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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 29 December 1918

Deuteronomy 33 v 27

"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath
are the everlasting arms: and He shall
thrust out the enemy from before thee; and
shall say, Destroy them"

These words, and those which follow, to the end of the chapter, are the conclusion of the blessing which Moses the man of God blessed Israel with ere he died. The blessings rise up to eternity and are in the eternal God. They are such as are needed by God's people, as are felt to be needed by them, and the felt need puts them upon a violent seeking after them from time to time; for "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." All blessings which do not rise up to, and end in, God are short. Faith lays hold of this truth, and makes the possessor of it say to the Lord, Put me not off with temporal things. And this will be, at times, a touchstone respecting our sincerity, and our state. If we can do with, be satisfied with, temporal blessings, there is therein an evidence of the lack of faith, an evidence, that is to say, that we are dead. But if, feeling that whatever good things we possess here below they are unsatisfying to our hearts, empty with respect to our spirits, and that the blessing we really seek and hope to find is in God, and is in that blessing of the Lord which maketh rich, and with which He addeth no sorrow, in that there is an evidence of the possession of eternal life. This text has a distinct intimation of danger in it, else what would a refuge be? But it has in it such a fullness of mercy, such a sufficiency of protection, such a glory of God, as, felt in any measure by the teaching of the Spirit, will swallow up all sorrow and make a person say that if God rides upon the heavens for my help, if God will be with me in my troubles, if he will cover me in the height of my danger, if He will drive out my enemies before me, if He will put underneath me His everlasting arms, then I can feel no grudge respecting the difficulties and the dangers of the way. You will find, if the Lord blessed you with some sweet intimation of His mercy,

with some solid persuasion that He will cover you in the day of battle, that He will fight your battles for you, that He will supply all your needs, you wont look at your troubles and say - How shall I get through? You will lose, in a proper sense, the sight of them in Him, the eternal God. Toplady had a large and beautiful view of God and of His condescension when he wrote these words

Less than Thyself will not suffice

and it would be well for us to be enabled narrowly to look into that wonderful point. What is it that will satisfy us? You may look at what you are till you sink near to despair. You may contemplate the power of your sins till you are so weakened as to say, I shall never get through. You may look at your carnal desires so as to say, these are my masters, these guide me. You may look at the enemy's power, so as to say, How can I expect to get past it, I must fall by it. All such looking has bondage in it, and when it becomes excessive it shuts God out of view. But when faith rises, when it stands and moves in the power of the Holy Ghost, it does not belittle the difficulties but it views Him who is above them. It does not deny necessity, but it looks to a fountain of supply. It does not say, There is no danger, but it says, There is safety in the Lord. Faith will point out the right way to walk. Faith will point out the proper object of faith, even the eternal God. Is the earth big enough for you? Is it good enough for you? Has it enough in it to satisfy your desires, or do you again and again find your heart turning from it and saying - The God of spirits only can fill up my vast desires. The eternal God, without beginning, uncaused. We can have no full conception of the Being of God. The Apostle Paul declares of Him - "He only hath immortality, dwelling in the light that no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see". We have immortality but it is a given immortality, and begins when we begin to be. God has a natural immortality, no beginning, no ending. "Who only hath immortality". And He brings a given immortality in all its purity to light by the gospel, and gives it to His children, and gives it into the hand of their faith, that they can receive it and rejoice in it. And this God who only hath immortality, is to be shown. Which in His time shall show who is that only King and Potentate, that only Lord God, King of kings, and Lord of lords. How does He show it? Where does He show it? He shows it in His Word;

