences of the fall. Decreed to unite some men to Himself in a union that was not in the first creation. He decreed these things in His Son. And the Scriptures, if they teach anything at all, teach these things, these great fundamental truths, and these are in Christ. And he who denies them may as well cast his Bible aside and say there is no Bible at all. They are written as with a sunbeam in the Word of God; the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrines of grace emanating from the Trinity. The doctrine of salvation decreed by the Trinity is the doctrine of the Bible, and if this be denied everything is turned upside down, there is no order either in heaven or in earth, and I pray God that we may not be left to deny the truth as taught us in the Scriptures. Depend upon it that God the Holy Ghost teaches in different measures of light and life and power, the truth as the truth is in Jesus, and the promise of Christ in the gospel according to John is that the Spirit of Truth shall, when He comes, guide into all truth. And this is that unction that the Apostle speaks of in the first Epistle here when he says "Ye have an unction from the Holy One and ye know all things". And do, I beg, look narrowly into what you believe, for belief of the truth is an effect of God's election. Ye are chosen of God from the beginning unto the belief of the truth and sanctification of the Spirit. (2 Thessalonians 2 v 13), and he has but little evidence of being taught of God who persistently and systematically denies the truth as the truth is in Jesus. God is a sovereign and gives what measure of light He will in the truth, but depend upon it, when He does teach, He does teach the truth in some measure.

And then we come down to that great and wondrous truth, the truth of the incarnation of the Son of God. My dear friends, it is more important than you may perhaps think. It is an amazing, a glorious

truth, that the Son of God, the only begotten Son of God, did in the fullness of time descend from heaven and take up into union with Himself that body that was miraculously begotten of the Holy Ghost in the virgin Mary. One of the greatest heresies that the devil was permitted to breathe into the mind of man is the denial of the incarnation of the Son of God. God only knows how near there may be to us a test with regard to this fundamental as with regard also the other fundamentals. And what did the Son of God become incarnate for? We are told by Himself, He was commanded by His Father to lay down His life, and of all the sights that you will ever see in this life, you to whom it is given, the most wonderful, the most affecting, the most heart-breaking, the most humbling sight, will be the sight of Christ dying for you; the sight of a pierced Saviour, pierced for you. "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son". And that is a truth friends; heaven attests it; the cross attests it; the Scriptures attest it; the Holy Ghost bears witness to it, and faith receives it - Christ died for the ungodly. He Himself bore our sins in His Own body on the tree. And if you ever get liberty from sin and forgiveness of sin and justification of your person and acceptance with God, you will get all those blessings through the death of Christ. He opened the way which was made, when His precious body was on the cross. Through the veil, that is to say His flesh, He opened a way to God, and a way by which God should come to His children. The atonement reconciles; the atonement delivers captives; the atonement purifies consciences when it is applied to them. And this is true, God is pleased with Christ. The Father is pleased and the Spirit is pleased and the law is pleased, and justice is pleased, and sinners are pleased when this precious death is revealed in them by the Holy Spirit. It is a great thing to receive this. And, although what you were singing just now is a great truth - and may the Lord print it well on your hearts and upon mine - "Dry doctrine cannot save us" - this also is true, that you cannot be saved without doctrine. The doctrine of the cross revealed by the Spirit is not dry. O, it is full of life; it is like a shower of rain that comes down upon the mown grass. It affects the conscience, purifying it. It breaks the heart into pieces. It melts the sinner into contrition and sorrow and it brings a sinner before God in the sweet way of reconciliation. The Apostle Paul speaks to the Romans as having received the atonement, that wonderful work of

Christ whereby He made an end of sin and brought in everlasting righteousness. The precious death of Christ faith sings; faith looks to, builds on, hopes in, glories in, for there is nothing good without this; no ground of hope without this. It is a great mercy when God reveals this in a sinner's heart. The truth as the truth is in Jesus also is here, that He who died was, in His death, and is, now that He is in heaven, our great High Priest. My dearly beloved friends, you will never see God, never get near Him, except through the Priesthood of Christ. If any of you think that you ought to put on ornaments of religion and get better, I would say this to you, as God deals graciously with you, your business will be, not to put on ornaments, but to strip yourselves and go naked and leprous to this Priest. No easy thing this, and no work of nature this. The work of the Spirit of God it is to show a sinner his sins, and his great and dreadful separation from God and his leprous condition, and that there is no way of access, of the leprosy being cured, but through the Priest. This is true - the Scripture teaches it, the Spirit reveals it, and it is one of the greatest encouragements that can ever be brought to the heart of a child of God who is mourning his leprous condition - that there is a Priest in heaven to whom the leper may go; who will judge the state of that leper; Ah, and blessed be God, will judge it to be a better state than the leper himself is able to judge it to be. The truth of the gospel is in the Priesthood of Christ. The gospel shines in Him as a Priest. The Epistle to the Hebrews is occupied, as you know, with that great matter, the revelation of the Priesthood, the exaltation of the Priesthood of Jesus Christ. Come, leprous soul to this truth, and thou wilt find it to be a relief as the Spirit brings it; one of the sweetest reliefs possible to you. And the truth in the gospel, which the people of God have given to them, and in which they are to walk, is this, in the next place, that there is a King in heaven. A King to rule for them in their circumstances, their persecutions, temptations, difficulties, necessities, battles, dangers. A King to rule over them in all these matters and to say to them, at times, Ye shall not need to fight in this battle. The battle is God's, not yours. The Captain of our salvation, Christ is, and this, when the Spirit manifests it in a measure to one who feels in danger too weak and too cowardly to fight his own battles, who would be for saying a confederacy if he were left to say so; to one, I say, in that case, when Christ the King is revealed, it is a

