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Sermon Preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
by Mr J.K. Popham on Wednesday Evening
11th January 1930

Text Ezekiel 9 verse 4

And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

The preceding chapter tells us of the awful degeneration of Judah, and all the impossible things, to think of naturally, that so favoured a nation, having the oracles of God, the good Spirit of God, bread for their hunger, water for their thirst, prophets rising up early, being sent to them. That notwithstanding, all that, this elect nation, gathered out, separated and blessed, departed most woefully, and wickedly from God. Oh the depths to which this people were plunged by their sins, the abominations from their God, and now in the eighth chapter, it would seem, that matters had come to a climax, so to express it, that the patience of God was exhausted, and He would pour out his fury and reign over this people with terror and slaughter.

The jealous God, jealous for the name which His people had polluted, would have six men go through the city, with destroying weapons to slay utterly, old and young, maids and little children, their eye was not to spare any. Very solemn, it may awaken in some, an unholy feeling of displeasure, that God should deal thus severely. To such a feeling, it might come easily into a child of God, if not favoured with God's presence, but such a feeling is unholy. Now what shall we say, this is history, this happened more than five hundred years before Christ came into this world. But He sent His gospel to England, after the dark days of prevailing popery, with all the blasphemy and uncleanness of that apostate system. God sent us the reformation, and He turned the nation to Himself. He gave us the gospel, and the Bible was valued, Christ was made known, and martyr's fires did not put it down, but only fanned it, and made it to grow. Then came the time of the Puritans, a remarkable time in the history of this nation, with mighty ministries. I wonder how many of our congregation today, could listen to the preaching of the puritans. The weight of their teaching, the reality, the depth, and the knowledge of God that they displayed, and exhibited, how many of us could sit and bear this teaching? Some could not, no doubt, some of us are but children, and we are afraid we could not bear such teaching.

I have often thought, what sheep the Lord must have had among those puritans. What wonderful followers they had, because they had such shepherds, such rulers, such teachers. And this reformation spread to Scotland, and indeed in that nation it went further than in England. And there was a more spiritual reformation, in some particulars, than in other parts of Britain. But now what do we see? Go to the national church, what do we see? The archbishop, and the bishops, unblushingly want to bring in, the very system which, at their ordination, they vowed their determination to do their utmost to banish.

The blasphemous, deceitful mass, it is thus spoken of I believe in the Church of England's Articles. There is a little salt, no doubt in that establishment, a few men who mourn and grieve over the state of things. Then come to the nonconformists, what have we there? The modernist, modernist means a man who denies the inspiration of the Bible, the divinity of Christ, and consequently His atonement. And some we know are denying His resurrection, attributing it to some, what they call, psychological process.

And all this in the name of religion. Spiritualism is also very prevalent in some places, but there is one system, that permits all the others, and that is Arminianism. If Arminianism did not exist, none of these sects would have followed. Free will, animates and prompts, and all these things are an abomination to God. It is not good to have our eyes closed to them, rather it is good for us to see them, and to, so see and feel for God as to sigh and cry for the abominations done in this our land. Some may instantly, now mentally say, O but what about our own abominations? If you know them, you have got plenty of work there. I know that, for myself, but that does not take away, the great thing that I would bring before you at this moment. That it is good, God approves of it, that we should sigh and cry for the abominations that are done in the land.

Is it nothing to us, that His name is blasphemed. is it nothing to us that a Bishop in the Church of England should say, If there is a God, that he should deny creation work. Is it nothing to us that they should say, that the truth of God as we own, and believe it, is altogether wrong? God is blasphemed, and I think it is a sign, of a gracious spirit, to grieve over these things, as they come to our knowledge. Think of the approbation of God in this, as it is set forth in this chapter. Go "and set a mark upon the forehead of the men (in this degenerate city, in the midst of all this evil,) that sigh and that cry for the abominations that are done in the" (land). May we be amongst the men, on whom God has put a mark, a mark of His approbation, of the grief felt, for the dishonour to His name.

Now my brethren, let us look, as we may be enabled, first of all at, the terrible anger of God against sin, against sin particularly as committed by professors of His name. It is a fearful thing, and it will do us good, to solemnly consider it. God is angry, men take His name in vain, men who have professed to believe in the sacrifice of Christ, now trample it under foot, yes, those who profess to worship God. And when their iniquity is full, as in the case before us, what will be done? Let us remember first of all, in this particular, that God's anger is just, that no injustice will ever stain His holy character. That every stroke He lays on a sinner, or on sinners, is just. His pure nature, so to express it, dictates it, His name is jealous, His honour is dear to Him, and one day He will exhibit it. He will make it known, that it is not a light thing, to take His name in vain. Not a light thing to put idols, where His own Shekinah was, and to have portrayed on walls, images of all kind of abominations, with the climax of worshipping the Sun.

