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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 31 May 1933

EPHESIANS 4 v 9 and 10

"Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things"

This is a singularly blessed Scripture. The Apostle was inspired to write this as perhaps one of the most profound parts of Holy Scripture; the amazing doctrines of sovereign grace, the origin, the divine origin of them, their connections, the upholding of them, and in them of the whole church of God, and the gathering up of all things into Christ, the Head of the body, His church. Having, at the close of the third chapter, ascribed praise, and glory to God, who is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us", he says: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord" - the prisoner for the Lord's sake, the prisoner because of his boldness in preaching the gospel of Christ; that gospel which was the exclusive, inclusive doctrine that he was determined to preach, having nothing to do with any other matters, not for inability, but by grace - "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord beseech you" - to whom the word has come; you who, hearing it, have believed, and after you believed have received the Spirit of Adoption and the sealing of the Spirit - "that ye walk worthy". Not carelessly; indifference to the glory of God in the saints is a sin. I beseech you, earnestly pray, that you may walk according to the character of grace; according to the power that has come upon you, according to God's dealings with your souls, according to His fear in your hearts, and consciences. "Walk" - you are called with a holy calling - "Walk worthy of the vocation" - the work of the Spirit in quickening, and calling you - "wherewith ye are called". And in this manner - "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." Not much of it today. Lowliness is a stranger to a good many who profess to fear

God. Meekness - teachableness, for meekness is teachableness - you would go a long way to find it today. "Longsuffering, forbearing one another in love". When inconsistencies are manifested, tempers show themselves, and improprieties, bear one another, and do it in love. Do not walk according to your passions, and even to just anger, for there is an anger that is just, but forbear. And if a brother walks improperly, shows a haughty spirit, and walks in a worldly spirit, bear with him, and, as you are enabled, speak kindly, faithfully, to him, but do it with humility. You are no better than he is. If you are kept from the same sins, you are kept by the power of God, and therefore boast not. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit". Not to make it, that you cannot, but if God has made it, if He has joined two of you together, mind how you treat that union. Endeavour to keep it; to keep the unity, not of the flesh, but of "the Spirit in the bond of peace." The opposite of quarrelling. "There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling". The hope of your calling is reaching heaven. Ye are called in that. Now "Endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace", remembering that the church is not composed of parties, but of one body. Remember that. Any church that is composed of parties is sure to come to the dust sooner or later. "One Lord" - one Lord over all, one Lord in the saints of the Most High God. "One faith", excluding all other things. "One faith" here is not the grace of faith; that is in all the saints in different measures; this is the doctrine of faith which is but one, and you cannot make error a part of it. Any error of doctrine is contrary to this "one faith". Hold it fast, as far as God has taught you dear friends; taught you the doctrine of the essential Names in the Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and taught you that all the doctrines of Holy Scripture come from this blessed Lord, and comprise this "one faith". "One baptism" which Huntington had equal with Philpot; which the Puritans had who did not practise baptism by immersion. "One baptism". Baptism by immersion in the Name of the Trinity is Scriptural, but this "one baptism", joined, as it is, to the Lord, and to the "one faith", is the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Do not think, therefore, that baptism in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by immersion is not necessary. It is necessary, not to salvation, but to obedience. If God has given you, any of you, living faith, and distinct manifestations, declare it in the congregation. "One God and Father

