

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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EPHESIANS 2 v 18

"For through Him we both have access by one
Spirit unto the Father"

Next to the mystery of the Being of God is the mystery of that glorious One communicating Himself in some measure to poor sinners; the mystery of God communicating His life, His grace, His love, His power, and His heaven to pieces of hell, to lumps of clay that He forms into vessels of mercy. And what can we wish for each other better than, if it be His sovereign will, God would communicate of Himself to us. I daresay that you young people whose prospects are confined to this world, who look for nothing better, nothing bigger than this world, what I may say, what you often hear me say, may have no interest at all to you. Often it may be that the services are tiresome to you, and you would be glad if one should go into other things and talk about time things, but then I should not be your friend if I did it, and I am your friend and mean what I say when I say to you, I wish with all my heart that you may come to know the mystery that is before me this evening about which I design and desire to speak. You cannot live on this life; you are not sufficient for yourselves; you cannot be your own end. There must be, if it is well with you, something outside, now brought home, imparted, implanted, that shall reveal to you your own death, your bondage to sin, your obligations to God, His claims on you, your hell deserving condition, the wickedness of your nature, your helplessness, and you must come to believe that your very helplessness is a part of your sin, because God did not create you as you now are. I wish you might be brought to believe all these painful things, and that you might feel how richly you deserve hell; that you might be led by the Holy Ghost to pray, pray with the dying thief, and feel even that it would be an honour were you allowed to

stand at his side and pray with him, feeling no better; that you felt that the publican's prayer, the publican's company would be a great honour to you, for then you would come to know Jesus Christ. You would come to know Him and knowing Him, O, how you would love Him, and bless Him. Now I say to this congregation, the text contains a mystery, it contains a mercy, it contains an experience. What a mercy to know all that. The mystery of it is that the blessed Trinity is known here, revealed, revealed in this beautiful order. First the Son through whom the access is had to the Father; then the Spirit by whom the soul is led to pray, led through Jesus Christ unto the Father, the ultimate end of faith. This is the mystery. You may think you believe in God; what a mercy if you do. Do not take the fact perhaps that you have never doubted the Being of God to be an evidence that you believe in the Being of God. You may not have doubted because you have no faith; you may not have doubted because you have no life; the devil has let you alone; sin has had it all its own way with you. O happy man who can say he believes in God. Happy man who has internally an evidence that God is; O blessed sinner who can say that there have been times when God has been very real to him, when it has seemed to him as if he, the sinner, were nearer to God than to himself. There is a God incomprehensible, infinite, self existent, eternally subsisting as the Scriptures teach us in Three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and these Three Persons in an amazing relationship, most mysterious, beyond our comprehension. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Spirit eternal. The eternal Father, the Son mysteriously begotten of the Father, and the Holy Ghost mysteriously proceeding from them both - One God. This is different from all our conception of things. Our natural conceptions of things cannot rise - because we are sinful - cannot rise to such a height as this. The Scriptures reveal this mystery. O be careful how you treat the Scriptures - they are God's Word, God's revelation of Himself. Beware denying the Scriptures, for if you deny them you deny God. This glorious God in the text is set before us as being known, as communicating Himself to sinners, and as known by sinners in a distinct operation. The soul wants God, he is led to God by the

Holy Ghost, he is led to God through the Son of God, Jesus Christ; he reaches God that way. Ah 'tis a great thing to be predestinated to know God, a very great wonder - wonders; a wonder of love, a wonder of grace, that a sinner should be predestinated to know God. It shows, not the nobility of our powers and the greatness of them, but it shows the infinite condescension of God. It shows not, how much you can grasp, but how low God must stoop to give you something. Forbear vain man to boast. Let the Christian ask the question of himself that is put in the Scriptures - Who maketh thee to differ from another, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Blessed be God that He has communicated of Himself to some of us. Not much, it may be, but eternal life is much. "I give unto My sheep eternal life" That is much. The experience of it may be little, but the thing is great. Eternity is great, eternal life is great. This God has determined to make Himself necessary to some people, necessary in this world. Think of it; let me try to speak of it. We can understand what necessity is. We need daily bread and strength; we need friends; we need homes and shelter; we need these things and we understand that we need them. It needs no demonstration from anybody that we need these things. Our minds and our bodies, our daily sensations tell us that we need these things. Do we need God as really? Yes, quite as really. We may not wish Him - nobody naturally - we may not wish Him as we wish for bread. O, but if we do wish Him really it is by the grace of the Holy Ghost. What is it that we need in God? Everything that He has. Yes, He has decreed that all that His children need shall be found by them in Himself; Himself as He reveals Himself as the God of salvation and in condescension to His people's capacity, if I may speak so, He has put in the Scriptures the provision under the forms of bread and water and clothing and rest and sleeping, and more, in the covenant of grace He has put this, that they should not only need, and feel their need, of these things, but that they shall have a spirit to ask for them, and that is what we do not possess naturally. We are more like a proud man who has a rich, liberal neighbour, and the proud man is very poor, has not enough to get a meal, but he is so proud, he wont even allow, if he can help it,

