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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 26 November 1922

Ezekiel 34 v 16

I will seek that which was lost and bring again
that which was driven away, and will bind up that
which was broken and will strengthen that which was
sick, but I will destroy the fat and the strong, I will
feed them with judgment

In this remarkable book are some of the strong consolations which God, by two immutable things, gives to His people. Some of these blessed things are in this chapter. Just previously the Lord had spoken very severely and solemnly against Mount Seir and Egypt. Here, in this chapter, He speaks against, and reproveth sharply, the false shepherds, the hirelings, those who have only themselves and their own interests in their work. And these entirely neglect the flock; they eat the fat, they drink the sweet, they clothe themselves with the wool, but the flock, wounded, driven, broken, sick and lost, they care nothing for; leave them to themselves. The Lord notices this. He notices all sin. Religious sins are worse than all others to Him and bring the most terrible judgments upon those who commit them. May we be kept from religious sins. The Lord looks on these false shepherds and recounts to them their shortcomings and their misdoings. They were guilty of negative things, of neglects. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost. What a catalogue of sins. What a solemn and awful thing it is to profess to be a shepherd and to neglect the flock in this way, never to look on the diseased and troubled ones who are dear to God. And the time will come when God will reprove them for their neglect. But also He sets before them their positive sins. Woe be to the shepherds which do feed themselves. Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed, but ye feed not the flock. What an awful thing it is to kill poor souls with that you give them for food

and perhaps there never was a day when this solemn Scripture was more fulfilled, when men, professing to be shepherds, to whom the name of shepherd is given, are guilty of offering, giving poison for food and only killing all who receive it. The doctrines of devils which now fill the land, kill all who receive them, and the distressed condition of the flock draws out the Lord's notice and sympathy and pity. He sees them wandering. My sheep are scattered because there is no shepherd. My sheep wandered through all the mountains and upon every high hill. Yea, My flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth and none did search or seek after them. May the Lord forbid that these sins of false shepherds should, any of them, be charged on me, and may not you, as a little flock, be found wandering, diseased and sick and broken and lost. It will be very solemn if such a Scripture should have any fulfilment, either in myself, or in any of you. Mercifully I am kept as far as I know myself and my judgment of things, from bringing poison to you and offering you diseased things. I am preserved from that. Now may the Lord give me and you grace to look at this, His blessed word of promise, for He not only charges false shepherds with their misdoings and their neglects, not only does He speak of the condition, the miserable and troubled and ruined and lost condition of His flock, but here He promises to do something. "I will seek that which was lost". I will do My covenant office; I will perform My purpose. "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken and will strengthen that which was sick." Here are mighty works promised by the Lord Himself.

First of all "I will seek that which was lost". To be lost in the Scripture sense is, in the first place, to be ruined in sin and by sin. "The Son of Man came to save that which was lost". That is the first in the Scripture sense. A lost person is a law breaker, one guilty of offences done against the law and the God of the law. One who has defiled himself, plunged himself into guilt and death and deserves nothing but everlasting banishment from the presence and glory of the Lord. I have such people before me and I am one myself. By nature we are lost. By sin we are lost. By law we are lost. What a work it is of the Holy Spirit to teach any person that. Blessed is the man who knows what the meaning of this word "lost" is. In any measure to know it is a mercy. "Daily to feel thyself undone" is a mercy.

To be lost also in the Scripture use of the word, is to be out of the way as to all your experience or feelings. When Christ told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them and said - "Whither I go, ye know, and the way ye know", one of them said to Him, "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest and how can we know the way". We are lost people, lost in our ignorance, do not know the way to go. Now this is a use of the word which applies to all the Lord's people from time to time. Take these two senses of the word, let us enlarge a little upon them. First, lost in and by sin. It is a very solemn position for us to be in, a very awful position for us to be in, to be just sinners. Without excuse, to be sinners; without hope in self, to be sinners; without help in self, to be sinners. How many of us have ever realised it, ever felt that we were in God's sight in such a condition as that? If no way of escape is found for us, it is inevitable that He should punish us, and punish us with everlasting banishment and punishment. It is very solemn. Eternity will soon take us up; time will lose us. We shall change worlds very soon. Look then at this great question. Lost. How many of you feel it, experience it, realise it in your own hearts; look upon God as a Judge of yourselves as culprits; look upon His law as inexorable, unchangeable, not to be revoked, and upon yourselves as having broken it, and therefore as being under its curse. O sinner, it is bad to be lost, and it is, if I may so speak, doubly bad to be ignorant of your lost state. Lost in sin, lost by sin.

