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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
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Genesis 15 v 1

"After these things the word of the Lord
came unto Abram in a vision saying: Fear not Abram, I am
thy shield and thy exceeding great reward"

The context is very interesting. Two things had recently happened to Abram. First, through the abundance of the riches in cattle, silver and gold of Abram and his nephew Lot, the land in which they were both dwelling was not sufficient for them and with striking unselfishness Abram said to Lot, now whichever way you choose to go, whatever part of the land you choose to make your dwellingplace that take. I will take what you do not want. If you go to the right hand I will go to the left. If you choose the left hand, I will take the right. A remarkable instance of unselfishness toward a relative. In a sense Abram was the superior and in a very important sense for he was the chosen of God. The second thing that had just happened was that Abram, to rescue Lot, who had been taken by the kings that came against Sodom and the cities, went, with the armed servants, born many of them in his house, and fought those kings and rescued his nephew and gave back to him, brought back to him, everything. These circumstances may be made more than interesting to us; they may be made an instruction; God grant that they may be. The first would say, "Leave your case with God; He will take care of you. Be not over anxious to get this world. If you have an interest in God and He is interested in you, things will turn out well for you. Leave everything with Him." Dear friends, if we have grace to walk in Christ's word, it will be well with us - "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" Be that your first concern, your first movement, your last movement, then whatever you need in this life, God will see that you have. You may not have all you wish for, but you will have everything you need. And the second instance would say this. "If you venture anything for God He will see to it that you do not suffer. Abram ventured and God saw to it that he did not suffer. I wish we had that spirit, I wish the Lord would give to us all, to take

heed to the doctrine of Christ, to take heed to the things we have wrought for He, as I have said, will see to it that we shall not lack. When He sent His disciples out on their mission and they, having attended to it, returned to Him, He said, Now lacked ye anything? And if it were put to you who have trusted Him, have ventured anything for Him, have you lacked? Has He allowed you to go short? Has He left you to yourself? Has He left you to an enemy? Has He left you to the devil? You would have to say "No, Lord. I have been troubled, I have failed, I am an unprofitable servant, but I have lacked nothing."

"After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision". O it is a great thing to have in our own manner, and in the measure it may please God, to have the word come to us. We have, through divine mercy, the whole Bible, the complete canon of Holy Scripture, and ordinarily dreams and visions may just come, as Solomon says, from the multitude of business, and it needs great caution, if you listen to voices especially. We should be careful never to listen to a voice that in any way contradicts the Scripture. Nothing that contradicts the word of God comes from Him. Mind that, let that be a test to all your religion, to all your feelings, to all your pursuits, to all your hopes. If they be not in absolute accord with this Book you do well to cast them away to the moles and the bats. Nothing will stand the test to which God will put all religion but that which comes from Himself, that which is in accordance with the Bible. O what a favour it is to have something that will stand the test. The Lord came unto Abram. Does He visit you? Does He visit me? He does come to sinners. He visits sinners still. He has not wholly left the world, no He has not wholly left this nation. He visits sinners; He visits them in His Word. He visits them by paying love visits to them. He visits them to correct them, to reprove them, to weaken their strength by the way. He visits them to put them right where they are wrong. O what business we do make for Him in this particular. I would shamefully say it, what business I have made for God in my long profession to put me right where I have gone wrong. Perhaps you - I am sure some of you in your measure and with shorter experience than mine - have to say the same, what business you have given Him, what trouble, to use such a word, you have given Him to put you right. Seek thy servant: I have gone astray like a lost sheep. Seek thy servant for I do not forget Thy statutes. He came to him. He