that the rich man shall know that he is poor and we - that is a feeble illustration - we are so proud that we refuse to bend the knee, and refuse to ask a blessing. O how besotted, O how vilely ignorant and proud we are respecting God. But He wont be put off; O No, for He says of a sinner, My throne shall be that sinner's heart; who shall prevent it? All that He does, all that He needs to do, is this, to come and say "Live", and the sinner lives; he lives a new life and living such a life he wants food and blessing, nourishment and good things, according to the nature of that new life. And my friends, this is the explanation of what may be a perplexity to some. Some of you young people may wonder how it is your parents cannot do without the Bible, and how it is they cannot do without the chapel, and how it is they must sometimes be alone. You do not understand it. Well, just as you cannot live without bread, your parents are unable to live without God. That is the secret of it. May you come to know it. But how can they get to Him? That is the question with them. How can they get to Him? That is what all feel and ask who are born again. So vile, how can they approach infinite holiness? That is a question. Prayer is a great thing; prayer is asking for things; prayer is worshipping God; prayer is adoring Him, acknowledging Him, a coming to Him, waiting on Him and waiting for Him. And how can all this be? By the Holy Ghost. That is an amazing thing, how the Holy Ghost, Almighty God, can enter the heart of a sinner and dwell there; open his wickedness to him, talk to him of his sins, bring him into condemnation, quicken his conscience so that he, again and again, comes into self condemnation - he judges himself - and how that that same Holy Spirit should touch the heart of that same guilty person, and, as it were, say to him in his guilt, before he gets any better, say to him, pray. And when the sinner would say, O how can I, how can I approach a holy God, that same Holy Spirit should say, through Jesus Christ, through Jesus Christ; should say, "Pour not on thyself too long". Do not only regard your sins, and your wickedness, but

Look to Jesus kind as strong

Mercy joined with power

And the mystery of true religion is this, that the sinner believes that, and ventures, and ventures, and ventures, and is bold sometimes, for he believes in Jesus Christ of whom the Spirit has borne some testimony in his heart. I have said these things, if the Lord will, to just show how the Holy Spirit leads poor sinners. This is the way to heaven; this is the way to heaven. It is the way to bread to nourish, to water to refresh, the way to righteousness to justify, and to blood to cleanse, and to grace to sanctify through Jesus Christ. Highly exalted is He in the Scriptures and highly exalted is He in the heart by the Holy Ghost. O that fair One, Jesus Christ, heaven's best, heaven's sun, heaven's rose, heaven's glory; the fulness of grace, the fulness of love, the fulness of mercy, the fulness of salvation in this blessed Jesus Christ. O if we were but acquainted with Him, if we only knew Him

O could we but with clearer eyes
His excellencies trace
Could we His Person learn to prize
We more should prize His grace

And when one does see Him it is as if the heart would say, who else is worthy a thought? who else is worthy attention? None but Jesus, none but Jesus. I think at times I can say in these latter days of my life He does fill my eye, He does fill my thoughts, and I do hanker after Him more than after anything in the whole of creation and I do wish I might be able to preach Him as He deserves to be preached. "Through Him" says the Apostle Paul "we both" - that is Jew and Gentile, in the text, in the meaning of the word both. We both. One circumcised and not benefitted before God by the circumcision; the other uncircumcised, and his uncircumcision no bar to his approach, for the middle wall of partition between us has been broken down and now we both, on equal grounds, have access to the Father through Jesus Christ by the Spirit. Well dear friends what is it to get to God through Jesus Christ, to get access? It is

