

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 19 August 1934

Ephesians 3 v 20 and 21

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly
above all that we ask or think, according to the power
that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the
Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages,
world without end. Amen".

The prayer you have just prayed in the last line of that hymn -
"May we nothing know beside Jesus and Him crucified" is a heavy prayer
because, if it be answered by God in your experience, you have very
much to lose. To one of his correspondents, William Gordon,
Rutherford said, the nearer to heaven you get, the nearer to hell you
will feel. A startling word it may be to us, but it is true, as people
know, who are approaching eternity, will soon be in eternity. They
find that as grace works, as the sanctifying power of truth is
known, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,
is the more angry, irritated and determined as far as possible to have
his own way. O saints of God do not expect to be free from the awful
workings of old nature while you live. What is this beautiful, this
wonderful chapter for, but to encourage, enlarge, instruct,
establish and comfort the Lord's people. Grace? what is it for, but
to subdue sin and make a sinner like Christ. Miracles have not ceased
and will not cease while the Holy Ghost is busy with sinners. A
wonderful miracle it is when God, of a sinner, makes a saint. When He
unites a dry stick, cut out of the dead stock, to the living Vine and
makes it fruitful by that union. You may be much afraid at times by a
sense of your barrenness. The one thing to make you fruitful is just
to be taken as a dry, barren stick, and carried into the temple of the
Most High God, laid before the ark, and in a night you will have bud,
blossom and fruit, never to be had from old nature. We may be much
discouraged by a sense of sin, by the working of lust and pride and
vanity, and the Holy Ghost will have His people encouraged and
strengthened by the wonderful truths set out in this Epistle and in
this chapter.

One of the mysteries that the Apostle had revealed to him, and which he was inspired to write here, is this that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs with the Jews and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel. What is the promise? You find the first utterance of it in Genesis, the Seed of the woman. You will hear it repeated if you have ears to hear when God spake to Abram and told him that all the families of the earth should be blessed in him. You have it repeated and enlarged and explained by the Apostle Paul when he said - He saith not to seeds as of many but as of one, thy seed, which is Christ. And to be a partaker of that promise is to have a work of grace in your soul and the motions of life by the Holy Ghost and the actings of faith standing in His power, so as that, from time to time, you are enabled to live a life of faith on the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you. The Apostle was specially anointed to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. Above all asking, all thinking. Asking is praying, and thinking goes beyond even that, when your minds and hearts are carried away perhaps for the moment into the contemplation of what Christ is, what He possesses. Unsearchable, yet occasionally opened a little to faith, blessed faith. And the Apostle was anointed to preach this mystery, the mystery of Christ, of His Person, and of His work. It is unsearchable. We shall need a blessed eternity to enter into, to explore, gaze on and enjoy the unsearchable riches of Christ. Ah, we are troubled by sin. I never had so much trouble from sin in my early days as I have now, but the day is coming, near to some, when they will have finished with that trouble and be absent from the body and present with the Lord.

Now the apostle, gathering up the whole of the mystery in this chapter which he expounds, opens the doxology of the text - "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." Able? That expresses just this, that whatever is needed, and more than can be received and held by a little vessel, Jesus Christ has. Able, according to His divine Person. Able, according to His human nature united to that Person, else just sheer divinity could not help sinful man, but the two united in one Person will bring this

forth. He is able to help a sinner. This ability to save is beautifully expressed in the Hebrews and it is connected with His Priesthood. "He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them", as if He should say your salvation hangs on the intercession of your great High Priest. "To the uttermost". You won't get beyond that. Able to awaken and bring off the bed of idleness a soul that has sunk away, as to all right exercise, from Himself. O my friends, some of us greatly need this ability of the Lord Jesus. Able to make us spiritually minded which is life and peace. Ah one says, I wish I were spiritually minded. What do you think it means? Do you think it means that you have no conflict? If you think that you make a great mistake. If you turn to that chapter in Romans you will find that the creation, the new creation, groans and travails in pain, and will do to the end. To be spiritually minded is to have your heart set on Christ, and it is to know that the devil hates Him and hates you. To be spiritually minded is to have your heart set on a felt interest in Christ. To be spiritually minded is to be with your affections set on things above and not on things on the earth, and Apollyon sometimes straddling across the whole way, and saying - you are a deserter, and I won't allow you to go any further. What, that is spiritually minded? Yes, because you are travelling to heaven. It does not make you carnal because the devil hates you. It does not make you carnal because he says he won't allow you to take another step toward heaven. No. Able to do this. Think of it, where you are weak there is room for the power of Christ. Where you fail, there is room for His merciful and powerful intervention. Where you are thrown down there is room for that word to be verified in you - Two are better than one, for if one fall his fellow shall help him up again. Bless God for this ability to make us spiritually minded. It is an ability to reckon things rightly, to have a just balance, and in the just balance the things of God in one scale and the tinsel of the world in the other scale. And you will judge rightly when you say this tinsel is not worth looking at, and these things of God are my life and my hope, and if I have any comfort, they are my comfort. And God in Christ is able to do this for you.