Now in several particular ways, the Lord fulfils this word - "I will seek that which was lost". Here, if I may be enabled to express it, is a full gospel. A good, gracious God, eternally loving His flock, eternally holding His flock to His bosom, having folded them in the covenant. O to be loved of God, to be loved out of sin into holiness, out of guilt into justification, out of pollution into holiness. Is not this wonderful? He knew from eternity this ruin and made provision for it, hence we have the gospel of the grace of God called the glorious gospel of Christ. The gospel of Christ because it is a gospel full of Him, expressing Him, describing Him, describing Him in His descent. He that ascended is the same also that descended. It is the same Person. He that is now in heaven came from heaven and He came from heaven for this great purpose of bearing the iniquity of His people. He sought His people. "The Son of Man is come to save

that which was lost". O sinner, if you are interested in this descent of Christ into the lower parts of the earth, then you one day will ascend up into heaven. He came into the place where His lost sheep were. His flock was in ruin and He came into that ruin. His flock was in guilt; He came under that guilt. His flock was under the curse; He came under the curse. All this is in redemption. Yes, sinner, all of it is in redemption. If it is of no interest to you, if you have no interest in it, it is a woeful case that you are in. But if you are living you have got an interest in it. O it is interesting to you. You will never tire of hearing of this, this great redemption that is in Christ Jesus. And your trouble will be that you often hear it and do not hear it profitably, that the Lord does not speak comfortably to you about it, but your desire will be to hear Him say "I am thy salvation". Christ then went into death, He poured out His soul unto death. When He was numbered with the transgressors that is what He did. He poured out His soul unto death and was numbered with these poor transgressing sinners. What a mercy it is for us if Christ is the Good Shepherd who came and gave His life for us. "I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep".

In the third place the Holy Ghost seeks these lost sheep. He seeks them when He goes to where they are and they are where the Scripture speaks of them, namely in graves. O My people I will open your graves. I will bring you up out of your graves. This is the work of regeneration. This is called in this blessed prophecy, sprinkling the people with clean water, giving them the Holy Ghost. This is the great work of the blessed Spirit to quicken a dead sinner and bring him to a sense of being lost.

Now this brings us to the great question with respect to ourselves, whether we know and feel that we are lost. It may be that some of you, being born so to speak in and under the truth, have grown up so to believe it and so to take up certain expressions that living people use, as that you may even think that you feel lost, whereas it is not so. You are not lost before God in secret, are you? You are not lost in your feelings day by day, are you? You are not drenched in a sense of sin, are you? But it is a mercy when the Holy Ghost comes and brings one to that condition, brings him to say, O I am leprous, I am undone.

Now that blessed Spirit comes to this poor sinner to lead him into another experience, namely a state of grace, an experience of redemption. This is being sought out. False shepherds drove these poor sheep; the Good Shepherd sends His Spirit to fetch these poor sheep to the fold. They are folded by God in eternity; they were folded by Christ when He bought them; they are folded by the Spirit when He brings them to Christ. The fold may be said to be the covenant. They are inside that. Yea, the very cross is a fold to them. Nothing keeps them like the cross, nothing shelters them like the cross, nothing protects them like the cross. Yea, they are fastened unto God in and by the cross. So Christ brings His people, His sheep to Himself. Redemption is the sweetest sound that a lost person can hear. Forgiveness is a joyful sound to a malefactor. And Christ's folding grace whereby He gathers a sinner and carries him in His bosom into the fold is wonderful grace, sweet grace, efficacious grace, powerful grace, and comforting grace. Christ brings His people. He does not helplessly call them; He goes with them. As a shepherd is among his sheep in the day when they are scattered that he may know them, that they may pass under his hand and be counted by him, so the Lord is among His poor scattered sheep and He brings them to this heavenly fold. They are at home then, yes they are at home. They feed in a large pasture, there is plenty of room in Christ and sufficient pasture in Christ. What the rich pasture is to a flock of sheep, so is the atonement to the flock of Christ, so is His righteousness, so is His work of redemption, so is His sanctifying grace. They are brought to Himself. "I will seek that which was lost". The Spirit seals redemption on the heart sooner or later. Now I may be speaking to some who feel lost and who have not, as yet, to their comfort, been sought by this Good Shepherd. Well, He knows where you are; that is one great comfort to a child of God when it is opened up to Him, that this heavenly Shepherd can never miss seeing one of His lost sheep. His eye runneth to and fro throughout the whole earth. His eye seeth every precious thing and there is nothing more precious to Him than His sheep. When they are at the ends of the earth, wherever they may be, in dark places, in pits, fallen, torn and cast, this wondrous Shepherd has an eye, piercing eye, to see them and He will go to them. I will seek out My sheep, I will search them in the day when they are scattered abroad. They wander on the dark mountains

