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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 23 May 1925

ACTS 15 verses 16 and 17

"After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom My Name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things".

Let us go back to the twelfth verse and read down: "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His Name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom My Name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things".

The circumstances of the text you know; the whole chapter gives them. God had visited the Gentiles, had opened to them the door of faith, but the believing Jews were unwilling, unready, to receive these converts to the faith. What little willingness there was in any of them was by distinct revelation. Prejudices die very hard and they are slow in their removal. These gracious Jews found themselves cleaving to Moses and to that ancestral faith which excluded all Gentiles, except there should come occasionally one and another who should be circumcised and thus become a Jew. We would have thought that the manifestation of God's will concerning the Gentiles to Peter in the case of Cornelius would have been sufficient to remove and kill that prejudice, but it was not so. There were, among the believing Jews, men who were cleaving to the rite of circumcision and

wishing to bring the Gentiles under the law and commanding them to keep it. This occurred at Antioch and there was much disputation among the people there, and Paul and Barnabas withstood the teachers of this wrong way. Afterwards Paul called them false brethren among whom he was in peril. Of them, he said to the Galatians, "I would that they were cut off that trouble you". All error is troublesome to the saint. Any deviation from Christ's way is false; anything that leads away from that godly, single, simple trust in, cleaving to, and following of, Christ, is wrong and should be resisted; here it was resisted by Paul and Barnabas, and the contention was so strong that ultimately the godly people at Antioch determined, decided, to send to Jerusalem, to the Apostles there, Paul and Barnabas with respect to this matter. When they came to Jerusalem, the Apostles and elders and the church received them, and after a good deal of disputing there, Paul and Barnabas told what the Lord had done among the Gentiles by their ministry. The people listened to this and when they had finished their ^{relation} ~~revelation~~ of God's great goodness to the Gentiles in opening to them the door of faith, then the Apostle James rose and said as we have read: "Men and brethren, hearken unto me. Simeon" - that is Simon Peter, (Simeon is the pure Hebrew name which, corrupted, became Simon) - "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His Name". This was according to the Covenant that God made with Abraham; promising him a son, He said that in him, in his seed, should all the families of the earth be blessed. He chose a people for Himself who should be typical, a people whose religion should be emphatically typical, people who should, in their religion, in their practices, set forth the promised Messiah, the promised blessings in Him. And the abolition of all the sacrifices was also to be, when this blessed, promised Messiah should come and offer Himself without spot to God. But, as I said, it is a slow death that prejudices die, especially religious prejudices. You will find that every prejudice you have against any person or human thing or system will die much easier than the prejudice of your nature against Jesus Christ, but it will fall down under a manifestation of Christ to you. It is well to have the mind stirred up at times to consider this point, the prejudice of our hearts against the salvation of the soul purely and alone by the Person, the imputed righteousness and the vicarious atonement of Christ, because we shall find, as long as we live,

I expect, a legal spirit rising up, and though we may have had, over and over again, some manifestation of God to us, some hints of mercy, some forth-flowings of divine love to our souls, we shall still be needing the influence of grace, the enlarging and enlightening instructions of the Spirit of Christ to make us willing to be saved by grace. Some of you - perhaps some of you who are younger, and have had, as you believe, some sight and sense of the free grace of God - may not be able very well or easily to receive what I have just said. But if you are observant of your own hearts and their ways toward God, you will find yourselves, again and again, stumbling at free grace, free grace that cries corruption on your goodness, weakness on your strength, folly on your wisdom, emptiness on your substance, so as that none but Jesus, none but Jesus, will suit you. The prophets of old, as the Apostle James speaks, especially here the prophet Amos, foretold this wondrous truth, that when religion was very low, when God had destroyed the house of Jacob by scattering it among all the nations of the earth, when His ancient people should be a byword and a reproach among all men, and it would seem as if the Lord had forgotten the earth, that then He would return and raise up, build again the tabernacle of David which had fallen down, and build again the ruins thereof and set it up. And this was not all; this would have aroused no opposition if it had stood alone in the mind of a Jew, even a godly Jew; this would have suited his national prejudice; this would have conformed to his racial religion; but when God said that, the residue of all men, - and Himself speaks of this, thus: The remnant of Edom in which the Gentiles are all brought - then it was different; then arose that in them that was in them ~~where~~ they were born, a strong feeling - we are the people and the rest are all condemned. "That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom My Name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things". And, that that I would speak about as being derived from this beautiful text is this, that when everything that we call religion, and when God's work also, shall seem to be dead; when in the professing church there shall appear to be nothing going on, but when it would seem as if God is about to remove candlesticks from this and that place; He will still carry on His blessed work, and out of the ruins that we look on, it may be with grief, and sorrow and shame, He will raise up the tabernacle of David which is fallen down. The tabernacle of David here represents the whole of the Jewish

