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1919/19

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

3 EPISTLE JOHN v 4

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

The truth of the gospel, the everlasting gospel; the truth of the blessed and full atonement of Christ, of His divine robe of righteousness, of His Priestly office and work, of His great faithfulness; the truth of His promises which are yea and amen in Himself. All the truths which have Christ for their centre and circumference are comprised in the word "truth", and it is a great mercy to know this and be enabled to walk in it. God has revealed Himself in the Scriptures, and His revelation of Himself is the truth. He has revealed Himself particularly, especially in Christ, and that revelation of Himself comprises the truth. Many things are in the world to deny this, to draw men away from their simplicity; many temptations. A good deal of science falsely so called is in the world and it will be our mercy to know the truth, to buy it at any cost and sell it not for any price, for the truth, which is wisdom, is above rubies and all the things that may be desired are not worthy to be compared with it. The price of wisdom is above rubies. Therefore, says Solomon, with all thy getting get wisdom, get understanding. And when people are brought by the Spirit to prize it, they dig for it, and search for it as for hid treasure, and when they find it it is pleasant to their souls, and they esteem it to be better than gold and silver. It is wrapped up in Christ and from Him it flows, emanates, and speaks by the Holy Ghost in the hearts of the election of grace.

I spoke a little this morning about the truth and now the next thing in the text is to observe the walking in it. "I have no greater joy than that my children", the people of God, "walk in truth." And the first remark I would make is this, to walk in it you must know it, and you must have an acquaintance with it. There are two ways of knowing the truth. First it may be known, and is known by some, in the

letter, in the form of sound words, and they go no further and that is very solemn. How many will go into eternity from this chapel with that kind of knowledge and nothing more, God only knows. Such people are ever learning and they are never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. They see it, in a way they like it, they follow it, they know enough of it to make them turn away in a sort of instinct from Arminianism, and yet it never has a power in their consciences, it never humbles them, never brings them to God, never talks to them by the way, never gives them any counsel, never exercises any authority over them, does not tell them where to go in trouble; they just hold it as a form, believe it as a revelation given in the Bible, and they go no further. The Lord grant, if it please Him, that none of you may go out of this world with such a naked, notional and unsaving knowledge of the truth. There is another way of knowing it, and that is by the teaching of the Spirit of truth. "He", says Christ promising Him to His people, "shall guide you into all truth". If He does not guide us into truth we shall never find truth. Blind people can never find out things and ways for themselves. God has to teach His people truth and He gives the Spirit of truth for this purpose, and that explains what people cannot understand, natural people; that explains why poor, illiterate people understand divine mysteries; the Holy Ghost opens them. No critical knowledge will discover the beauties of Christ, will open the mysteries of His incarnation, His precious death, but the Holy Ghost does this, and some of us will never be able to express what, at certain moments, we have seen and felt in certain passages relating to Christ, to the atonement, to justification, to sanctification, to union with God, to a new relationship with Him, to redemption by Christ. O, the glory that has come through some Scriptures into our souls. O the peace that has pervaded our consciences; O the love that we have felt in our hearts by the truth. And this experimental knowledge of it makes men wise unto salvation, and it comes in a singular way. Let me mention this to you. It comes, not by dint of hard thinking, but in a moment it falls from heaven, comes down into the heart from heaven, and the sinner finds it in himself. He did not bring it to himself. He had prayed for it, sometimes hoped it would come, and then given up the hope because it was delayed, and suddenly he found it in his heart. No fancy, this, but a solid, solemn, blessed reality. May you know the truth in this way. I can only tell you it is to be known in

this way; some here know it in this way. We cannot explain it to you, how it came, by what sense it entered our hearts, but we know this, that as the melting fire burneth and causeth the waters to boil, so truth, in some branch of it, came like a melting fire in our hearts, caused our affections to boil, our consciences to be filled with peace, our mind with hope, and our whole souls were carried away in the power and in the light and in the glory of the truth. And this does for the soul what Christ prayed for - "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy Word is truth". You might one minute feel your souls to be flooded with iniquity, your thoughts too dreadful to name, and intolerable to yourselves, and the next moment feel so blessed that idols were cast out, horrible thoughts conquered and removed, and holiness and God and Christ and the Spirit and the gospel, your delight, your life. O, the sweetness of this - honey and the honeycomb, a fainting soul revived, a drooping faith strengthened, a hope all but gone made in you strong in your soul, and this is by the Holy Spirit. He is called the Spirit of truth because the truth is given to Him to convey to sinners. It is committed to Him, as it were, to give to sinners. "He", says Christ promising Him, "shall glorify Me". And how? "He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you". This is how you must get it if ever you have it savingly in your hearts my dear friends, and until you get it in some way, some measure like this, how can you walk in it.