of ignorance and folly, but He goes after them. They are driven by dogs, but He rules the dogs and takes care of the sheep. The devil walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, but this Good Shepherd takes care of them. I will seek them; I will bring them again and they shall feed in a good pasture.

Now take the second sense which we mentioned just now of being lost, that is not knowing the way to take. Ignorant, we know not the way. How can we know the way? Do you feel ignorant? By constant reading the Scriptures, by hearing preaching, you may well be in the letter of the gospel. You may say I know there is no way but Christ. I know there is no reconciliation but in Him. You may say all that, but did you ever take one single step under the guidance of Him who seeks His sheep in the cloudy and dark day? Did you ever get one little minute in your experience in the fold or did you ever see by faith, not in notion but by faith, that living way to the Father? That will be a greater test to you than at this moment you may understand or realise. O beware of notions and resting in them. To walk by faith under the guidance of the eternal Spirit, to have your faith turned towards redemption and the Redeemer, toward heaven and see the way to heaven, is a most wonderful mercy and not common. How many there are who, seeing see not; hearing hear not; in whom is fulfilled that solemn word - Go make the heart of this people fat and their ears heavy that seeing they may see not and hearing they may not hear lest they be converted and I should heal them. It is a terrible word; may it not be fulfilled in any of us. Are we ignorant? That was a question in the minds of the Pharisees of old and they said they were never in bondage. They did not need a deliverer, they did not need a teacher. How is it with us? Did we ever receive light from heaven to shine upon the road to show us where to go, show us the throne of God's heavenly grace, show us that glorious high throne which from the beginning has been the place of the sanctuary of the church of Christ? Did we ever see that heavenly fold into which Christ brings His people, surrounding them as a garden is surrounded; surrounding them with all the perfections of Deity, with the promises of God, with the oath of God, so that though death and hell and sin and law and curse and fear and ignorance and all sorts of enemies should rise up against us, not one of them can enter to hurt us finally. I will seek, says the Lord, I will seek that which was lost. Let me say again what I

have often said to you, ignorance is no bar here. O, but I cannot find the way! The gospel plan is not that you should find it. This is the gospel plan. "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, I will lead them in paths that they have not known, I will make crooked things straight before them and rough places plain. These things will I do unto them and not forsake them." That means God coming to you; then you will get to Him. That means God teaching you; then you will understand. Then you will join with the Psalmist in prayer "Give me understanding and I shall live." There are two ways of understanding the gospel. The one is the way of theory, growing up into that kind of knowledge which is acquired, pleased with it, resting in it. The other way is the teaching, the guidance, the mysterious, but blessed, inshining of divine truth which demonstrates to the subjects of it what is, what God has done, what the sinner is, what sin has done for him, who Christ is and what Christ has done for His people. And then they come into a personal experience of it and they say - For me, the Saviour died for me. Then they know. "Now know I that the Lord saveth His anointed". Then they can join with the Apostle John and say "We know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true and we are in Him that is true even in His Son Jesus Christ." Blessed be God for this seeking. He has found some of us, yes He has found some of us.

"And bring again that which was driven away". The same sheep, or person, or flock, spoken of as having been driven. To be driven away in the sense in which the word is used is to be driven away from God and from the inheritance that God has given to His people. David said to Saul - you have driven me away from the inheritance, driven me from Jerusalem, driven me out of Israel. And how shall we know and understand this? If you turn to Isaiah you will have it. "Our iniquities like the wind have carried us away". Yes, O what iniquities some of us have found influencing, driving our poor hearts away from God. Do you enter into it? Driven! Your own heart, a false heart, a wicked heart, like a false, wicked shepherd, driving you away from your centre, from your friend, from your shepherd, from your God, from your hope. It may be done in a minute. One moment you may seem to be in a quiet and not a bad state, and the next moment you may feel driven to the very ends of the earth, far off upon the sea. Sin