polity, the Jewish religion, the Mosaic law, circumcision and all those sacrifices which were kept up until the Messiah came. And, spiritually, the tabernacle of David sets forth this, God's blessed kingdom - the head of which is David, spiritual David; David was a type of Christ - when this tabernacle shall shine with the glory of God. And that then, that shall come, which is a mystery, which was particularly, specially revealed to the Apostle Paul, as he tells us in the Ephesians; the mystery of the Gentiles being joined to the Jews, and together they shall be one body in Christ, one body. The glory of God in the church is by Christ Jesus and is to be world without end, and there seems no reason to doubt that the day is coming that will transcend the days that have been, and especially the day that now is, in glory, when there shall be such a power, such a glory poured out upon the people of God as shall raise them up from their desolate state; when the desolate heritages shall be restored and the waste places and the garden of the Lord be like Eden in its purity; when the Son of Man shall appear in His glory, and by the Holy Spirit and the Word having free course and being glorified, there shall be such an uprising of this kingdom, such a spirit of this kingdom, such a wide spread of the glory of God, as that that shall take place - the nations of them which believe shall bring their glory into the church. We are far from this; it began on the day of Pentecost; it was very wonderful in Apostolic days, and for some time to come after those blessed days, it was to be, and was for a good while, wonderful how Christ reigned in the Church. But with the advent of the day of Pentecost, it would seem that there was also the enemy sowing tares, and very early in the life of the church popery began to manifest itself in various errors. It has gone on, and is going on still; added to which we have the modernism of this day, the trampling under foot of the holy Scripture, spiritualism, and all manner of evil things, called religion, and the tabernacle of David seems to be fallen down. Vital religion, access to God, knowledge of His Person, of His grace, of His blood, of His righteousness, seems to be all but dead, lost to us. How many of you, myself with you, get distinct and clear up-building, get from the Holy Ghost living testimonies, get these prejudices of your hearts knocked down and stabbed and killed from time to time by manifestations of the Person and of the work of Christ, so that you come, by faith, again and again, as lively stones, to be built on Him who is the living stone,

and become a spiritual house, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. And what if you get no such mercies? What will avail that form of godliness that you possess? If you deny the power of it, of what avail is the form? If the Lord does not come, where are you? Fallen down; fallen down into confusion, into weakness; and it is a very solemn thing to be in that state that is set forth in this word - the tabernacle of David which is fallen down; that blessed kingdom of God which cometh not with observation, which is within you, which is not in word only, but also in power. The Thessalonians were built up in this way. The Apostle Paul says to them - You received the word in much affliction, with joy and in the Holy Ghost; received the word which built you up on your most holy faith, and then there was joy in the Holy Ghost; joy in Christ, by the Spirit; joy in the ministration of the Spirit; joy in the discoveries He made of Christ and of a person's interest in Him; joy to believe, as they did, that the Lord had turned them from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, even Jesus, which delivered them from the wrath to come. And that has been the case with some of us; whatever may be our state now, it has been the case, has it not, when, under trouble, affliction; when, pained with new sights of our sinfulness; when, in weakness and at a distance from the Lord; the Spirit has come, and brought us again to Him who is the only foundation for a sinner, and again laid us on that foundation, and so raised up the kingdom of God in our hearts, and there has been one King, one Shepherd. David shall be King; David is the Shepherd; David there being a type of the Lord Jesus; He, He is the King, He is the Shepherd, He is the corner-stone, He is the Rock. Happy the men and happy the people who understand in their experience what this raising up of the tabernacle of David is. It is the renewing of the mind and the spirit of the mind; it is the renewing of the Holy Ghost; it is the coming again and the putting again of the hand of God to the work whereby a sinner rises in his soul's experience and seeks and finds God. It will be a mercy if, as a people, we are concerned about this. It is great when an individual person is exercised; it is great when a church is exercised and when the godly in the congregation are exercised, when a fear of God's departure is in the mind, causing a strong cry to go out: Forsake us not; we are called by Thy Name; Take us for Thine inheritance. I hope you are not without concern about this. Can you read the seven epistles to the seven

churches in Asia and have no suspicion or fear? Can you read of the entrance, the subtle entrance of error into the churches of Galatia, whereby the poor people were soon moved away, so soon that Paul marvelled at it (I marvel that you are so soon moved away from the gospel to another which is not another); can you read the solemn warning and admonitions in the Scripture, and not feel a fear lest these things should have no gracious effect on you? May the Lord stir us up. I do hope and pray that He will, and cause us to be afraid lest these things should come upon us. There are admonitions such as the carcasses of the unbelieving Jews that fell in the wilderness. These are for our admonition upon whom the end of the world is come, and solemn it is when there is no heed paid by one who even is a child of God, for that heedlessness of spirit leads to further declension, and declensions bring chastening, and chastening brings soreness and distance felt from God.