Able to make you strong in faith. To be strong in faith does not mean no opposition. It means strong in faith notwithstanding that

you have much opposition. Abraham's faith was strong here, that he believed in hope against hope. He believed that the natural impossibility, that now had come on the promise, could not make the promise of no effect. He gave glory to God in believing that what was naturally impossible was possible with God, and he believed God. Your being made strong in faith may be for the purpose of trial, "the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, that it might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." We may have sometimes made a great mistake in thinking that if we had more faith we should have less trial. Who had stronger faith than David in his afflictions? See how his faith was tried. What an extreme of trial there was to his faith when Ziklag was burnt down and his wives and children and the wives and children of his men, taken away. And more, when his men, disheartened, spake of stoning him as being the author of all their disasters. What then? He was strong in faith, as we read - He encouraged himself in the Lord his God. Looked back, and said, hitherto the Lord has helped me. Come to the present, I need Him now. I expect some gracious communication was made to him by the Holy Ghost, that he got some powerful intimation that God was with him and would deliver him, that perhaps some sweet promise was breathed into his soul by the Holy Spirit that lifted him up above the discouraging circumstances of the moment. And so, he encouraged himself, said to his soul, as in another Psalm - "Hope thou in God, I shall yet praise Him". He has not forsaken me though I am cast down. So, dear friends, God is able to strengthen faith.

He is able to give that desire for union with Christ that you have expressed to Him many a time in prayer. You may have said often

Lord make the union closer yet
And let the marriage be complete

Union with Christ, what is it? "I am the vine, ye are the branches", cut out of the old dead stock and grafted into Christ. That union is productive of fruit. "Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye expect ye abide in Me." The intimacy and the fruitfulness of union,

both are there set out. It is still more intimate and blessed, according to Scripture, when it is spoken of as the saints being members of His body in particular and from Him, as in this Epistle, - "From whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." All the virtue, motion, articulation of any and every joint, you must receive, will receive from the Lord Jesus. And any communication of good by you to a fellow saint will be from that union that is between you and the Lord Jesus, from whom the whole body, He being the Head, receives nourishment. Well, it is a blessed union. You say, I am too alone to permit me to think I have this union. Your very thinking that may be some evidence that you have union. Yea, this union is still set forth under another figure more beautiful, if it can be, than those named already - husband and wife. The husband is to cherish his wife, and it is written - "No man ever yet hated his own flesh" which means no man united to Christ, or the bride of Christ, was so nourished by Him. He could not hate His bride. If He did He would hate Himself. Well, you say, that is far beyond my experience, and I cannot apprehend it. It may be this evening; it may not be tomorrow. Yea, God could work it in you now - union with Christ. Blessed is this and though, in this time's state, with the many difficulties and afflictions and doubts and temptations and the world, it is often an obscure thing, not much enjoyed, still it abides.

In union with the Lamb
From condemnation free
The saints from everlasting were
And shall for ever be

He is able to keep you from falling. Jude thus speaks in that beautiful doxology of his. "Unto Him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you spotless before the presence of His glory". This is wonderful. There are two kinds of falls that the saints of God are liable to. One they often experience, an inward fall. They fall into doubt, into fear. They fall into inward transgression. I need not enlarge here. The more grace you have the more you will understand that. The more grace you have the more you

will dread to fall. Dr Owen, I think it is, somewhere says that every sin has, in the nature of it, apostacy. O that has shaken me sometimes. Every sin you do, that I do, has in it the very nature of apostacy, because every sin is falling from God. Think of it. Do you think of it? Do you know it? Do you feel it? Do you confess it? Every sin. This is but a little thing. Ah, it may be very little to you at the present, but you do not know what it may be to you later. As the letting out of water is dangerous, because who can bound the issue of it, so the indulgence of sin. I have proved it in my own bitter, inward experience, who can bound the issues of it. Say you, then I am in constant danger. Yes, and if you feel that, that will be a great help to you in this regard, it will send you to your knees. Keep me from falling. "Preserve my soul for I am holy". "Hear my prayer O Lord". "Leave me not neither forsake me, O God of my salvation". So you will find that when you fear you are more safe than when you have no fear. Said good Bunyan