of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" This is the Person of the Father. Christ and the Spirit are mentioned earlier. Now he says - "One God and Father" and He is above all. Christ is His servant in the Covenant, and the Holy Ghost was given to Christ without measure in that Covenant. And God, here, is the Person of the Father, who is above all. And when the Mediatorial kingdom of Christ is completed, then, it is written by the Apostle to the Corinthians, He will deliver up the kingdom to His Father. There will be a ceasing of the Mediatorial work of Christ. And this One God and Father, with the Son in the midst of the throne, and the Holy Spirit, the seven lamps of fire before the throne, will be glorified, but here it is this good God and Father who "is through all" - all His providences, all His teachings, all His patience, through all the saints - "and in you all". "I will" - says God by the Apostle Paul - "I will receive you and ye shall be My sons and daughters". I will walk in you, and I will walk with you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. But all have not attained to this in the same measure. There are different measures of knowledge of God, of understanding, and of experience. "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ". That is to say, what grace Christ has given you is a certain measure, and another may have a certain measure, either greater, or lesser. "Unto every one", that is to say, every saint - the church at Ephesus, the church of Galatia, the church of God in Thessalonica, and every saint today. God in Christ reconciled the world unto Himself, and Christ, to whom grace was given before the foundation of the world, gives that grace out in different measures, and He does it because He has ascended up on high. He led captivity captive. Sin, death, devil, principalities, rulers of the darkness of this world, God - Jesus Christ, who is a Man of war - led them captive, conquered them, and, as a Divine warrior, when He had done the work His Father gave Him to do, He led all these enemies captive. Led captivity, which means captives, led them all as captive, and then, gave gifts unto men. And if any of us have received gifts from Christ they have come from Him as exalted at the right-hand of God. The text is a parenthesis - "Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things". You cannot, in a sense, separate the coming of Christ from His ascension; coming from

His Father, and going again to His Father. Coming as a servant of His Father in the Covenant; the gift of His Father to the church; the gift of grace to Him from the foundation of the world; and in the fulfilment of that Covenant in part, He came. "Lo, I come: in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will O My God".

The descent of the Son of God to become incarnate is a cardinal doctrine. No man, mere man, sinful, could enter heaven apart from an interest in this descent of Christ from heaven. Therefore it is of infinite importance to us to see if God has given us an interest in the descent of Christ. In speaking of this solemn and vital and infinitely important truth, I would notice, first, the love that sent Him. The much abused text in John, 3rd chapter, - "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" - is all eternal truth, a vital truth. He did love the world -and He does love the world - so as to send His Son into the world, and this sending, Christ Himself speaks of by Isaiah. He says - "Now the Lord God and His Spirit hath sent Me." And the Father, by the same Prophet says - "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth." This is the Father's word concerning His equal, eternal Son. In the Covenant He was the servant of the Father. The eyes of a servant look to the hand of his master, and Christ had regard to the commandment of His Father. He said it is My delight to do Thy will, and that will was that His Son should take the seed of Abraham into union with His divine Person. It was His will that His Son incarnate should descend into the lower parts of the earth, so low as that He, though Lord of all, had not of His own a place whereon to lay His head; so low, that it is written of Him by the Apostle Paul - "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor". And this includes, I judge, the whole of His humiliation. That is to say, the love of God sent Him to be the substitute of sinners. The substitution of Christ for you poor, guilty, creature; fearing, mourning, groaning, sighing under sin - I say, the substitution of Christ for you means this, that He took precisely your place, your debts, your guilt, your liability to death, and the curse due to you as a breaker of God's holy law. That was what the love of God sent Christ to do, to be a surety.

He sent Him to fulfil the law, and the Lord said - "Think not that I am come to destroy the law. I am come to fulfil the law." He magnified it and made it honourable. He took the dying traitor's place. He magnified the law that the wicked traitors could not magnify, and had no wish to magnify, for no one wishes to do right, that is, to please God, today, that is, after the flesh. And further, the love of God spared not His Own Son from the curse. If we have felt the law of God in our consciences - and some of us have felt it there; we have just had, O, only hardly to be named, a sense of what the curse means - if we have seen sin in the light in which God sees it; we have seen, and felt, what we could scarcely bear. But if such a load falls to one poor, elected sinner, what must all the sins of all the election of grace have been, as they were laid on Christ; made His by imputation? And to all those sins, the curse was due. It is so solemn when you enter into it experimentally, that it is almost beyond speaking about. "Made a curse". "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree". And the curse was not the external trouble of the cross, the anguish of His body, when every vein, and pore, and nerve, and every part of His sacred body was suffering exquisitely, but it was the curse poured like fire into His bones, when the anger of God justly fell on Him; when the hiding of His Father's face justly became part of His sufferings; when the desertion of His Father became His chief anguish, for He had lived in the presence of His Father eternally, and now, even for a short time, to miss that presence, and instead of it, desertion; to miss that smile, and instead of it have a curse. And all this, as I judge, is included in Christ's descending into the lower parts of the earth. One step more, He was buried. He could not escape the indignity of the grave. He was buried, and the Holy Ghost has named this as part of the gospel, when the Apostle in the Corinthians says - "I delivered unto you that which I received of the Lord, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scripture, and that He was buried, and the third day was raised again, according to the Scripture." He was buried; the indignity of the grave. The grave was dug by sin, but, blessed be God, that sacred Person knew no corruption. If corruption had laid its hand on that body, it would have affected the church, from the beginning to the end. Christ was necessarily pure, had no corruption. He had no sin, He did no sin; He was entirely, and absolutely, and everlastingly free from sin, and therefore free from all corruption. His death was