Look then at this great word: "the tabernacle of David which is fallen down". I think of you night and day, and bless God for you as far as I see His grace moving and working. But also, when I look at the religious world, when I look at many churches I know, and see the condition of things, and when I consider the ministry, and how far God appears to be from it - and much cause have I to be grieved on this account in myself - I am troubled. It is not a question of whether we here are quarrelling or not - I believe we are not - but it is a question like this - Is God among us, or is the tabernacle of David fallen down? If it is, here is a kind promise. What a mercy it will be for us to look to Him and ask Him to do for us that which will preserve us from this state, from this dreadful condition. The Jewish religion at the time when these words were uttered was in a very low state; they had rejected the Lord and the time was rapidly approaching when He would scatter that nation over the whole world, and so destroy the house of Jacob with respect to its being gathered together in one place, as it had been, and it would seem that today, what is called Christendom, is very like that condition of the Jews. Have not we, as a nation - has not Christendom on the whole - rejected Jesus Christ, by denying His miraculous conception and birth? Have we not rejected the Scriptures, by denying their inspiration? Has not their authority ceased to be known by men who talk about the Bible? And if this is so, then in Christendom, in our own nation, the

tabernacle of David is fallen down and the power of God, and the love of Christ, and the unction of the Spirit, seriously lacking. Then it would bring us to this, if we really reflect upon it in the light and teaching of the Spirit - Lord do not leave me. I can truly say that there is no day of my life that I live now, when this exercise is altogether absent. He only knows how often that cry is in my heart - Leave me not. You think you are safe perhaps; you are if God keeps you, not otherwise. You think you know the truth, perhaps; you do if you see it and are taught it in the light and by the Holy Ghost. You think you value Christ, and you do if you see Him in the manifesting light of the Holy Spirit. But, suppose these things are absent, and you think well of yourself; then what a solemn case you are in. "Let us search and try our ways and turn again to the Lord". This is the word of a people who were low, as in the Lamentations of Jeremiah. It is very solemn, as I judge, to read the prophets, very instructive, and sometimes it may have been a comfort to some of you to see how, though the church was frequently in an exceedingly low condition, God condescended to send His prophets and His servants to His people. It is very encouraging to see how that He says that Judah shall not be forgotten nor forsaken of Him, though the land was full of sin. He still has a people and will have a people, but for churches, visible churches, it is a trembling thought that may come into the mind - churches as such are liable to the removal of their candlesticks. Do you ever think of it? May the Lord help us to look to Him in this particular. And take notice of this if you can - I speak not to individuals as such here, and yet I speak to each one professing the Name of the Lord; I speak not to the church here, as if it were in the condition of the Jewish religion and of Christendom, for I hope the Lord has done something for us and is still among us; but I would speak to this church - there is a solemn reality in sin, a power in sin, an insidiousness in error, a subtlety which, unless the Spirit warn us of, and graciously direct us to Jesus Christ, will, sooner or later, affect us and bring us into a low state.

The promise is, that the residue of men might seek after the Lord. Let us look at this; that the the residue - the remnant of Edom, that is to say, the Gentiles; this brings us in - might seek after the Lord. Here we have two things; first, a seeker, seeking sinners who are, in themselves, lost, and second, an Object; seek

after the Lord. Now these two points will occupy us all our life; if we are under the teaching of the Spirit, all our days will be occupied in the main, and in the trend and bent of the spirit; all our days. A sinner! what a creature. A sinner is a deformed person; His mind, conscience, judgment, affections and will, all warped; all eccentric. We lost our centre when we fell; we shall never find it again except we find it in Jesus Christ. A sinner with grace - for he never seeks God without grace;