by precious faith to fix in the infinite merits of that blessed Person, to have your eye and your heart, your faith and your love, and your hope all centred in that Person, and what He accomplished in His life and in His death. It is to enter by faith into Paul's experience when he says that though an Israelite, though of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, though touching the law, blameless, and all the things which he had and had acquired, he esteemed them all dung and dross and loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, his Lord. Now in a measure you must come to that. All you have morally speaking, justly speaking, and in every other way, all you have with regard to God, will have to come into the dust and be nothing to you but loss, dung, and dross, that you may win Christ and be found in Him, and when you come there your eye, your heart and your love and your hope fixed there, and through that One Person you go to God with your sins and your troubles, and your exercises, and your weaknesses and your fears, with your appetite, your desires, your thirst, your pains, your pangs, your travail, and all things, then there is a going through Jesus Christ. It is not speculation about Him, but an apprehension of Him. O bless God for this way; it is called a new and living way. A new way with regard to the law which was first made known. It is a new and living way because the law is a dead way, and you cannot walk in it. This is a new and living way, a way of life, a way in which, as you walk in it, you find life, life in your feeling, life in your prayers and life in your faith, life in your hope and life in your prospects. It is a living way and it is a living way to the living God. There be gods many but there is only One God to the child of God, and this living God is approached in a living way by a living soul. Through Him, we both - poor sinful men - a Jew who has been religious all his days, from the days of his circumcision unto the day God met with him, and taught him his sin; a poor guilty man who says I have no privilege now before God in these things; Christ, the Antetype has realised in Himself all the types, and Christ the Passover slain for the people of God has realised in His death all the slaying of sacrifices ordained under the law and I have to come, Hebrew though I am, a guilty, weak and helpless worm - and the

Gentile with no privileges such as had the Jews, finds that he is not disqualified thereby, but he, like his brother sinner, is ruined; says I am a wretch undone, I have no righteousness, but rags only, and they both have to go to the same source of life and righteousness and mercy. "Through Him" O bless God for Christ. Let me, as the Lord enables me, keep this before you always. One way, One Person, One Mediator, One good God; one, only one way, My dearly beloved friends you will never get to heaven if you are unacquainted with Christ. Religious you may be; saved you cannot be, without Jesus Christ - impossible. Very solemn for you who are ignorant of Him, very solemn. May the Lord make you think of it and bow down before Him. May He teach you today, may He overcome your infidelity and your indifference, and your hardness for His Name's sake.

Now this access, what an amazing thing it is. What do you get access to? First of all to the glorious God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the fountain of all goodness and there is the infinite love of God and through Christ a sinner gets access to God in that particular. He gets to love, and reaches love, reaches free love, love so free that it ran down in an act of election to this poor wretch. So great that it even gives out of the bosom of the Father the only begotten Son, and so wonderful that it designed eternal good for the greatest of sinners and so steadfast that it cannot change. Not all the sins of the sinner loved can change it. "I am the LORD, I change not". He rests in His love and the sinner gets access to this for it comes, as it were, like a stream from this blessed God into his heart. It is shed abroad there by the Holy Ghost. If you get near the fire, you feel it, and if you get to God the Father in Jesus Christ, something of His love is reached, some sense, some taste, some feeling of it. Access - not a speculation, but an experience, sweet and solemn experience. O, to be embraced by love is wonderful; to be in the ring of love is wonderful, and to partake of the gift of love is wonderful, and to see how love has cared over the sinner, provided for him, ordered his ways, ordered his troubles, ordered his perplexities, and his anxieties, that love