Another word I would say to you about the truth, and it is this, that it is found in the way of tribulation. This is said of the word of God, that it is purified seven times in a furnace of earth. It is pure in itself, absolutely, but is purified in a furnace in our experience, for we are very apt to attach our own meaning to it and put on it our own interpretation, and then we have to prove death. The man that Eve thought that God gave to her to be the promised seed was a murderer, and you may get a word from God but, through impatience, you will make a carnal application of it; that is death. The Thessalonians received the word in much affliction; that is how it is generally received. It is written of Joseph that "until the time that His Word came, the Word of the Lord tried him". The word of the Lord that tried him was given to him in his dreams. The trial of that word was in his imprisonment, his being sold into Egypt, losing his good character for a time, put into prison, kept there, forgotten

there till God wanted him. And the word that came - until the time that the word came - the word that came was the word that brought him out of prison; "fetch Joseph." That was his deliverance. When you get a word, the word of truth, you will find ordinarily that it is put into some prison, or some fire, and you think you are deceived; perhaps will be ready to give it up. But when God holds you up, and as long as He holds you up, you will find Joseph's experience something like yours; yours like his. The Lord was with Joseph. The Lord was with him when he lost his home, lost every comfort, was sold a slave into Egypt. The Lord was with him when he was in prison; the Lord was with him and He will be with every child of God in whom the word is. You are not going to have two heavens in a certain sense. You will not get the word in the fulfilment of it easily. It will be through tribulation. "I am with thee". "I am with thee". Where? In the fire, in the flood, in the flame, in the river. "I am with thee", Jeremiah. Where? In the low dungeon. What a great thing it is to have God's word in you. And this will give you a key to how people walk in the truth. Yet may I, as the Lord may help me, try to open this a little to you. Do you walk in the Lord Jesus who is the truth? To walk in Him is to cleave to Him by faith. How do you walk in Him? Through tribulation, contradiction of sinners against yourself, through darkness, self-destitution, ignorance, weakness, temptation respecting Him, the loss of all sight of Him for a time, the fire burning up the flesh, and you think burning up your religion, and all the while God gives you faith, and sometimes faith comes up to the top and says in you - "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." It is a great thing so to walk in the truth. Perhaps you are tempted, perhaps you are tempted about your hope, that it will prove to be the hope of the hypocrite. Tempted because you are hypocritical in your nature. Tempted because you are unclean and impure in your thoughts. Tempted because you have more infidelity than faith and you think you have no faith. Tempted because you have no comfort; you have waited long and no comfort has come as yet. Tempted because, though you have prayed for assurance, you are still full of doubt and fear. Now what does the temptation do for you? Sometimes it shuts you up in the utmost confusion. You do not know where you are or what you are. But what is one certain thing with you sometimes? Is it not this - If I perish I will perish seeking Christ, seeking mercy. If I perish I will, as helped, perish at the throne of grace. What is this? I believe I may

say, and say with truth, this is a part of walking in truth. Perhaps you are tempted about Christ, tempted to believe He is not, tempted to doubt the Scripture testimony of Him. And O the pain of this; God only knows the pain of this. It is more than words, it is beyond words, as I well know. Now what does faith do? She cries to Him - O save me from these things. Save me from entertaining these dreadful thoughts about Thyself. O save me; give me to love Thee; make me to believe in Thee; make me to love Thee; make me to know Thee. Bring me into union with Thyself; O make me Thine. I believe when God comes He will never rebuke the men who cry like that for so crying. He will never reprove the sinner for such cries as this. He will rebuke the devil who tempted him about Christ, but He will show how He approved of the sinner in his cleaving to Christ in the midst of temptation. Hang about Him poor sinner, tempted though you are. Wait on Him, cry to Him, tell Him how the tyrants lash, tell Him that you would fain be His. He will approve of it; one day let you know that He approved of it.

Take the atonement; do you walk in that? O, one says, I wish I could, for my sins and my guilt are such that I am often ready to give up; I am in bondage often. But now look at this side of it. What are your thoughts, your prayers, your desires, your longings and your followings; what are they concerning the atonement? Well, if you could speak you would say, that blessed atonement shines and sparkles in my eyes. When I can think of it I think of it as the only ground of hope, the only ground of prayer, the only ground of my having any little feeling toward God, any love to His Name. I look to that when I come for cleansing, for sanctification, for the purifying of my conscience. Well, you may not believe me now, but I will say it; this is a part of walking in the truth, and you will find this, that Christ was wonderfully pleased with you when you walked in this way. Ah, He said "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me". When the devil maligns His glorious Name, it is a great thing for faith to honour that Name. When the devil belittles His atonement, it is a great thing for faith in you to cleave to that atonement. It is easy enough for men to talk about the atonement if they are never tempted, but O to be a sinner and to be tempted, that is that there is no remedy. Tempted even to believe that the blood of Christ cannot take the sin away. Then, then to cleave to Him, it is great. Some