that is how. He shows it in the heart by His Spirit; that is how. Where is this? In the Lord Jesus, in the Person of Him who is Man as well as God, very God, very Man, One Person. And as many as have faith will go to this one only blessed God Emmanuel. Necessity will draw them. His goodness will attract them. Their death will make them sick of themselves. His life will move them to Himself. Their wickedness will frighten them. His power to save will fill them with hope. This God is our refuge. "The eternal God is thy refuge". A refuge is a place which protects a person who is in it from danger, and evil, and calamity of any kind. Such is God to His children. He protects them from danger, from evil, and from calamity. "No evil shall come nigh thy dwelling". That blessed word in the Psalms has a fullness of meaning. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty". That is the dwelling near to which no evil shall come. If you take it literally, what will you make of it, at least of your interest in it, when evil comes to your house, when evil comes to your body? O it has a better, and a deeper meaning than that surface meaning, attaching to it at times. The eternal God - therefore a refuge that can never change, that can never cease to be a refuge. The Martello Towers on our coast had their use in their day. What would they be today? God is the same today that He ever was - "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever". A refuge has a particular use. God has a particular use to His children. He has made Himself both necessary to them, and useful. The refuge which He is, is in respect of some things; it is not an indefinite thing, this refuge. It is a refuge in respect, first, of sin felt and feared. Happy the man who is corrected of God with respect to sin, corrected in his views of it. We think little of it; it seems to us a small thing naturally. It is much like the little one for which Lot pleaded. "Spare it, is it not a little one". O the little things we all have in our nature. But God corrects the views and thoughts of His children respecting sin. He makes it, as the Apostle Paul calls it, exceeding sinful, dangerous to them, dangerous in its motions, dangerous in its effects, dangerous in its results where no salvation is, very dangerous. Dangerous because of what God thinks of it, because of what God must do with all who die in it. You think of it. A lie that a child may tell its parents seems little, and the consequences, even though it be discovered, may not be very great or severe, but if conviction of sin were brought to that

child and God let the light of His law shine, O what a different view there would at once be taken of it, what a correction there would be in that. It is a great thing to be corrected with regard to our natural views of sin. When we see it as it is in God's sight, when we feel it as it is in our nature, when we feel it, as to the effects of it, in separating us from God, when we feel it in respect of its everlasting results, even hell, then, O then, a refuge from it is needed, and sought, and there is a refuge.

A refuge for sinners the gospel makes known

The eternal God becomes a refuge to those who were His enemies, who fought against Him, who sinned against Him. He is a refuge to them and they find Him to be one. The blood of Christ becomes a refuge to them throughout their days on earth from the wrath to come. They flee to Christ from the burden, and pollution of guilt. They flee to Christ to be cleansed therefrom. They plead His blood. And this is that first use of a refuge which I would direct your attention to. O, to be a sinner is a bitter thing, but a merciful thing to be a sensible sinner. One writes

A sinner is a sacred thing
The Holy Ghost has made him so

and that is a truth; it is a great truth,

To see sin smarts but slightly

but O to feel, and the more grace people have the more they feel sin. This does not always appear to them to be so, but so it is really, and the more they feel sin, the more they prize this refuge. It is a life long exercise to be fleeing, and fleeing, and fleeing, into this refuge. And in this refuge there is strong consolation - you mark it - and you will get it, you who are fleeing from the wrath to come. The Apostle Paul in the Hebrews speaks of God being willing by two immutable things in which it was impossible for Him to lie to give strong consolation to them who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them. Strong consolation is needed where strong trouble is felt. Slight convictions of sin issue in slight comfort,

and consolation, but when one understands that word - "O to feel cuts deep beyond expression", then the refuge will afford strong consolation. God's immutability will afford strong consolation and God's oath will afford strong consolation and you find the two things are there. Immutability - the same as eternity here - immutability in the Promiser, and an oath confirming the promise do afford strong consolation to all who flee from the wrath to come, and flee to lay hold on Christ who is a refuge for them in respect of the guilt of sin. Now there is just this to be said here, we must either find deliverance from sin, or sink into eternal suffering and punishment for sin. No middle way. Many different measures of experience there are respecting sin, and respecting hope, respecting salvation, but the two things I have mentioned are never altered by any experience. Either delivered from sin, or sink into eternal misery, and punishment for sin. Now what a mercy to belong to that people who have the bliss before them of knowing God to be their refuge. "The eternal God is thy refuge".

