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394

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148

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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 6 October 1929

ACTS 13 v 38 and 39

"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren,
that through this Man is preached unto
you the forgiveness of sins: And by
Him all that believe are justified from all
things, from which ye could not be justified
by the law of Moses"

What a preaching this was; what a preaching it must be to the end of time; the Lord Jesus Christ, the Man of the text, living and dying and rising again for sinners and determined that all for whom He lived and died and rose again shall come to Him. And for this end He sends the ministry, for when He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, He received gifts for men, for the rebellious also, and expounding that Scripture, the Holy Spirit, by Paul, to the Ephesians, brings it to the ministry. Gave gifts to men, some apostles, some prophets, some pastors and teachers and so on, for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith unto a perfect stature of a man in Christ.

Preaching is declaring. Preaching may be, and should be, expounding; expounding the will of God, the purpose of God, the grace of God, the Son of God, the Holy Ghost. It is telling men what they are by sin, and what God can make them by grace. Preaching the law which condemns and the gospel which justifies. Hence the greatness, the dignity, the simplicity of the text. "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man" of whom the Apostle has been preaching "is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." And continuing he says: "Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish," which makes it very solemn to hear the gospel and not receive it in

the Holy Ghost.

Now what I would bring before you this evening is the great, the essential, the fundamental doctrine of justification, the forgiveness of sins. The importance of it can never be exaggerated (there is only one above it - the Justifier, the Person of the Son of God, and the Father in Him, and the Holy Ghost, proceeding from them) for man is depraved, sinful, has broken the law. Sin is the transgression of the law. Man's duty is to obey God. Your duty is, and my duty is, to obey God. Obedience has respect to a commandment. The commandment in this case is the law, and to obey it is the bounden duty of every man born from Adam. We shall never be exonerated from that obedience, unless we are brought to Jesus Christ. We cannot obey this law; we have no power to obey one single precept of it yet it justly commands us to obey it. Disobedience is death, that is, it brings death. Wherein is God justified in commanding a sinner to do what He knows the sinner cannot do, and punish him for not doing it? The answer to such a question has often been given. I have attempted to give it many times. It is this, that God made man upright. A more serious reflection on God's character could not be made than to affirm that He gave man a law without giving him power to obey it. You must find, and you will find, one day that man's accountability started with his creation and placing in the garden of Eden with liberty and a prohibition. Liberty to eat of all the trees in the garden save that tree that was pointed out to him and to touch and eat of which he was forbidden. And if our accountability starts there it will clear the matter. If we believe it will clear the matter in our judgment, that God is just in commanding man, every man, every woman, every child, to obey Him, and just in condemning each one for disobedience. And further, as the law cannot be abrogated, as no man can absolve himself from his allegiance, from his duty, and as the law is an eternal law, men under it must be eternally justified or eternally condemned. O what a trifling thing is life in this world with respect to what we shall eat and what we shall drink and wherewithal we shall be clothed. This speck of time between two eternities, this life a span, long spent, as swiftly as the weaver's shuttle is shot through the web; told, pleasantly in many cases, as a tale is told, the attention occupied, and time not noticed till the end of it. What a trifling thing this poor life is with respect to

eating and drinking and being clothed. And if the law then cannot be abrogated, if man cannot absolve himself from it, if it is eternal, is it not beyond all question eternally important to be justified from this law if such a thing is possible?

Now the Apostle was inspired to preach to sinners this grand doctrine, this fundamental doctrine, the forgiveness of sins, and the forgiveness of sins, in Scripture, is justification: "Being justified by His blood". The importance of it may be illustrated by the defection of the Apostle Peter from a gospel practice. He had been eating and drinking with Gentiles. Living as a justified Jew, he lived with justified Gentiles, taking his meals with them. But there came certain from Jerusalem, from the Apostle James, and when these Jews came, who were not wholly delivered from Jewish practices, - and such practices did continue for a good while among Christians, converted Jews - when these came down, Peter separated himself from the believing Gentiles and would no longer eat with them, and that stumbled some people. Then Paul, seeing this and perceiving that that defection of Peter invaded the doctrine of justification, withstood Peter to his face. It seemed a little thing that one day Peter should be eating with the Gentile converts and another day he should abstain from doing so, but Paul saw, in the Holy Spirit's light, how this invaded, touched and, as far as it could be, in human language, destroyed the doctrine. He withstood Peter face to face; he said he was to be blamed and he reproached him for it before the congregation. And he said: We who are Jews by nature, believing in Jesus are justified, and Gentiles are justified in the same way. And so, as he taught in the Ephesians, so he taught in that instance. He said: "He hath made both one, Jew and Gentile, having broken down the middle wall of partition between us" Now if we perceive the importance of this great doctrine it will be a help to us, and if we feel in our own souls the need of it, it will set us searching for it. Let us look in the first place at this great doctrine, and then at an experience of it.