has done them all, yea, to see, as one says, concerning the cross, love inscribed upon it, this is happiness. Now when one gets a blessed intimacy, for this access has in its very bosom intimacy, then he finds that he has reached love. When the law came to him and he got under the law, then he reached justice, pure justice. When he saw hell in the curse he saw pure justice. When he reached God in the law then he reached omnipotence and he feared Him who, after killing the body, had power to cast into hell. And when he reached the Father in Jesus Christ, he reached justice, pure justice, and he reached justice satisfied. Satisfied justice, O satisfied justice. The fire in the golden censer taken from the altar was satisfied fire, not hungry fire, fire to devour any object it touched, but satisfied fire that had had the offering on it and had consumed it and now he might go with incense into the Holy of Holies and there, on the Mercy Seat it could not devour but please, and if you see Jesus Christ and reach the Father through Him, you will reach justice satisfied and pleased, and reach that with love also. O what a thing it is, what an experience it is. "Behold" says Hart, in this experience, "Behold a change indeed, justice is now for me", and you get access to that through Jesus Christ. O I wish my heart and your hearts O people of God were at this time touched with a sweet sense of this satisfied justice, this free, wondrous love. All the world's pleasure cannot reach this pleasure, cannot reach it. It is of another nature; it is infinitely below this, infinitely below this; nothing in the world is like it; it is altogether unique. Bless God if you ever had access to the Father through Jesus Christ and have reached this satisfied justice, this eternal love. And then also you reach grace. He is the God of all grace, and the Father of all comfort and consolation and this is reached. Grace, grace to reign over sin, grace to subdue iniquity, grace to keep you firm and stedfast, grace to help you to bear trouble, grace to help you to say, "Thy will be done". Grace to set before you a beautiful prospect, free grace shining in the face of Christ, free grace flowing down into your heart, free grace giving to you everything you need in trouble, everything you can wish for in trouble; consolation and mercy and peace and comfort and support

and submission and quietness of mind in trouble. Fulness in want, strength in weakness, wisdom in foolishness. O friends, what does a sinner reach when he reaches God the Father, the God of all grace, and access to this is had through Jesus Christ, nowhere else. Trouble will swallow you up one day my friends who have not access to the Father through Jesus Christ. Sin will overcome you - it does overcome you every day - because you have no access to the Father through Jesus Christ. Time will carry you to eternity, and there eternity will swallow you up in misery endless, all because you are sinners and have no access to the Father through Jesus Christ. But here is a poor unworthy sinner who says what will become of me? I am a wretch undone. And the Holy Spirit comes to his assistance and says look to Jesus, kind as strong; pray through Him, pray in His Name, mention His name and speak to the Father of His love, and His blood and His righteousness, and all will be well. Solid pieces of heaven come down into the hearts of those who feel themselves pieces of hell. Men who feel themselves almost to be incarnate devils are made to feel they are saints, melted into love, drawn by grace, and brought to the Father and they get access to the power of God; God Almighty they reach. What a wonder; and perhaps you have dreaded omnipotence; my mind often goes back to the day when I dreaded omnipotence and to the day when I saw omnipotence could bless me. What a great thing. There is a sinner who says, if omnipotence touches me it will break me to shivers and then there comes love and pardon to that sinner, and he sees omnipotence clothed in flesh and he craves to be touched by it, and helped, and raised up and sustained and defended by it, and sees how it can be his best friend, yea that it must befriend him or he will be overcome. You have access to this blessed God for this. But there is nothing will do you harm if omnipotence be with you to support you and help you. Why you can say, this trouble I can bear, and this affliction I can bear, and that burden I can carry and that sorrow shall do me good. O my friends, what can you not do if omnipotence be with you and you get access to it, employ it by precious faith, as you reach it through Jesus Christ. Through Him we both have access to the power of God, yea and to the Word of God, to the promises of God, the

blessed promises which are in Christ Jesus yea and amen You may feel at the ends of the earth one minute, a long way from a promise and a long way from a testimony and cry O how silent God is to me. And then He draws you and you get to the Father and He speaks to you through the Son. God who in times past spake unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son. What a way. Access to the Word of God. You have got it here my friends, O read it; all young people read it. But I am speaking of another thing, not different from this Book, but the way in which a sinner gets into this Book in some part of it. He gets into a promise when he gets access and God opens His mouth to him. Then says he, did ever sinner ever hear the voice of God out of heaven and live as I do? O happy sinner. Said Moses to Israel, did ever people hear the voice of God out of heaven and live as ye do this day? And says the sinner, I have heard the voice of God and I live and live in my soul, live in hope and live in love and live with a prospect before me of eternal bliss, And the sinner also gets access to God's wisdom. "God only wise". Perhaps he has been saying well I shall never get through this, this perplexing providence and perplexing sins and their workings and their oftentimes prevailing in me as they do. I think I shall never get through them. And when he gets access in prayer, and through the holy, blessed Son of God, what does he see? That the wisdom of God can turn all his adverse things to advantage, that He can make a straight path for his poor feet by crooked circumstances; that the trouble that brings out the worst of his nature really brings forth the best of God to him; the wisdom of God. He sees all this by precious faith as he approaches God and finds Him to be "God only wise". And my friends, let me say another word on this point. He reaches his heaven. Ah there are moments in this life, when some here can sing the joys of heaven. They can say,