He is, in the second place, a refuge from sin respecting its power. He who feels the guilt of sin often suffers defeat from the power of sin, and what is to become of him. He finds it vain to rise up early and sit up late and eat the bread of sorrows respecting this thing. He finds sin a deadening thing. He finds its power very great. It drives, it deceives, it blinds, it confuses. It misapplies, it sees things wrongly, upside down. It calls light darkness, and darkness light; sweet bitter, and bitter sweet. It brings people who feel it into Paul's conflict and experience, and blessed be God also they come into his victory. "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." O the times God gives relief to His children by enabling them to take refuge in the promise of God. "Sin shall not have dominion over you for ye are not under the law but under grace." When men are under the law sin provokes them. The law provokes sin, and sin provokes them, hurts, and wounds, and deceives. But when they are under grace, sin is subdued. A mighty hand is on it, the foot of divine grace tramples on it at times. Poor sinner you will never be a refuge to yourself here. You will never be able to say, Now I have managed that. You will never be able to boast that you have overcome any sin, but you will at times say, I found help, I found rest from my

hard labour by the grace of Christ. I was enabled to run to Him and pour my heart out before Him, and I felt to enter somewhat into Paul's language - "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord". "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God". And you can say, Now I perceive that I and my sin can be separated; that I, and my sin, in some way, some sense, and measure, are separated; that I myself serve the law of God with my mind. "The eternal God is thy refuge". Mid all the changing, and the adversity, and the strange experience through which you pass, there is one unchanging God, to whom by faith you are enabled to flee. "Happy art thou O Israel, who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help and who is the sword of thy excellency, and thine enemies - thy sins - shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places." The man who knows nothing of this is in a sad case, and if he could call millions of money his own he would be in a sad case, but the sinner who knows what it is to find a refuge from the power of sin in the eternal God, is in a happy case, whatever his circumstances may be. Let me name one point here that is very wonderful to all who perceive it, namely that the greatest relief, the sweetest comfort, and the most marked victories that are obtained over indwelling sin come from seeing this refuge, a suffering Surety. If you look on Him whom you have pierced you will be sorry for your sins. If you look on the wounds of Jesus Christ, if you gaze on His sufferings by precious faith, O how bitter will sin be to you. You will say, I hate my sins, I loathe myself. No sin is small that gave Christ a pang, that brought the stroke of justice into His holy soul, that brought the wrath of God like fire into His bones. That is known, that is felt, and there is a refuge. The Man you caused to suffer by your sins, the Man who sweat blood for you in Gethsemane's Garden, the Man who was strengthened by an angel dispatched from heaven to strengthen Him, the God-Man Jesus Christ, becomes in His sufferings, and in His grace, and in His promise, a refuge from the dominion of sin that dwells within. Better be plagued all the day with indwelling sin than consent to it for an hour.

And then God is a refuge - "The eternal God is thy refuge" - in respect of all troubles. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Only people who know this can understand this, what a relief, what a calmness, what a different view of

matters, of afflictions, one can take when one is favoured to flee unto God to hide one in respect of troubles. It is beyond understanding; it is according to Paul's word - "The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your heart and mind by Jesus Christ." You wont get away from trouble, but you will get away from the bitterness of it, and the despair of it, the anguish of it; you will get away from all the fretting under it; when you are enabled to flee unto God to hide you. O what a great thing it is to flee unto God to hide us till all calamities be overpast. They will be overpast one day to the saints. Meantime, says the Lord - "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". This is the rest, and this is the refreshing which all His people get in respect of their troubles, and it does put such a different complexion on troubles when you see them in the light of God's mercy, and when you see them in the sweet safety that Christ becomes to you. This Man is a hiding place from the wind, and covert from the tempest, and on all the dwelling places of Zion there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow from the heat and a refuge from storm and rain, and this is Jesus Christ. Troubled souls find they lose their troubles even though they keep them, when they run to this refuge. "I flee unto Thee to hide me". "In God is my refuge" says one. O it is so different. You may look at a rod and not see the kind hand that is using it and think the rod will make an end of you. You may look at a rod and see it in the hand of your Father, and then you will say, this is sent to do me good. "I flee unto Thee to hide me", to give me grace to submit to it, to say in respect of it - "Thy will be done".