has no pity, the devil has no pity. Just simply as permitted they drive, and drive toward death and destruction. I know what I mean too well. It is solemn to be driven. Our iniquities, these boiling things, these iniquitous thoughts, these vile imaginations, these wrong desires, these things that live in us and move in us, these hypocrisies, this malice. O the things we have got in our hearts. Some of you may feel very wicked, but I have got a line in my own sad experience to reach any of you and all of you, the very worst of you. "Iniquities prevail against me" says the Psalmist. They are there. Ah, you may say, I have not been under a false shepherd, I have not lent my ears to false teaching. But you have lent your ears to sin, have not you? You have lent your will to some sin. You have submitted your understanding to some sin. And those things have driven you away and you have looked round perhaps and said, where am I? Where have I got to? I have lost my mooring, I have lost my bearing. Where am I? And conscience says, you are in a wilderness, yes, in a wilderness, and you say I am indeed in a place of death. These false shepherds never did a worse thing to the flock than your own heart has done to you. Driven you away, away from prayer, away from the throne of grace, away from the simplicity of the truth, away from the gospel, away from love, away from comfort, away from peace. They have driven you away, like a leaf, seared, and ready to fall from the tree, caught by the wind and carried away. We do fade away, are carried away. Is this the case with some of you? Well now, look at this. I will bring again that which was driven away. I will bring them again to My footstool. Yes, we get back again. Love draws, divine beauties in Christ attract, the Spirit influences, puts wind into our desires like wind in the sails of the mill, and we are carried back again mercifully, powerfully, comfortably back again to the throne of God's heavenly grace. When men pray, and then cannot pray, and then again do pray, what a comfortable change it is. O when you have had a little time without prayer, perhaps you have been a day or two as idle and inert as the earth bound in frost, then you have been brought to your senses and your cry has been, O Lord save me from this state and the Spirit has wafted your soul in His own gracious power again to the throne of grace, and again you have opened your mouth, again the light has fallen upon your eye, and again some sweet scent of mercy has fallen upon your heart and spirit and you have been brought again, brought to the throne of grace there to pour out your heart, there to

express your sorrow and confess your sin, there to look at the Saviour, to look on His infinite merit, there to hope and to say to yourself, O, I wish I could always pray, I wish my soul might not lose this influence, but that I could go on and press my case and urge my suit and seek the favour of God which is better than life. It is good to be brought back. I wish in a sense that I might never be brought back, that is, I wish I might never get away, but since I do get away, O what a mercy it is to be brought back. If some devil drives you away, you want the angel of the covenant to fetch you back. Trouble may drive you away for a time. The thing that is made, in the long run, a blessing, may at the beginning drive you away. You fret, you rebel, and the rebellious dwell in a dry land. And then the Lord, who has received gifts for men, sends a gift down to you, a gift of renewing grace, a gift of comforting mercy, and you are brought again. "I will bring again that which was driven away". Temptation may drive you away. Some driving fears may come upon your spirit, some influence of the world or some horrible thing in your own heart and you are caught, caught by the wind and just carried like a feather caught by the wind without any resisting power at all. Like an old creature who formerly could resist certain things coming to his body, finds all his power of resistance gone, or nearly gone, you find no power to resist. Then the blessed Lord Jesus Christ comes and draws the soul up to Himself. "I will bring again that which was driven away". You may be driven away from your promises, words given to you, hopes wrought in you, comforts bestowed upon you by the Word of God spoken. You may be driven away from them. They were like an anchorage and the cable seems broken, snapped, and you are now at the mercy of a driving wind and the comfortable harbour in which you were, now you are far from. You hardly can believe it true that ever you were so sweetly and so powerfully moored and kept. So tossed are you now you can hardly believe that God ever took trouble to fix you in His mercy because now you are so far away from Him. Says He "I will bring it again". He can turn the wind into a south wind and mercifully and gently bring you again to that place where you were moored. O, the anchorage is good, and the anchor hold shall be renewed. Blessed be God for His kindness in bringing us again to Himself.