This great doctrine; I am only able to lisp it. It needs another tongue and a better instructed heart and soul than mine to properly express it, but here I am, and if sent to preach, I would preach, as helped, this great truth. There are many reasons why it

should be preached, but let me come to the thing itself. How is it possible for the infinitely holy, just, sin hating God, in that law that is not to be abrogated, not to be destroyed, to deal with any sinner in such a way as to remove the sins of that sinner from him and declare him to be just, without sin or anything blameworthy? And the great answer is found first of all in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of Him this is written: "He" that is the Father "hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." All Scripture is great, but if one, without any invidious feeling or word, might say one Scripture is greater than another, one would say this Scripture is one of the greatest in this Book. "He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." The imputation of sin to the Lord Jesus Christ is one of the most mysterious, gracious, mighty, glorious acts of God and were it shown to us in the light of the Spirit we should stand before that truth trembling, hoping, worshipping, and loving Him who did that, loving Him who submitted to be made sin, loving the Holy Spirit who formed that human nature for the Son of God to inhabit. O brethren, this is the first thing in divine manifestation of the doctrine of justification, that a sinless God-Man was made sin. And if you know that experimentally let me say, by the way, you will hate sin; you will hate sin. If sin be so terrible in the sight of God, as that nothing less than the matchless, the inconceivably grievous sufferings of the Son of God could suffice, O what must that be, that evil thing. And the Person of Jesus Christ was made able to bear that awful load of imputed sin; the sin of every elected person given to Jesus Christ, made part of His body, imputed to Him. If we, this evening, saw and felt sin, as Christ saw and felt it, we should be glad each to get into his own room and there meditate and weep and mourn and rejoice and be glad and praise God, for it is a great thing to see sin as God sees it. I am aware that this subject of sin is exceedingly disagreeable to many people. They cannot bear to hear about it, but that does not affect the fact that sin must be preached. Sin is felt, known by every new born person as that which, if it be not removed from him, will sink him into an endless hell of punishment. Well, God made His Son to be sin. What did that involve? It involved the punishment, the death of Jesus Christ. What a sight. If you get it you will say, what a sight to see the holy, harmless, undefiled Son

suffering for sin, not done by Him, but imputed to Him. The punishment of sin on either the Person of the Surety or the principal in the offence is necessary and therefore the Father must treat His eternal Son as He would treat a sinner. The law made this necessary; divine justice made this necessary. Divine love brought the Saviour to be willing to suffer. God spared not His own Son, and His own Son spared not Himself. And so the Lord Jesus was treated in such a way as, but for revelation, no man could believe, but we have it revealed to us in Isaiah's prophecy. "He" the Lord Jesus "was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed". "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief". O sinner, quickened, Spirit taught sinner, behold this scene of justice and of love, of law and of grace in the Person of the Saviour, in the treatment of Him by His eternal Father. "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment" and He was taken to Calvary and there they crucified Him between two thieves. And the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, while it was the most abominable, wicked, guilty act of men, it was the most loving, wonderful, mysterious, glorious act of obedience on the part of Christ. It brought Him to this, even His crucifixion; brought Him to this, He was willing to lay down His life.

How willing was Jesus to die,
That we fellow-sinners might live!

And when He knew in Himself that all things were now accomplished, that is the things which His Father sent and commanded Him to do, He cried with a loud voice: "It is finished" and dismissed His spirit. And then took place this word, it was fulfilled in Him. "The sin of a land was removed in one day". He made an end of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He purified His people by that one word: "It is finished". Law was finished; wrath was finished; anger was finished; punishment was finished; desertion was finished; and now His happy soul was dismissed by His own act from His tortured body and went to heaven, taking with Him, a very short time afterward, the dying, penitent, forgiven thief. My brethren this is a feeble word - I know it is feeble - concerning this great fundamental, the

forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit's work in a sinner does not add to the work, the infinite merit of Christ. The Spirit's work in a sinner is the application of what Christ accomplished.

And now this brings me in the next place to speak a little of justification as an experience. It must be an experience, that is to say, it must come to some people, for it would not be possible in the nature of things for the Son of God to suffer and there be no effect. The giving to sinners what He did for them, making over to them His precious death, is a necessity of justice. Yes, there is a mysterious and beautiful and miraculous and glorious union between the word "just" as belonging to God, and justification. Justification is no arbitrary act of the will of God. If it could have taken place by the will of God only, what need of the death of the Lord Jesus? But, says the Spirit by Paul, "Without shedding of blood is no remission", and the covenant blessing must come to the covenant people. It must fall into their souls, and it comes this way ordinarily. I would not lay down, I do not lay down, any line, any measure, for God - He will work as a sovereign - but ordinarily it comes this way. A sinner is born again, he is convinced in some measure of his sins, and by the law comes that knowledge - whatever the measure may be - of sin. "By the law is the knowledge of sin". Some of God's people can say positively that they have been under the law. They can tell when it came to them, when they were convinced, how eternal things became real to them, present with them, how God shined by that condemning law into their consciences, into their hearts, and on their nature and on their conduct. Others cannot say as much. They can say, they were blind once but now they see. They were blind to their state; now they see it. They were blind to God; now they see Him in some way. They were blind to the law; now they see it as condemning them, only they cannot say it came to them in such and such a way, in such and such power, with such and such authority and penetration; only they know they are sinners. And conviction brings confession. Conviction brings the Publican's cry out: "God be merciful to me a sinner". They can say that. They pray that prayer. They feel that prayer. It goes out of their anguished hearts. Each one says it: "God be merciful to me a sinner." And the gospel begins to come, to some who had the law clearly revealed to them, at once perhaps. It comes at once, a sweet, clear deliverance from it and they can say: "I am