voluntary. His death was vicarious. And when He had made an end of sin, nothing remained to be done but His burial as an acknowledgement that His people deserve to die, and be buried. But He said - "O grave I will be thy destruction." When you think about His ascension, God give you grace to remember that you cannot separate it from His descending. He "ascended up far above all heavens." "The heaven of heavens cannot contain Him". He "ascended up far above all heavens". His resurrection was in between His death and His ascension into heaven. His resurrection was the attestation of the perfection of His sacrifice; that it answered all the things designed, and desired, and necessary; that He left nothing undone, left not one penny to be paid, not one act of obedience under the law to be done by the church. He completely redeemed her, and she became free when in one day Christ removed the sin of the land. And she was born in one day when He rose from the dead. "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise". And when He had risen from the dead, then after that He showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs. That very same numerical body that was hanged by the Jews on the cross, and pierced by the Roman soldiers, that very same body was raised from the dead. There is more importance in this than may appear at the first glance. I have thought sometimes I would like to have been one of those "above 500 brethren at once" who saw Him. He appointed the meeting on the mountain. He had been seen by His disciples. They saw Him, He came and spoke to them, and when they were afraid of Him, thinking Him to be a Spirit, He told them to handle Him. And to prove that He was flesh and body, He ate before them the food which, at His request, they gave to Him. Thomas was convinced - Thomas, a reasoner; Thomas, claiming proofs of anything submitted to him - Thomas was convinced. At a Communion in Scotland one minister at one of the Tables prayed that there might be no unbelieving Thomas's present. I think it was good, blessed, Guthrie, who followed this minister, at another Table, and he prayed that there might be unbelieving Thomas's there, that the Lord might be there to convince and bless them. If any of you should be, at the Lord's Table, like unbelieving Thomas, may the Lord give you the proof that He gave to Thomas, not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. And the day came when Jesus led out His disciples as far as to Bethany, and while He blessed them He was received into heaven. He ascended far above all heavens. And what did He do, and what is He doing still?

"He gave gifts unto men". Men must be beggars, and very poor, to receive gifts gladly. You must be poor if you are gladly to receive a gift from Christ. Christ, mercifully, and beautifully says - "Blessed are the poor in spirit". Christ has blessings for the poor. He has them, they are given to Him in the Covenant. The Apostle tells us in His letter to Timothy that we are saved, "not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

Let us look, as enabled, for a few minutes at some of these gifts. In respect of the church, we are told what they were. "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive: But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: 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." What a mercy it is that God gave, and still gives, pastors, and teachers. The extraordinary gifts bestowed on the Apostles ceased with their life, their ministry. The church will always have need of pastors, and teachers, and no church should consider itself a perfect church on earth - I mean in respect of organisation - that has no pastor. It is according to holy Scripture that pastors are given to churches, and from the letters to the churches, Galatia, Ephesus, and so on, there were pastors, bishops, elders, all meaning the same mercy, for God uses pastors, and teachers, these now seeming among us to be blended into one, if they exist at all. But when you come to a personal experience, which I would handle a little by divine help now, you come to gifts given to your own souls. First of all, the gift of the Holy Ghost. You must, if you go to heaven, be born of the Spirit. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" and you cannot make anything better of it. A spark may fly out of the chimney, and it