Our seeking Thy face is all of Thy grace

A sinner with grace, grace that tells him he is a sinner, that stirs him up to seek the face of the Most High; grace that tells him that unless he is a branch in the true vine he will be cast out, bound in the bundle of sinners and burned; grace that tells him that the blood of Christ alone can cleanse him from all his sins, and the righteousness of Christ alone can justify him from his guilt - is that sinner here? Yes, he is a seeker; he is hungry, therefore he seeks bread, the bread of life. I am that bread, says the Lord Jesus. Thirsty - My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? Naked, and prodigal-like, he says, There is bread in my Father's house, and there is all I need. I am here starving, a vagabond in rags, and grace says, Seek the Father's house, and he does so. A sinner, a sacred thing under the eye of God, under the teaching of the Spirit. A sinner, lost, unwilling to believe himself what he is, yet constrained to believe he is what God tells him he is. A sinner weak, too weak to resist sin; too weak to conquer one lust; too weak to pray. A sinner, ignorant; too ignorant to know anything of God by himself; he must needs be under the teaching of the Holy Spirit if ever he comes to know God. A seeker who finds himself in danger of hell fire because his conscience tells him what he has done. Distant from God; can he find Him? Unlike God; can he be made like Him? Deformed; can he be made right, upright, righteous?

"That the residue of men", Gentile sinners, who have hitherto not sought the Lord but are now born again and need and seek Him; these have before them an Object. Mind your object. An objective

religion, when the Object is right, is a good religion. Mind your Object. One says, I have an Object - well, and what is it? I wish my heart were broken - a very good wish, but if that be the termination, if that be the only Object, you are in the wrong way at present, and if you are born again, God will put you right. Why, is it not good to seek a broken heart? Nothing better, as to grace in the soul; but when you seek a broken heart rightly, you will seek it by seeking Him who can give it. The Object; mind the Object. As the Lord helps me, as long as I live among you and speak to you, I will endeavour to set the Object before you - God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. The jailor went hurriedly into the presence of Paul and Silas, when the earthquake shook, not the prison only to its foundation, but, under God, shook him to pieces. Now he was a poor, lost creature. Said he - What must I do? What must I do to be saved? O, if this question burns in some of you as it burned in him, you will cry as he did - What must I do to be saved? Then you will get an answer; and what is the answer? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved". That is the Object, the Person of Christ, the work, the sufficient work, the righteousness of Christ. Well, dear friends, is it not wonderful that an alien should be born again and out of that new birth, and its working in the soul by the Spirit, he should be seeking a gracious God? He has Him before him; The Psalmist had this Object before him. He had fallen down; the kingdom of God, as it were, had been shattered in his mind as he looked on the wicked and envied them their prosperity; as he looked on the righteous and was stumbled at their adversity. What a shattering there had been in his spirit. He lost all goodness, all proper proportion and all perspective, spiritual perspective. He lost all, and he came to this - I was as a beast before Thee. And yet he had this in his soul, he was a seeker and God came by His Spirit and, as it were, took him by the hand and conducted him to the sanctuary, and there he got teaching, there he saw his Object; then he said "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee". O, sinner, if ever your eyes see this King, this Saviour, this God, your Object will be clear to you in the measure of the revelation, and you will say - there is none in heaven I want, none on earth I seek, but the Lord Jesus.

"That the residue of men might seek after the Lord". Seeking

tells us this, that the Object is not immediately found. Grace is long in some, making them seekers, but withholding the finding. Hart expresses it thus:

Some long repent and late believe

In a sense repentance is the first, but also, in a true sense, repentance goes with every step of a child of God till he reaches that blessed Object, and whether he late believes or early believes, it is just the same to his soul; he finds the Saviour, the pearl of great price, wisdom, whose price is above rubies and all the things that may be desired. This Object will fill your eye; fill it with light, and then your whole body will be filled with light, and to every false Christ, every false object, every wrong thing, every false way, you will say, No. While this light shines you will walk in the right way and have no occasion of stumbling. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

Well, now, ere I sit down, may it not be profitable for us for a minute or two just to ask ourselves these questions. First, are we seeking? Seeking, not the world; seeking, not uninterrupted health, or pleasure, or profit - the miser's pelf. No, seeking God, that is the thing, seeking God. If we are, we go aside at times and if there be no opportunity of kneeling before the Lord, that does not interrupt the cry - Jesus, reveal Thyself to me. Are we seeking this great One, the only true Object, the end of faith, the Lord of life, in whom it has pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. The Apostle says to the Corinthians - "Examine yourselves and see". May we be enabled so to do in regard of this, for God has said that the residue of men, sinful men, weak, foolish, guilty men, shall seek after the Lord. May He grant this mercy to us.

AMEN.