Beneath His smile my soul has lived
And part of heaven possessed

It is too solemn almost to mention; God's smile, and God's blessing

and God's anointing, and God's presence, you feel. I know a little of it; it is almost too sacred to mention that a man of earth, a man in this world with a body of sin and death to plague him and defile him and harden him and wound him in his dearest joys, that that same man should, by occasions get a minute or two of this blessedness and possess a part of heaven. You must have it, my friends, though I say as I do, the sacredness. I say you must know just an inkling, perhaps now and again, something of it. Yea, the least gospel blessing that you have in your soul is a part of it, a sweet part of it but when you have had that you will say now Lord I want more. It wont be with you, O it does not matter how little I have here if I get to heaven. It will be rather this, Now Lord do grant me as much of heaven here as I can carry. Through Him, Jesus Christ, we both, sinful men, Jew and Gentile, have access to the Father and there see Him smile. O what a smile has God for sinners and you who are coming to Him, let me say this to you, you do not know, you cannot conceive what awaits when you get near to Him through Jesus Christ.

And now a few words in conclusion on the third point. "Through the Spirit", the Holy Ghost. I have mentioned Him, running along, but look particularly for two or three minutes at this - "Through the Spirit". We have access to the Father by that Holy Spirit's operation. By His gracious inshining sinners pray, they believe, they love. Speaking of the Spirit and promising Him, the Lord Jesus said, the world knoweth Him not. It seeth Him not, neither can it know Him. But to His disciples He said, Ye know Him for He shall dwell with you and be in you; dwell in you. Now that is a point, a real point in true religion, that the Holy Ghost does dwell in the saints and in His operations He comes, as Paul says in the Romans, alongside of them when they are in trouble and helps their infirmities; that is what the Apostle says - He helpeth our infirmities. He cometh, as it were, alongside of us and takes the heaviest end of the cross, yea the sinner and the cross together, and lifts him up in prayer and supplication. and that is why it is, as I have said before, many times, a praying man is a miracle, a

miracle of grace, for when he prays he prays by the particular operation of the Holy Ghost within him. His prayer comes down from heaven and goes up to heaven. It comes down into his heart by the Spirit; it is wrought there, put there. He is prompted how to pray; he is taught to pray and he prays, not when he gets into a good frame, and fit for it; not when he gets into a nice quiet corner where he can kneel in quietness from all intrusion; no, though such things are good and pleasant - but he prays just as the rain does not tarry for a man to get out of the field into his house or into a barn but it comes falling down just upon the man where he is. Says the sinner, I do not feel able to pray, and I have no praying frame in me, I have no power, I have no life to pray now; I am too carnal, I am too hard, and in a moment the whole scene is changed, and he prays. Behind his counter, in his field, on his bed, at his business, he prays, he gets access through Jesus Christ by one Spirit. Not by his own, O no, but by the Holy Ghost, that one Spirit of God. Then his spirit goes out and the sinner prays as prompted from within, begs, urges, pleads, argues, wrestles, confesses, mourns, He believes, he waits, he casts his hope in Christ as an anchor cast into that which is within the veil. It is a beautiful way of praying and is the only effectual way. You may say one word and the thing is done, your prayer is heard and accepted. Often it is just that, not the long prayer, not the laboured setting out of a case; it is just the one word - "Lord remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom" Lord let Thy kingdom come into my soul. Mercifully undertake for me in this trouble. Subdue in me this iniquity. In this difficulty guide me. O clothe me in Christ's righteousness and cleanse my sin by His blood and assure my conscience by the Spirit that Christ loved me and gave Himself for me. Just a few words and it is done; the answer is sure to come. Prayer indited by the Spirit must be answered. The delay may try you; the denial will never never cut you off. Bless God for a breath of prayer; O bless God for the Holy Ghost rather; that He who gives prayer should ever have condescended to come into our hearts is very wonderful. I have often thought that the greatest judgment that could befall me would be to take away the

spirit of prayer, and that I have greatly feared, but the Holy Ghost has come again and again and again; pray thus; O if you pray thus, you pray as Jude speaks, Praying in the Holy Ghost, and that will do you good. And this is the way, this, my beloved friends, this is the way to heaven. I have set before you in a very feeble way a mystery, a mercy and an experience. It is something known, felt, enjoyed at times, and may we know it and feel it and enjoy it.

AMEN.