I say then first the anger of God is just, it is also pure, purity is in all that He does. This nation, so favoured in the past, has forgotten God, and one day, it may be very soon, God only knows that, but the signs are very threatening. One day, He will come out, and say to these professors, What have you to do, to tread My courts, and take My covenant upon your lips, "who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?" (Isaiah 1 verse 12). And O when men, angels, and even wicked men have, put into their hands instruments of destruction, when vials shall be poured out, then the church will sing, Holy, Holy, Holy, as the smoke of the sacrifices of God in His anger ascends to heaven. And it will be on the ground, that God's anger is absolutely pure. Consider this then, consider that whatever God does, with His enemies is a vindication of His character, an exhibition of His purity. May the Lord help us to consider it this day.

The next thing I would notice is this, "and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. (in the land)" First of all the sighing and the crying. It is a great mercy to have a regard for God's honour, and I think indeed, I am persuaded, that it is a great blessing, to have a regard for the honour of God. So that whenever we see Him dishonoured, we are pained. Alas that through the familiarity that we have, so to speak, with sin, in the constant sight of it, the perpetual exhibition of sin in various ways, we have become accustomed to, so that unless special grace is given from time to time, there is little or no sadness or sorrow felt. But it is a mercy, to have grace enough to be sorry when sin is before us. Before us in two ways, first as to our own nature, which is utterly fallen and base.

We are no better than others. "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4 verse 7). But I say, when sin in my heart grieves me, when the motions of sin make me a wretched man in my experience, wretchedness, the feeling of it, the grief for it, God accepts, and it is good to have it, when you feel the evil of unbelief, that will qualify you, to grieve over the wicked infidelity of professors of religion. O it is good to be sorry for sin in your own heart, then to be sorry for it in others. Who has felt grieved at what is now, day by day, in our newspapers? Who has felt sorry that God is so dishonoured? that His name is trampled under foot? that the Lord Jesus is so degraded by men, His divinity denied, His atonement trampled on? When a minister should say, he pities the mentality of people who believe that sin can be put away by the blood of another man? And all this is done in this land.

Pulpits, clergies, professors, teachers, bishops, official dignitaries, everywhere in the name of religion, trampling God, His Holy Name and Word under foot. Do you grieve, my friends? It is a great thing to have a sorrowful spirit, on account of what is done in the land. God approves of it, let us not pass this by, let us not say, we have too much trouble with our own cases, to ever think of another case. God approves of the sighs and the cries that go up to Him from the hearts of His people, because of sin done in the land. I wish we may be enabled to take notice of this point, the approval of God. I would like to say this, although it is personal to myself, as I left this, pulpit last Lord's day morning, I was so blessed in my soul, with a sense of God's approbation, with what we had done, that I was truly happy, but grieved for what I hear, and what I see about me. But He does approve of grief for sin, either in myself, or in another. And He will look on you and bless you, and show you, how He approves of the grief you feel for the sin done in the land. I could not tell you how happy I was, as I left this chapel on Lord's day morning, with a sense of the approbation of God in my conscience. Go said He, to this man with the ink-horn by his side, Go. There are men in this day, who love My name and are jealous for My honour. Go, I will point them out to you, God makes no mistakes, and He will not pass by one, however obscure. Go He said and put a mark on their foreheads. You may think nobody notices, or knows your religion, but you sigh secretly. The Lord knows where you are, He won't let this man with the ink-horn, pass you by. He will point you out to him, and, as it were, say, Here is one of My people, here is a sighing soul, here is one who cries to Me, because he is grieved at the dishonour, done to My name. He will put a mark on you. Do you covet this? It is a great thing to have this mark of God.

What is this mark? It is the following things, among many. It is first the fear of God. "By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." (Proverbs 16 verse 6). The fear of the Lord is a way of life, a path of life. The fear of the Lord. makes Him dear, makes His honour exceedingly precious, in the feeling and the view of the person who has it. "The fear of the Lord is clean."(Psalm 19 verse 9), it leads the man, in whom it is, to worship one God, and only one God. It is a great thing, the Spirit of God gives it, the Spirit shows the value of it in the scripture. "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate." (Proverbs 8 verse 13). The fear of the Lord will be in you, as a bar to wrong things, and a light to right things.