"And will bind up that which was broken". You may be broken in

judgment as Ephraim was and can form no proper judgment of things now, no proper judgment of your feelings, no proper judgment of God's dealings with you. Things look upside down, everything looks like wrath. Cannot judge your religion, cannot judge your state, can judge nothing. An easy professor would not understand this. Some of you may think, well, I cannot believe a child of God who has ever had a good experience can get into such a state. Do you believe Ephraim was ever settled in the land of promise? O, of course. Well, but Ephraim was broken, Ephraim was like a cake unturned. That godly tribe, favoured of God above many, that godly tribe, broken in judgment. We can soon get broken if God permit. You can soon lose your wisdom, you can soon lose your power to form right judgment of things if God allows it. You may take your experience to pieces, if I may speak so, and examine every part of it. Look at your convictions; O how short, how natural they seem, how far from being spiritual. Look at your hope; O how questionable it is. Did the Lord give it me? Look at your comforts; they seem only to have come by your memory exercising itself upon the gospel in the form of it. Look at your standing; if it had been definitely given, how could you have been moved away from it as you are? Look at your hypocrisy; can you judge yourself to be a Christian when such unchristian feelings influence you? Can you judge yourself to be a child of God when you feel much more like a reprobate? A saint, when you feel much more like a devil? You are broken in judgment. Ah and you want binding up and what can bind you up? That which first of all put you right. The gospel, the gospel of God's grace, the love of God again made known in measure, the sweetness of Christ once more expressed into your heart as the juice of the grape is expressed, so this will be binding. It will bind up your spirit, bind up your judgment, renew your experience in you, renew the face of the earth and the dew of heaven coming will fructify every feeling of your heart toward God. "I will bind that which was broken". Some sin has broken you, broken your comfort. God will bind that broken place by renewed pardon. Some temptation has broken your spirit. God will bind that by strengthening you with another promise or repeat some word He has formerly given to you. The devil may have broken you to pieces sometimes when you were trying to seek the Lord. The Lord will bind up that by coming and rebuking the enemy and the avenger. O what ways has our good God of binding broken hearts and broken sinners and broken circumstances, broken wills and broken

love and broken judgment. Christ will do the thing. A sight of Him will do it all! A word from Him will accomplish the whole business. O what a precious Christ He is to come and bind up a broken sinner. The sinner says, why, I gave way to this and yielded to that. Says Christ, I love you, I bought you with My blood. He is a lovely Saviour, a suitable Saviour, a great Saviour, a living Saviour. What creatures cannot do He both can and does in the hearts of His people. Trouble may break you, some sore affliction may come on you to break you to pieces. And what then? The Lord may bind you up and leave the broken, breaking circumstances with you. And the binding in that case will be the bringing of your will into a sweet submission and unison with the will of God. O, then you say, it is all right; this is for the best. It is good for me to be afflicted because the Lord has done it, and I hope it will turn to the furtherance of the gospel in my soul's experience. That is the way God will bind a poor person who is broken by some affliction.

"And will strengthen that which was sick". Strengthen the poor creature who has lost, as it were, all his strength. Now there are two sorts of sickness which the Lord will heal. The first is sickness by sin, a sickness that comes on you when some sin prevails. O, how graciously does our Lord and Saviour heal this sick soul. He comes and forgives, kisses with the kisses of His mouth and makes His love better than wine. The second sickness is a sickness I wish we all were afflicted with. It is not the sickness that is here intended, but a sickness I want to name. The sickness here intended is that that was wrought by the oppression and violence and driving of the false shepherds, but the sickness I would name to you is a sickness I wish we all had, namely the sickness of love. I am sick of love; I am sick for want of love. I am sick because I do not feel the love of Christ, sick because I do not realise His presence and do not feel His mercy, do not understand and enjoy the justification and acceptance of my person. Sick because I have not got that in my soul from the Lord that I desire to have. How many of you could honestly appeal to God now and say, Lord I am sick in that sense. Let honest conscience give an answer and listen to it. If you are sick by sin, it is a great matter and a mercy to be waiting on God for healing. I will heal that which was sick. I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely. But O to come and say we are healed and we want still

more healing. We know that the Lord has loved us and we want Him to let His love down more and we are really sick of that love, sick for want of it; cannot get it. Sick for heaven because we are so far from it. Sick for the power and grace of Christ which are so far from us. May it please the Lord to do this in us, to fulfil these great and kind words respecting His flock. One word, and I close. This poor flock, the purchase of Christ, is so dear to the Lord as that He says, to allay all the fears that may be felt - "Fear not little flock for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". The devil's malice is to break you and ruin you and drive you. The Father's pleasure is to fold you and keep you and ultimately bring you into that kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

AMEN.