He that is down need fear no fall
He that is low, no pride
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide

The Lord keep us from falling inwardly. Outward falls are the result, generally speaking, of an inward fall, because if your conscience gets hardened you will be less careful in your steps, but when your conscience is tender you are afraid of falling. When your conscience is hardened then you will be more or less indifferent to your steps. You may say yes to something which, if you had been tender, you would not have said. You may consent to something which, if you had been tender, you would not have consented. Solemn is Solomon's word - "Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life". I cannot, says one. "Now unto Him that is able to keep you", able to give your conscience such a tenderness that you fear the approach of sin. "Able to keep you from falling".

Able to do more than you can ask or think. That will go beyond prayer sometimes. Prayer sometimes is confined to present circumstances. You have a trouble and your prayer is perhaps two-fold in respect of that trouble. First, that God would sanctify it to

you, and then, in His time, deliver you out of it. This poor man cried and the Lord heard him and saved him from his fears. This poor man cried and the Lord heard him and delivered him out of all his troubles. You will get both of them, but while that would be a limit, so to speak, to the asking, there is yet a larger asking when you feel your need of divine teaching, of the operations of the Holy Ghost. When you realise that, left to yourself, you turn away from God, and your prayer is "Hold me fast, and keep me near Thee, for Thou knowest I'm but a worm". Sometimes prayer is enlarged and you go forth believing, in a measure, in the greatness of grace. The greatness of grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ, the wonders of His love, the infinite merit of His death. And you believe that no sin you have committed, and no sin that you can commit, being a child of God, can be more than His blood. Ah, I have been glad of that in my convictions of my sins and the deep sorrow I have felt. Night after night this has been a business with me even up to now, how I have sinned. You may understand me when I say this makes a difficulty to ask. What can these sins be forgiven? Can all my provocations of a good God be passed over? Can my innumerable transgressions be blotted out? The unbelief of your heart may stand up and say "No". God comes in - able to do it. And He says there is a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, for all manner of uncleanness and separation from God. And the word of invitation may drop upon your spirit - "Come boldly unto the throne of grace", until you find yourself encouraged and say

Can blood such horrid crimes atone

Yes, faith says

Yes, blood so rich as Thine.

You say, I cannot reach that. God can lift you up to it and make you understand the honour He has put on faith in the great office He has assigned to it in the matter of experimental salvation. O what a God we have to deal with. Able to do this.

And more than we can think, beyond all that. Just look at it. Able to ask or think. You look at your prayers and say, well they have

been very limited and I have often limited the Holy One of Israel. You say, instead of shooting six arrows, I only shot three, Instead of stamping six times on the floor I only stamped three times. I have been limited and have limited the Holy One of Israel. Yes, but then sometimes the Holy Ghost comes, raises your thoughts, and you see an infinitude of love, an infinitude of mercy, and you see that with the Lord there is mercy that He may be feared and with Him is forgiveness. You see that Christ has power to forgive sins, and O the thought helps you greatly. The thought comes in and it is a key to open every door and gate in doubting castle and you use the key and come out of the castle and are at large and you see what a great God you have had to do with, what a blessed Jesus you have had to do with, and what a good Spirit has dealt with you.

Able. The Lord knows how unable we are. O how unable we are, unable to think one thought aright, one holy thought. But here is the Lord Jesus, God in Him, the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and here is the Father in Him. Able. Therefore, poor, weak child of God, venture on His ability, venture on His immutability, venture on His oath and promise. These are engaged to help and to save the people of God.