An unctuous light to all that's right,
A bar to all that's wrong. (Gadsby's 832 verse 5)

It will point out what is evil, it will make you tender, afraid of sinning, afraid of displeasing God. It is not a slavish fear, but a filial fear, a tender fear that rises to God, reaches the honour of God. It is jealous for the honour of God, it is a great thing to have this clean spirit, I like that word in the Psalms "The fear of the Lord is clean," it is a clean thing, it is a clean thing. O if it were always in exercise in us, we should not backslide. It would certainly keep us from persistence in backsliding, whenever it is with us in exercise. And this will be a mark, God notices it. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him," (Psalm 147 verse 11), "He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man."(Psalm 147 verse 10). He taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, and He will let them know some day, that He does take pleasure in them. In this mark you have also the Holy Spirit's grace rising in you, in the exercise of faith. Faith in God will keep you from Idolatry, and preserve you from sinning cheaply. It will make you fear, lest you should, miss:

That prize such numbers never seek,
Such numbers seek in vain. (Gadsby's 308 part 2 verse 1).

It will set you hankering after God, and make the words of the Psalmist , well understood, "As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God."(Psalm 42 verse 1)."My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."(Psalm 84 verse 2)."My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42 verse 2). None of these pictures, these idols will do, but God alone. Paul said "There is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many) But to us believers there is but one God, the Father, in whom are all things."(1 Corinthians 8 verses 4-6).

And it is from this faith in exercise, worship will grow. Now no unbeliever worships God really, it is impossible, because faith brings the knowledge of God. Some say that faith is a knowledge, as I think Luther was right in saying. Now if you have faith, you will worship. John as struck with the discoveries, that were made to him of the mysteries of God, fell at the feet of the angel, who showed him such things, but the angel said no, worship God. And that is always the issue, of the exercise of faith towards God. There is a worshipping of Him, and we do not worship an unknown God. The solemn impressions of the being of God, the manifestation of His excellences, His perfections, to the people of God always beget worship."God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in Spirit and in truth."(John 4 verse 24). And this will be a real mark, it is God's mark, and it is written, a wonderful approval. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10 verse 13). This is worship, you will worship the Father, you will worship the Son, you will worship the Holy Ghost, you will worship one God.

Another mark is this, the mark of the blood of Christ. "And when I see the blood, I will pass over you." (Exodus 12 verse 13). The destroying angel, was commissioned not to enter a house, that was protected by that Pascal blood. And God will never permit, one of the six men, with destroying weapons in his hand, to come and deal a deadly blow to any poor sinner, who takes shelter by faith, in the blood of the Lord Jesus. The blood of the everlasting covenant, blood that purchased the church. "Feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20 verse 28). What a blessing it is to have that mark on your conscience.

Forgiveness! 'tis a joyful sound
To malefactors doomed to die;
Lord, may this bliss in me be found;
May I redeeming grace enjoy. (Gadsby's 755 verse 1).

Now God sees the blood in two places, on the altar, the horns of the altar, a perfect atonement, satisfying the justice of God. And making that justice perfectly consistent with the happiness of sinners. Never forget that, God keeps it in your hearts, and in my heart, that the atonement is there, perfect, making perfect all who are covered by it, there it is. Thus the election of grace are preserved in unregenerancy. No destruction can come near to a blood bought sinner, as long as he may live unregenerate, much as he may fight against God in his unregenerancy, terrible as may be his hatred of God, as some of us know and remember too well.

The blood covers the church, the blood preserves the church, the blood justifies the church, she stands perfect in this wonderful covering. She is perfect in God's sight. And the other place, where this blood is seen by God, is on the conscience of the sinner. Oh it is beautiful when it is there, God passes by, even if He sends affliction, it is not destruction. If He lay on the rod, it is not a sword, it is not a fire to destroy. If He puts a child of His into floods of trouble, it is not that He will drown them, or let them be drowned. They are covered, and preserved by the blood, which forgives and washes away their sins. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:" (took away their uncleanness, and made them fit to serve God in the tabernacle. Paul notices this, and asks this important question) "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9 verses 13 & 14).

O afflicted friends, may God keep you from thinking that your afflictions are for destruction. They are for edification, they are for reproof, they are for a proof of your sonship, they are for a sign of God's love, a token of His mercy. Think not that He is going to destroy, when He afflicts, try not to judge His heart by His hand. His providences unfold His purposes, but they never unfold destruction, for the church, or any single member of it. O He is a good God, and He sees this mark.