may be seen for a minute, but it will never become a star. Religious flesh may rise a great height, but it will never be Christian. A man can only be a Christian by receiving the Spirit of Christ, and the washing of regeneration. That washing, that eternal life imparted, makes a sinner receiving it one Spirit with the Lord. He becomes in that instant a part of the body of Christ. He is possessed of what is called "the divine nature". That is the gift of eternal life from the fountain of life, the Lord Jesus Christ. This divine nature manifests itself in the possessor of it, even as the old man manifests himself. The old man manifests himself in wicked designs, devising wickedness on his bed, thinking wickedness, thinking God to be just like himself. O, the trouble, the grief, the pain, the shame to every child of God who is born again, from the flesh. Now this new nature, called the new heart, a heart to fear God, a heart circumcised to fear Him, is honest, is hungry; it pants for its author and its end. You can never satisfy it with the world. There is nothing in this world of this divine nature, and therefore there is nothing in this world that can satisfy a new born soul. Coming from heaven, it rises to heaven in its desires. "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee O God". How many of you can honestly say that? Can say sometimes in the night, O Lord do come to me. Sometimes, when you are working in the day, O Lord bless my soul. Grant to me to eat of the bread of life which will keep a man from death. The panting of the soul leads it to the throne of grace, leads it to the Scriptures. The panting of a soul born of God rises as high as God. You will never be satisfied, you who are born of God, until you awake in His likeness. You get many a fall, many a slip, bent to backsliding. O what trouble God's people have from the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, but nothing can set a bound to a new born soul. This world is not big enough for it, not good enough for it. Berridge, in his own way, says

The portion of a beast
Will not content my heart
The God of Spirits only can
Fill up the vast desires of man

Hence, "the desire of the righteous is only good," but that desire is often very low as to the feeling, and deferred a great while in many

cases. That is one gift, the gift of the Holy Ghost in the new birth.

Then His teachings, His rebukes, His checks in the conscience; His revealing more and more of the depths of iniquity in a desperately wicked heart. I thought nearly 70 years ago that I knew something about sin, and I did, but O, if anyone had said to me, you will be the wicked man that you now do not think; you will have such and such thoughts, and do such and such things, and say such and such words; I should have been very likely to say this - "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" But now one has to say that it has been so. But then there is this to be said, the increase of knowledge which makes you know what an increase of sorrow is, will lead you to an increase of joy and peace when Christ comes and fills the empty places in your hearts. He does come. Some of you may say, I have not seen Him for a long time. If that be so, how are you affected by it? Have you grown sleepy? Are you somewhat comfortable in your profession? Do you feel as if you can say, Well, He has blessed me, and I am safe? That is not a good place to be in. I remember many years ago preaching in old Gower Street chapel about backsliding, and one of the members came to me and said what a good time she had had; how I had described her heart. Well, but, I said, it is not a good place. You are not in a good place if you are where I have been speaking about. You are not in a good place if you are saying, O, but I have got that, and it is alright. The hungry soul says, Lord, I want another feast. I want the bread of life again. I want fresh tokens. I want new touches. I want Thy presence with me. O mercifully renew the spirit of my mind.

The work of the Holy Ghost is a work of revelation. Take this third point. It is a work of revelation. Sometimes He will give you a view of Christ, a new, a clearer view of Christ. O, how you love Him. You wont be able to be quiet and say, this is enough. You will say, Lord, let me have Thy presence continually. You will want to walk in that Scripture - "Abide in Me, and I in you". It is wonderful to get a sight of Christ. I do not mean as you read the Bible, but I mean the Holy Ghost revealing Him, and doing what Christ promised He should do in His disciples - glorify Him. Speaking of that Spirit, He said - "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it