doctrine full of consolation. It gives courage to worms; it says in the heart, the battle is God's, the victory must come from Him; look to Him for it. "Christ who conquered for you once, will in you conquer too". O, what a wonder that that God-Man Jesus Christ, who was crucified through weakness on the cross is now in heaven, having received of His Father all power in heaven and in earth. All the devilism of our nature, all the evils with which we may be surrounded, all the dangers that may come against us, all the enemies that may lift up their hand and sword against us, are under His power. O what an amazing thing it is to see this King, King of kings, and Lord of lords, the heart of the king in His hands to turn it withersoever He will; to see that Satan himself has no power except this King permit, that he can move nowhere except by this divine permission. Christ is a King. O subjects of Christ, look to this blessed King. He undertakes, He goes through, He treads down the enemy; He gives the victory to worms; this blessed One, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And I would mention in connection, in immediate connection, with Christ, one more great truth, namely that He is the faithful and true witness. He is the truth, and He is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance". He is the faithful and true witness, and having spoken shall He not make good what He has said. This is a great point in true experience, that there is One in heaven who will never forego His word that He has said to His dear children and He will make it good. He has said to them - "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee". O what a mercy, and this is what our faithful and true witness has said. "I will never leave thee". However unfaithful thou art to Me, I will stand by thee. "Even to your old-age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you". "The promises of God in Christ are yea and amen unto the glory of God by us". If you sink, He stands, and will lift you up. "When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and He shall save the humble person." "He cannot deny Himself". This faithful God will stand by His Own word, and there are many promises which we need to put to Him in mind of. What He said, - "Put Me in remembrance" Forgetfulness is no part of His; He never forgets His Word, but He gives faith to His children to put Him in remembrance. David said "Do as Thou hast said". Jacob said "Thou didst say", and God's people are told to put Him in remembrance. Blessed be God, He does make them know He is faithful; the faithful

and true witness.

Walk, in the next place, in the truth of the Holy Ghost. "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one." And I will say, once more, what I have often said to you, you can as soon go to heaven without Christ as you can get there without the Holy Ghost. The love of the Father in election, the love of the Son in redemption, and the love of the Holy Ghost in regeneration, and all the steps afterwards; this Trinity is necessary to salvation. And may God grant it may never be said by you, "We have not so much as heard whether there ^{is e} ~~is~~ any Holy Ghost". By His mercy you shall not say it while I am here. There is a Holy Ghost, there is the Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of the Son. There is that divine Person in the Trinity, one with the Father and with the Son, and He has committed to Him the care of the Church, and it is His great work and business to bring eternal life from Christ and put it into the soul; to breathe prayer into the soul; to shed light in the understanding; to conquer the stubborn sinner, to bring him down to the footstool of mercy. It is His business to reveal Jesus Christ and form Him in the heart the hope of glory; to speak the promises, to apply and explain them, to give liberty from bondage, and to make known to sinners what Christ has done for them, and to be in them the oil of joy. This divine Person is known in the Church. Christ promised Him and said to His disciples, The world "seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you". And how He is in His people Christ teaches. "He shall be in you as a well of water springing up into everlasting life", and there is no other explanation of those bubblings of desire, those motions of love, those actings of faith that the people of God feel. There is no other reason to be given why a sinner mourns his sins and his backslidings, and longs to return to the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul. There is no other reason to be given why a sinner one day seems as blind as he can be, and the next he sees the light of truth and the Lord Jesus and feels his heart, that was so hard, softened and melted in him; and why, at times, he says, I know nothing, I am afraid, and another time he says, "I know whom I have believed". The reason of all this is the indwelling and teaching of the Holy Ghost, and if your religion is not a Holy Ghost religion it will do you no good when you come to die. It wont stand you in good stead. But if you have a religion wrought in you by this Holy Ghost,