Now there is another mark, and that is love, love for Christ. If any man love the Lord Jesus, O, he is a good man. "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." (Ephesians 6 verse 24). God speaks that by an inspired Apostle, and if you love Him, you love His Person, His grace, His atonement, His goodness, His precious blood, His justifying righteousness, His prevailing intercession, and His saving arm. "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious:" (1 Peter 2 verse 7). And in Him the Father is seen and loved, and from Him comes the Holy Spirit, and thus the Trinity is known and loved. And that is God's mark, for "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." (Romans 5 verse 5). This begets love to God. "We love Him, because He first loved us." (1 John 4 verse 19).

Notice this, you never will have one motion of love to Christ, to God in Him, that the Lord will not see and approve, and one day He will let you know, that He approves of love, approves of your love. If you give a cup of water, to a poor saint, because he is as saint, love is in that, and God notices it. All the acts of love He takes notice of, and as it were, writes them in a book. So God gives this mark, and what will love do?

Many things, among them it will keep you steady and steadfast in the truth. It will keep you steady and steadfast "in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free." (Galations 5 verse 1). Therefore said Paul to the Galations "Stand fast." This is wonderful, an idol is presented to your view, and God the Holy Spirit moves you, in love, to say begone, and you turn your eye, you heart, and your mind away, from the vain thing, and desire to worship God. To be found in Him alone, and O it is a mercy to stand fast. When people are on Christ's side, they are there because He has put them there. And when they are enabled, notwithstanding the vileness, the treachery of their unbelieving hearts, to cleave close to Him, and follow Him fully. He notices it. It is all His own work, and yet He puts it down to their account. Sets this mark upon them, union with the Lord Himself. "Abide in Me, and I in you." (John 15 verse 4). Abide in the vine as the branches, or stones in His building. Well dear friends, this mark will never be passed by unnoticed, or unrecognised by the Lord.

Now what? but I must not stay long because the time has nearly gone, but what is the issue of this? Well, it is this, they are not destroyed. Here is a poor creature, and he says I am so afraid of trouble, I am afraid that I shall never stand, I am so vile, so unbelieving, so weak, that I am afraid that I shall prove like the disciples, of whom it is said "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." (John 6 verse 66). It is a mercy for us who feel like this, and I do feel so, that their standing is in God. The preservation is God's, wholly His, so the men with the ink-horn at his side, went as it were, to the Lord who commissioned him to go forth, and he said, it is done. I have done as Thou hast commanded me, and these people are covered by this mark. They may not see it sometimes, themselves, but they are all covered by it. The destroying men are commissioned not to touch these people. Jesus will say, O do not touch these people, so covering them all with His mighty love, protecting them all by His infinite goodness, upholding them all by His gracious omnipotence, so that they shall come well through.

Somebody may say, this is a strange new year sermon, well my friends, whatever it may appear to be, this in my own mind is certain, that if we begin this year, or any other year, this day or any day, with this mark upon us, though we are living in a terrible day, in a land that is utterly degenerate, that has turned its back upon the reformation, and is trampling under foot God's great mercy, in the scriptures, we shall be preserved. The Lord has provided chambers, provided chambers for His people, and He says to them, when He is about to destroy His enemies,

"Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee, hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast."(Isaiah 26 verse 20). O dear friends, what a shelter Christ is, what a protector Christ is, what an end Christ has to give to His people. May we then have this mark. Flee from all abominations, flee from all idolatry, turn away from all the modernism, and all the things that are prevailing amongst us today, and turn with humble faith, and fervent desire, and warm love, from time to time, to this blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

Put our bad cases into His hand, go with our weakness to Him, and with all the troubles and perplexities that we have, go to Him and seek protection, supplies, help and consolation, and seek also to understand that word, that is very beautiful, yet mysterious at times. "For the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Nehemiah 8 verse 10). And when you get a blessing, you get an inkling of that joy, the joy of the Lord, the joy of the Holy Ghost. And you will get an inkling of it, because that very joy will strengthen your faith, and your hope, inflame your love, draw out your praises, and enable you to feel, it is well.

May God give us a good year if it please Him, or as much, or as little of it, as we may live to see. "For thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." (Proverbs 27 verse 1). May God think upon us here as a little people, a feeble people, with a good deal of affliction among us, from time to time. But may we not simply think of ourselves as individuals here and there, but as a gathered people, a church, and that God looks on us in that particular way, in the spiritual union we have with one another. He looks on us in this way, and may we be enabled to cleave close to the truth, and close to the simple services that we have.

Cleave to the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and be enabled to follow the word of God. "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." (Romans 13 verse 14).

Amen.