But there is a rule to this, happily not your rule, not my rule - "According to the power that worketh in us". We are to judge of God by His working in us. Then, one may say, I cannot judge much. O, but the Lord has something to do with you if you are a believer. What is it that lifts up faith? What was it in David that said to his soul "Why art thou cast down O my soul and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God". What was it? The power that brought him was not his courage, it was not his wisdom. He was cast down; he was a poor, dejected, desponding soul at that moment, but there must have been dropped into his heart something from heaven, a power working in him, so that he turns upon himself, so to speak, and says, why this despondency, why this dismay? Has God forsaken thee? Faith says, No, He has chastened me and I have been as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. But now, seeing God, and feeling a power in my soul, I smite upon my thigh and I repent. This is the power of God. What makes you submit to Him when the cross is heavy and contrary to nature? What enables you to change your mind with respect to a cross which you said

you would not take up, and ask the Lord to give you grace to take it up? I remember telling the Lord I would not do a thing He told me to do. Do not you follow that bad example. I told Him I would not do it. I dared, in my wickedness, to say to Him it was too bad of Him to tell me to do it, and I never would do it - Ah that day I shall never forget - but there was a power came toward evening, a power came on my soul, and I ran into a corner and said "Lord, wilt Thou allow me to do it? Wilt Thou give me grace to do it?" Now you may sometimes judge that God is on your side by the change that comes, by the power that He conveys to your soul. Of a rebel, here is a subject, submissive, submitting himself unreservedly to his Lord and Saviour. O blessed power. Sometimes the power comes in regard to the Word, a word dropped into your mind, your heart, and it works in you. You might say it did not come with any remarkable power, but I found it in my heart spreading an influence. It spread an influence over my whole soul, influencing my thoughts and quickening my desires and making me run to the Lord. "According to the power that worketh in us". If you have this power, do not deny it. It will carry you heavenward. It will fix your thoughts on God. It will make Him first and last, the Alpha and Omega.

"Unto Him be glory". In the beginning of this epistle the apostle says "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". That was giving glory to Him. When God blesses a sinner, He gives the sinner something. When a sinner blesses God, it is heaping praises and honour on Him, crowning Him. "Unto Him be glory in the church". We may have been so occupied with our own cases as very seldom to have thought about the church, but that is not Christ's mind. His heart is on her. She is His bride, His wife. He is jealous of her. He is jealous of every little separate church, each one united to the other in Himself. A denomination may be held together by rules and association letters without any real union in God in Christ. But the real church is bound by bands and joints, each one fitly joined and knit by the power of the Holy Ghost. That church is precious to Him. In the church is His glory. Sometimes, when you have got a blessing, you say, now I will shut myself up. I will enjoy it alone. I will go into my room and I will praise Him. I will kneel down and thank Him. Well, that is good. That is according to Dr Owen, who says, Jesus Christ is most glorified in secret. So do not refrain from that, but

remember there is a church, yes a church visible, organised by grace - knit together by grace is each member to the other - and in this church, when the Lord leads you, you are to join yourself and praise Him there for grace, rich grace, great grace, reigning grace, sovereign grace, surprising grace sometimes. "In the church by Christ Jesus", that blessed Person, the Head of the church, the life of the church, the strength of the church and her righteousness. May we value, according to the Scripture, the church of God and seek to glorify Him there. "Unto Him be glory". How? By your profession of the Name of Jesus Christ. How? By holding fast the profession of your faith. How? By giving cups of cold water, by visiting the sick, by visiting Christ in prison. Is He glorified in these things? According to the Scripture He is, and O think of the esteem He holds that in, as we read this morning in the 25 Matthew. You came to Me when I was sick. You came to Me in My disciple who was sick. You gave Me food when I was hungry because you helped a poor, hungry disciple of Mine. And all this is glory in the church and it is by Christ Jesus, in whom you will find all riches unsearchable, all grace infinite, all merit infinite all righteousness infinite. "World without end". So the glory of a little visible church only continues for a time but that visible church is translated into the blessed presence of God where the church, that on earth was invisible in a sense but visible also to the glory of God, shall be for ever and ever, world without end. Well, my brethren, do you hope to be there where there is no change? Sweet is the hope, and blessed is the Man, the God-Man Jesus Christ, the ground of that hope, the life of that hope, the strength of that hope, and the vigour and overcoming of the hope, all in Him, in Him alone. Now may the Lord bless us. Do not forget one thing I have often said to you, we are as much a people when in our homes and scattered about this town and the neighbourhood as we are when we are gathered together here. The union does not begin with the service and end with the service. If God has made union it abides. May we never forget this. May the Lord be with us.

AMEN.