unto you". Well, that is wonderful to get a sight of the God-Man, Jesus; of the Son of God incarnate. A sight of Him as a substitute for you, as having borne your curse on the tree, as being in heaven, ascended now on high, ever living to intercede for you. To get such a sight of Him is a wonderful blessing. He gave gifts unto men. He gives the Spirit as the Spirit of revelation in the knowledge of Christ. I do not know very much about this, hardly enough to name it, but would say this - I have had Him revealed, not once only, and what a sight. O what a humbling, heart-breaking sight a revealed Christ is. When He comes and the little arms of your faith open and He permits you to embrace Him, and He loves you, really makes love known to you, and you enter into Rutherford's word if you meet it - I did not love Him, but He would love me, and I could not refuse to be loved. You will enter into it whenever you get the revelation of Christ in your soul by the Holy Ghost. It is not thinking about Him - it is good to think about Him - but this particular thing is not just that. It is Christ opened, shown, manifested in some particular, to your soul, that you see Him. Faith may embrace Him, love may fear Him, honour Him, and believe everything that is good about Him, and would not believe an ill word of Him. You would resent any ill word any devil might whisper, any man might utter, in your ears. O, He is so lovely, so glorious, so wonderful; immense as God, incapable of extension, either in His love or purposes or Person. O, that God would give us this gift. The Apostle prayed in this epistle, that the Ephesians might receive it, that they might have the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, and in what is the hope of His calling and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead. (Ephesians 1 v 17/20). That same power is in the soul in measure that raised up Christ from the dead and set Him "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all."

He gives the gift of forgiveness. Forgiveness, not once only. "Many offences" as in that wonderful epistle to the Romans.

Condemnation was by one offence by one man. Justification is of many offences, by one man. Adam brought the death; Jesus gives the forgiveness. "Many offences" Have you ever been glad of that word? I have. "Many offences". So that as sin abounds unto death, so grace abounds, and much more abounds.

He gives the gift of righteousness. As I have said many times to you, you must be righteous if you are going to heaven. You must be righteous before you get there, and that is by imputation. "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." You must have a righteousness in which God sees no flaw. Pure and bright as the light; broad in its perfections, broad as the law. That is the gift. Jesus is this righteousness. Jesus bestows it upon us. "This is the name whereby He shall be called THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

He gives the gift of humility, of a tender conscience, of the Spirit of grace and supplications. He gives the gift of gracious answers to prayer. He gives the gift also of perseverance to the end. "Hold Thou me up" is the prayer of a weak saint, and the answer is - "The Lord keepeth the feet of His saints. None of their steps shall slide." He gives the gift. Devil, sin, death, enemies, modernists, Papists, and all other enemies of God and Christ, these are all the captives of Christ. Not one of them can hurt a child of God. Not one of them can destroy him, because he is a member of the body of Christ in particular.

Well, He gives the gift of heaven. O, I want to get there. Do not you? Cannot some of you say, the very thought, the sweet hope in your heart, that one day you will drop this poor body of your humiliation, vile body, and your ransomed, holy soul, will enter into the joy of your Lord is very attractive? Does not it move you sometimes. Owen says, when favoured, a child of God finds it difficult to repress the wish to go quickly to heaven. Well, it is wonderful to have a hope of it. The devil says you will never get there, but then he is a liar, the father of lies. Says the sinner, I am a poor leper. Lepers must go to the Priest, they may not go to anyone else, but they must go to the Priest and we see in the life of Christ that lepers did go to

Him, and He said, "I will, be thou clean". He can cleanse lepers and fit them for heaven, for that is what I want to aim at at this moment. Thieves, murderers, adulterers, liars, and all sorts of sinners, washed in the blood of Christ, justified in His righteousness, shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. "And such were some of you" What a word, what a word. "And such were some of you". So poor, guilty creature, if your eyes are looking into your wicked heart, you have got plenty of trouble. You need have no outward trouble for the moment, when you are looking at yourself you have plenty of trouble, but when the Holy Ghost comes and turns your eye another way, to Jesus and His blood, then hope rises, and when application comes you say - "I'm clean, just God, I'm clean."

Well, I am surprised to see that I have done what is not at all common nowadays with me; I have extended the time, have gone beyond my usual time, but I do not apologise for it. May the Lord's blessing rest upon it, and be with each gracious soul, and bless the dead with life if it please Him.

AMEN.