clean". "My Beloved is Mine and I am His". They pass under the law and have come into the bond of the covenant clearly and sweetly and powerfully and the love of God is in them and the grace of Christ is in them and the blood of Christ is on their consciences and they are clean. But that is not the experience of everyone. In some cases the word in the chapter which I read becomes more and more known: "Now that which waxeth old is ready to vanish". It just waxes old in their consciences by some coming in of the gospel, some view of the Lord Jesus, some whispers of mercy, some sweet access to the Father, through Christ, some power to plead what Christ has done, some power of faith in them to take refuge in the gospel, and they have to say, again and again, we have never got, as yet, that clear deliverance that our friend, so and so, got, but we have a hope and we cleave to Christ. Now I say in such cases, every time there is an inflowing of the gospel, in the measure of that inflowing, is the weakening of the law in such and such consciences. God is the Object of faith; Christ is the Person through whom the Father must be approached, and the Spirit is that gracious God who teaches the sinner how to come to God. Now I would say, in a concluding word, to any here who may have had this latter way of experience, do not say you know nothing because you do not know everything. Dr Sibbes, the old Puritan, says a man may be rich and not possess millions. A sinner may know something of the gospel but not all of it; indeed who can know all of it here? who can? But I say, hold that fast that God has given you. Should you be tempted to give it up because your experience does not reach that of a friend you have, do not listen to the temptation. Remember how you heard; remember how welcome the gospel was to you; remember how precious Christ became to you; remember the softening of spirit you felt occasionally as His Name was spoken, perhaps from the pulpit, perhaps in reading a Psalm or a chapter, perhaps particularly in prayer at times. All these things come from God. They are parts of the gospel, they are the flowings of the gospel or the droppings of the rain as God speaks of the gospel. "My doctrine shall drop as the rain and My speech shall distil as the dew". And if you can, think this - Is it not kind of God to notice a beggar, a poor miserable sinner, to take notice of the tears he drops because he is a sinner, and of the heart burning of desire he has to know that his sins are forgiven. And from God noticing him - just dropping a word now and again upon his heart, saying perhaps: Come unto Me O labouring,

sorrowing, burdened sinner and do not labour for that which cannot profit you and do not stumble at My terms which are that you shall buy without money and without price, but come to Me - that which decayeth and waxeth old, even the covenant of works which could not do a sinner good but only curse him, that which decayeth in the sinner's heart and waxeth old and helpless, is ready to vanish away. And the vanishing away will come; it must come. The law is established by Christ and magnified and it can never seek further satisfaction in and from the sinner. It is ready to vanish away and you will know when it vanishes away from you. O the peace of God is so wonderful, it passeth all understanding. You will know when the law vanishes because then you will break out into gospel liberty and then you will say: Why, my sins are gone, my guilt is cleansed away from me. Why, I have access to God and He smiles on me. O sinner the gospel will do you good. It will save your soul; it will comfort your heart; it will control your conscience; it will warm your affections, gather them to the Lord Jesus; it will make your heart His throne. He will be a Priest in your conscience, purging it from dead works and He will be a prophet in your understanding, telling you of good things to come. "Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins and by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." "Justified from all things". You may sometimes begin to except certain sins. I was long held in that. Certain sins. I used to say when I was a young man and under conviction, if mine were ordinary sins then I might hope. It is not uncommon I think that poor convinced sinners except certain sins. This might be forgiven, but not that. But, says the Spirit, "all things", all sins, all transgressions. And what a great, glorious word is that "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven". Think of it sinner. O what a full gospel. "All manner"; word, deed, thought, everything forgiven by the Son of Man. What will you except now? Hardness of heart, ingratitude, idolatry, adultery, theft, murder; all manner of sin. O it is hard to believe, but it is believable, and the Lord teaches His people to believe it and brings it into their consciences. Justified from these things. Now one word - there is much that I cannot enter upon now - one word. A justified person, a person justified by God has access to Him and though it is difficult to think it, yet it is a thing that is experienced. There is no reason in God why that sinner should be held back from coming near

to God. Familiarity God does grant to His people by being familiar with them. Justification opens the door for their access, their comfortable access, and then, then they have liberty to speak to Him and they are told to cast their burdens on Him. They are taught to cleave to Him with purpose of heart and they are told, they are told in Scripture, and they are told in their souls from time to time, that where He is who has freely justified them by His blood, there, they being justified and made meet for the inheritance, shall one day be with Him. Now may the Lord make this gospel attractive, this justification a reality in our souls, that we may live to His praise and glory.

AMEN.