sins stand up, some of yours stand up perhaps above all others. Some sins done since you were called, some iniquity indulged in your spirit since God called you, and they stand up, they are prominent, they are above all others, and you may be tempted sometimes to say, and find yourself saying, now I can believe that all that I did before I was called, as I thought I was called, could be put away, but what I have done since, O that is the worst of all, and perhaps this will accompany you all your days more or less, will rise up again and again, and even when you may be enabled a little to rejoice in the Lord Jesus, the devil will throw these things at you and memory will catch them up and a poor conscience, as it were, will lay hold of them again and you will be ready to say, can these be cleansed and if, when such is your experience, you can say with Hart "Can blood such horrid crimes atone?" and follow on with him and say "Yes, blood so rich as Thine", you are walking in the truth, and though devils mock, though infidel men laugh, though they say this atonement is a myth, your faith will honour it and cleave to it, plead it before God as the only ground of your hope and consolation, and this is a part of walking in the truth, cleaving to the atonement. And when you feel far off from God, when you feel much cause of separation from Him, when the leprosy of sin breaks out here and there and you have to go and say, it seemeth to me that there is a leprosy in the house, it breaks out everywhere, O what then? Well one may say, you must put a covering on your upper lip and cry to everybody "Unclean, unclean", but the gospel says, there is a great High Priest over the house of God; go to Him with this outbreak of leprosy. The Apostle teaches in the Hebrews that there is a great High Priest and he tells us that this High Priest is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. Do you get any inkling of this Priest? Does your faith receive any hint of Him from the Spirit? Do you feel you can look to Him and go by some cries and tears and prayers to Him and ask Him to take notice of your case. He is full of compassion. That is a wonderful word about Him in the Hebrews - Able to have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way. Walk this way my friends, you who are exercised with leprosy, with causes of separation, walk in this way; hang about this Priest; name Him to the Father and cry, as did the Church of old - "Let Thy hand be upon the Man of Thy right hand, upon the Son of Man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself. So will not we go back from Thee; quicken

us and we will call upon Thy Name". Proud thoughts and a proud, tempting devil may wound you, tempt you to cover yourself up with something of your own. God will strip you, that you may go in all the nakedness of your sinfulness to this Priest. Walk in this truth. O it is a great mercy to be brought here. It is such a consolation as cannot be well expressed when you have your eye on your great High Priest. And then again some people have the Bible in their hands and some part of it in their hearts, some promises, and these promises get a very painful death on them. God promised Abraham a son and the son was delayed for many years. God promised Joseph that he should be great and he had to go into Egypt for that greatness. The Lord promises His children good things, tells them that He will never leave them, never forsake them; that their bread shall be given them, their water shall be sure; that He will fight their battles for them, guide them with His eye and afterwards receive them to glory. But O the buffeting, the ups and the downs, the mountains and the valleys that have to be met with and got over and passed through, who can tell. It is here where we find two things - our weakness and God's strength. Here we find that we can never keep the word ourselves, and yet that word is not allowed to leave us and die altogether in the trial. You wont give it up; it wont leave you. What is it to walk in it? There is perhaps one Scripture more to you than all the rest of the Bible put together; one word, one promise made yours years ago perhaps, and that is to you sometimes the keenest trial of your life because it is not yet fulfilled. A begun matter may be a very bitter sore to the subject of it. If God has begun to show you His greatness according to His promise and does not continue to do it, that will be to you a very severe trial and you may even get as far as this, to wish you had never heard the promise because you are tempted to believe you made a mistake, you presumed in taking it to yourself. Now to walk in this is no easy matter, but it is a blessed thing. To walk in it is to do what Paul speaks in the Corinthians - "We walk by faith not by sight". Sight judges according to appearances. Christ said "Judge not according to appearances; judge righteous judgement." What is righteous judgement in a trial of faith? It is this, to judge that God is right, God is truthful, faithful, able, willing. To judge righteous judgement is to judge that what God has said He will fulfil. To judge righteous judgement is to suspend judgement as to time and appearances and believe that "With the Lord one day is as a thousand