He will never leave His work but carry it on; make you sorry that you turned your back on Him, that you vexed and grieved Him, and make you mourn over a crucified Christ. This is the truth, the glorious Trinity, and I hope, as a congregation and people, we shall be Trinitarians; as long as we are a congregation of people that God will cause us to have fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Ghost. There is no other people think in the same sober, solid way, as do experimental Trinitarians. Why? Because this truth puts everything in its right place. God first; self next and nothing; providence under God's control; all things are put in their right place. And if you really believe this, you will be thinking on the Name of God. How often your thoughts will turn to Him - a poor sinner, helpless and often miserable - how your thoughts will turn to Him and when they do then the devil will say you are too bad, or you are not bad enough. He will be sure to say something against you and against your Lord and Master. But God will help and bring you through. Now I should feel that I had left this point very short and in an unsatisfactory way if I omitted to speak of that blessed practice of truth which the Holy Ghost works in the Church. That is to say, in the Scriptures, in the blessed gospel there are precepts and admonitions and warnings and we need them. There is nothing superfluous in this Book my friends. It is a mercy to believe that. Why did God give admonitions? Why did Christ give a new commandment? "A new commandment give I unto you that ye love one another". Why has He warned and exhorted if these things are not to be noticed by the people of the living God? Nobody else will notice them except in a legal way. But the truth is this that God has given these exhortations and warnings and admonitions for us upon whom the ends of the world are come. As said Paul, having related the fall of Israel in the wilderness, these things are for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come. I can only name one or two. For instance let me speak of these. "Come out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing". What concord hath Christ with Belial; what union is there between a believer and an infidel? Wherefore God's word is "Come out from among them". Has not the world entered much into the Church and has not the material prosperity that the land has for so long experienced entered like a canker into the Church of God, and are we not conformed in many ways? Now the Scripture says, Come out; be ye separate. Truth and error can never

unite. They can no more become one than iron and clay can become one. They may be mixed, and are alas, but they cannot become one. Be ye separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you and be a Father unto you and ye shall be my sons and daughters saith the Lord Almighty. May God make us separate. I know men can separate themselves from wrong motives. A love of peculiarity may make a man separate himself from others but that is not acceptable. When the root of grace is in the soul it says to a sinner, the world lies in wickedness, come out from it. It says to the child of God this Arminianism is false, come out from it. This self-righteousness is destructive, come away from it; and the warnings and the admonitions must be noticed.

And one more word here. Says Christ, "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me." Believe in Me, the equal of My Father, one with the Holy Ghost, and believe what I have said. And the connection of that is very remarkable. Christ had just told one of His disciples that before the cock should crow he would thrice deny Christ his Master. He had told His disciples that they would all forsake Him. And then, just as it were having in one breath predicted so great a woe, so great a sin, He says "Let not your heart be troubled". I die for this sin, I die for all your sins, and I go, having died, to prepare a place for you. Now my friends, what a mercy it is to have faith fixed in the Son of God. Faith in the bleeding Lamb; faith in the sin-bearer. in the burden-bearer, in the great Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because He trusteth in Thee." How pleased is God with faith. "This is the work of God that ye believe in Him whom He hath sent". That is to say the one thing that the man enquired after - "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" - the one thing that brings you to the blessed life is that precious faith which is the creation of the Spirit and which comes in His power. This is the work of God, the work that pleases God, the work He accepts "that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent". What a blessed thing it is to have faith in the bleeding Lamb. O it will bring your souls peace; it will bring you to God; it will help you to hold fast to Him who said "Believe in Me", to have the faith of God, the faith of His elect. This is a very poor, brief word on an infinitely important and large subject - the truth as the truth is in Jesus. I might have spoken of divine providence, how that God rules here and everywhere; that the ills which befall the saints, the

troubles which are their lot, the lacks, the wants, the losses, the crosses, the temptations, the friends and the enemies that the people of God have are all in the hands of this King, this blessed One who says "Believe in Me". All in His hands, and our life is there, and our breath is there. Our way is there, for "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps". Everything is in the hands of our Christ, this blessed Jesus. Every providence is made a friend; every loss and cross and staff and rod He uses for the good of His children. This is truth. This is true, the truth of the Scriptures - King of kings and Lord of lords. What say your hearts to this? I know we should like to be in our own hands naturally, but O says the Spirit's teaching, what fools you are to wish it even; it is best to be in the hands of God. One said "Let me fall into the hands of God for His mercies are very great". And so everyone is brought to believe who is taught of the Holy Ghost.

Now John, jealous for the good of the Church of Christ, here called his children, says to them - It is a great joy to me, the greatest joy I can have in the Church, that you walk in the truth; that you come to it, follow it, love it, hold it fast; buy the truth and sell it not; it is your life, and O the day may come when you will say, it is a great mercy for us to have received the truth. And perhaps when I am in my grave some of you younger people will say he spoke the truth when he told us it was of infinite importance to have it, to know it, to feel it. It is indeed of infinite importance. The day is evil and it is a terrible time for young people. Even for the young of the Lord's people it is a terrible time. and I do feel for them because of the temptations of the wicked and the snares that are laid for them. And you younger people who fear God, and I know some of you do, may the Holy Ghost put this well on your hearts that the truth matters and nothing else, and that your knowledge of it as the Holy Ghost may give you to know it, will bring salvation and peace and steadiness and a godly walk and conversation in this life. "Buy the truth and sell it not". Hold it fast. What is in it is good. Outside it there is nothing but error, heresy and death. The Lord grant His mercy.

AMEN.