Also God is a refuge to His needy people. They come to Him for supplies. "The poverty of the poor is his destruction". But suppose that poor person gets near to God; He is rich in grace, and possesses gold, and silver, and cattle upon a thousand hills. O he sees such a fountain of supply in God as will take away all his fear. He says, by faith

I must have all things and abound
Since God is God to me

and that sheds a light upon his spirit, and he may say, in such an experience, something in Paul's language. He says - Let no man glory

in men for all things are yours. You need not depend on this or that arm, you need not bewail the drying up of that river, or of that brook - all things are yours. And Paul enlarges there - "Whether Paul, or Cephas, or Apollos, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's. "Well my friends, if God says this to you, these are your servants. The world is your servant, Paul, Apollos, Cephas, these are your servants. Time, your servant; death your servant. You will say, I must have all things and abound, all grace, and all providence; everything I need for my body, for my family; everything I need for my soul, my justification, my sanctification, my wisdom, my redemption; all, all I am to have because I am Christ's and Christ is God's. "The eternal God is thy refuge". Israel then was surrounded by nationsthat knew not God, and whose manners, and whose gods, may be a snare to them. O, look not to them, look to thy God, look to thy God, go to Him for instruction as well as for safety. "The eternal God is thy refuge" and He will never be wanting to thee, never be wanting to thee. Christ made an appeal to the Apostles on one occasion. He had sent them out without scrip, empty; He had sent they and they came back having fulfilled their mission. Said He to them "Lacked ye anything?" I have sent you without purse and scrip, I gave you directions - "Lacked ye anything?" Nothing, said they. I believe every child of God will say that in his way, and in his measure, from time to time, if it is put to him. You have gone that journey, you have gone into that trouble, you have gone into that difficulty, you have had to meet that enemy, you have had that affliction, you have been put into that fire - "Lacked ye anything?" Have I been a wilderness to you? "Have I been a wilderness to Israel, a land of darkness?" O, if God were to say it to some of us, what would our reply be? What would you have to say? As to providence you may say He has more than answered my prayers. He has more than fulfilled my expectations in some particulars, and, as to grace, He has been a good God, a good God in Christ. He has been a good God in Christ, given me hours of the sweetest happiness that a creature can have; views of Himself which have clarified my views of all other things. I have seen them to be in His hand, under His guidance and control. He has been a good God. And this is the eternal God. "I am the Lord I change not". If you look to the earth, you look to what is changing. If you look to God you will look to Him who changes not. "I change

not". The Psalmist had a view of the world and of the heavens, and it was given him to perceive, and to write too, how that the elements should melt and that the heavens should be rolled up as a scroll. Enough to make a poor man faint. What, all these solid things to be moved? Yes, all of them. Then what? "Thou remainest". "Thou art the same and Thy years shall not fail". And this is for an instruction to us, that we should not look to the earth which God makes empty, void, and waste to His children, but to Himself. "The eternal God is thy refuge". What then is the greatest misery that can come to a man? To be a sinner without God. What is the greatest happiness that can come to a sinner? To have God for his refuge, for His Saviour, for his all in all. And my friends, this is a point I would just put before you, and leave with you this morning, namely, Who is it, what is it, that attracts your souls, that is your end? If it is the world, if it is yourself, then you are of all creatures the most miserable in your estate. But if you can say, as far as I know - not wanting to speak wrongly, or beyond what I have understanding in - as far as I know it is God I want. I can say

I seek and hope to find
A portion for my soul
To heal a feverish mind
And make a bankrupt whole
A cup of blessing for the poor
That's full and free and flowing o'er

Why then this shall be said, and God will ratify it, that He, the eternal God, has, by two immutable things in which it is impossible for Him to lie, secured to you everlasting consolation and good hope through grace because you have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before you.

AMEN.