years and a thousand years as one day". And when you have got faith thus to judge righteous judgement one effect will be that you will wait on the Lord. You will find something like the Psalmist found in himself - "Hope thou in God". Said he to his soul - "Hope thou in God". Hope in men, hope in circumstances, hope in self, gone. Hope now alone in God. What is that? Walking in the truth. When Naomi said to her daughters in law, go home to your own friends, Orpha went back but Ruth clave to Naomi and said that Naomi's God and Naomi's people and Naomi's land should be hers, and God was with her. And when the devil says to a child of God, go back, you made a mistake, give it up, cast it to the wind, hope no more; you are only cherishing an illusion, give it all up; faith is Ruth-like and says, Lord let me not leave Thee; keep me cleaving, praying, pleading, hoping, waiting. Blessed is the man that waits for God. Keep me waiting, keep me judging a delay is not a denial. Keep me in the fear of Thy Name. What is this? Walking in truth. Why John walked in truth though he seemed to give it up. His case, in that particular, is very instructive. It shows us that a man of God may get a very clear revelation of Christ and be left to question it all. With Christ absent, what can you hold to for long? "Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?" said John to Christ by messengers. I suppose John would not have believed it if anyone had said to him when he was preaching "Behold the Lamb; preaching that, because he had seen the sign given; now John you are going to prison; it wont be very long before, because you get no message from Christ, you will send messengers to Him and say to Him "Art Thou He that should come or look we for another"?, that is to say, was I mistaken, was I deceived, did I not preach the truth, the Christ of God when I said "Behold the Lamb of God". It was very solemn and yet, in a way he did not give up. If he had really wholly given up he would not have sent messengers. O, no, and when you are in doubt and fear and trouble and send out cries: O Lord, was I deceived or was it true? it is a part of the walking in truth. Give it up; give Him up; give the promise up; cast everything to the winds. The hymnwriter has put it well

Depart from Thee, 'tis death.'tis more
'Tis endless ruin, deep despair

Do not you feel like that sometimes? Walk in the truth. And these

experiences have a good issue. Let me name it; it is this. "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." "If a man love Me, he will keep my words" How? By faith, because they have been given him. He will keep them in prayer, pray over them, pray about them, pray for the fulfilment of them. He will keep them in hope. He will say, "Hope Thou in God", hope for the fulfilment of His words. He will keep them in love; he would not part with them for thousands of gold and silver. They are his life. He will keep them in love. Yea, sometimes he loves them so, believes them so, He says - "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee". He keeps them in faith. He believes there is so much in them that he will never exhaust them. "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law". O what a mercy it is to have this blessed faith that keeps, holds, walks in the words of God. Well beloved friends, you who know the truth and have in some measure received it in affliction and with some joy and peace, God give you that blessed grace of faith in exercise that you may walk in the word; the despised word, the word about which you are tempted, the word that is put into a furnace of earth to try it. Keep it, walk in it; God will never deceive you.

"To trust Him endeavour, the work is His own
He makes the believer and gives him his crown"

I mentioned this morning that there are warnings and precepts and admonitions in the truth, and these are to be walked in. Every child of God will, at times, "work", as Hart puts it "with all his power, and grieve that he can work no more", and he respects and reveres and loves the precepts of the gospel. He who has any despising of these prevailing in him knows nothing about the rest of the word. If you have any part of God's word in you by the Holy Ghost, you will love the precepts and wish to obey them. They do lay an obligation on us to walk unto all pleasing. They do forbid sins; they do exhort and admonish, and the Lord grant that we may be enabled to walk in them. Keep Christ in view and walk in the holy precepts and commandments of the holy apostles and prophets of Jesus Christ. If we have grace it will make us the best in all relationships of life; the best husband, and best wife, best son and best daughter; the best master and the

best servant. You will find these, when in a right state, have got a conscience in their different relationships and the duties arising out of these relationships. Ah it is a great thing to walk according to the precepts of the gospel. You know them; may the Lord help you to observe them.

And now one word in conclusion. The Apostle John was zealous for the glory of God. He is often spoken of as the Apostle of love, and it is very remarkable how, in his epistles, he continually mentions love. But not less remarkable is it that there is no part of the Scriptures more severe, more solemnly strict, than the Epistles of John. His care for the church was so great, his zeal for the glory of God so burning, that he denounces in the strongest language by the Holy Ghost all error, all heresies, all turning aside from the Scriptures, from the Lord Jesus, and this is the secret of this, his joy - "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth". The truth was so dear to his heart; he knew the power and the sweetness and the value of the truth, so as that to see his children, people called by grace under his ministry, the whole of the family of heaven, walking in the truth, gave him the sweetest consolation and joy that he could have, and this will be true of all the servants of God and true of the mutual feelings of the saints. I am sure if you find your brethren here and there walking in the fear of God and in the gospel you will be very glad and perhaps you will love them sometimes, saying O Lord give me such grace that I may walk as they walk; O that I may honour Thee as they do. It is a great thing then to have the honour of God near and dear to our hearts. May the Lord grant it may be. Now brethren the Lord grant that these feeble observations may be of use to you and His Name be honoured.

AMEN.