comes in His Spirit. The Spirit is given to sinners who are made saints, to reprove them, to reveal the Lord Jesus in them, to bring peace and good tidings of great joy to them. You have no right to any unbroken confidence if you cannot say the Lord has in some way come to you at some time. It is according to Scripture that the Holy Spirit is given to the church, given to each member of the church, more or less distinctly. I say, if it be according to Scripture, then see, look at this point, be very particular about it. Has the Lord come to you? I am not setting up any special measure for everyone but speaking generally the Holy Ghost does come to sinners. He comes to make their hearts His dwelling place. He comes to convince them of sin. He comes to correct them of their errors of spirit. He comes to weaken their strength. He comes to tell them where they are sinful, to prove to them their wilfulness, their waywardness, their rebellion, their witchcraft rebellion. He comes to them and He comes to them to manifest Jesus Christ, to manifest mercy, and it comes so to them after certain things. You will often, as made observant, find that after certain events, troubles, exercises, deliverances, the Lord will come to you. He comes to His church. One strong wish, and I hope I may say cry to God to do for you, for us, here as a church, has been this, that the Son of Man may condescend to walk in the midst of us. O my friends, we should have a great deal less religion than we have if Christ were to come and the exercises of which we may speak, and speak rather lightly sometimes, would be very much altered in this, they would be more toward Himself. How often are mine toward myself. Perhaps you may say the same of yourselves. But when His glory appears, what weakness comes, what corruption is felt, what death is upon us as we fall before His glorious majesty. Look for His presence, my friends, and may you be exercised about it so that when you come to the service you may not say, well I wonder what the minister will say, but rather, will the Lord speak to me. You may not say, who shall we see there, but shall we meet with God. It is a solemn thing to profess His Name. Now if the Lord were here, what humbleness of mind would fill us, what tenderness of conscience would be in us, what worship would be in our spirits. May He be with us.

And He came unto Abram. Then the next remark is this. He spoke to him, saying "Fear not Abram". And this leads one to say there is

such a mercy as divine communications made to the people of God, and it is a mercy. O if you can put your hand on your heart and if your memory is moved to enable you to look back to this and to that and say, now there the Lord spoke to me. In that trouble He spoke to me; in that affliction He spoke to me. O my brethren what gladness is in the heart when God speaks, or sadness, for both are the fruit of communications. Sadness when He reproveth us, gladness when He makes us know that He loves us. There is such a mercy as divine communications made to sinners. The Lord came to Abram in a vision, came to say something. Now He may come to you in a dream though be very careful of dreams. You have perhaps had thousands of dreams, but you may not be able to say of more than one or two, God instructed you by them, and unless you can get instruction from a dream, do not hold it as any good. He has spoken twice in my life in a dream, and I have thousands of dreams, many of which I would be glad entirely to forget. He spoke in a vision. Perhaps in this case it was an audible voice, for the Son of God, coming to the patriarchs, manifested Himself as the Son of Man, took on Him this form and used a voice distinct, articulate, so that there was no misunderstanding. Abram knew whose voice spoke to him. Seek communications. Seek them in and by and through the Word of God. Watts says somewhere, we look on the Scripture if haply our eye may light on some sweet promise there. How much some of us have missed and lost from inattention to the Scripture and forgetfulness, the Lord alone knows. But He brings some things to our remembrance, some things He has said. O how profitable have been some of the fires we have been in because therein God came to us and spoke to us. Now may that point be with you and with myself. He came to Abram, saying to him, not leaving him to imagine anything in the matter, saying to him "Fear not". This "Fear not" would no doubt be very much needed by Abram. He had just defeated some kings and would they take that defeat quietly? Would they never after that day contemplate revenge? Would they not say, here we are so many of us and there is that Hebrew who has come here and with a few men he has inflicted on us this. Now we will take our revenge. And Abram probably even naturally would think of that. I have exposed myself to anger and the revengeful intentions of these kings. He might look at them and think of their prowess, think he had just broken it, how it would revive, and think of his own weakness and now the Lord comes and says "Fear not". You may have fears. If at any time you have been

enabled to resist the devil and he has fled from you, you may expect him to come again. If you think, well now I shall know for the future how he will come, he will come another way, a way you never thought of. All you need is to be covered with a shield divine. O think not too much of a victory, because the enemy is alive. The Lord Jesus corrected what might appear to Him, even though it did not appear to the disciples, an exaltation because they had overcome. They went out by His commission and they came and told Him how that even devils and things had been subject to them, been overcome by them and He said to them "Rejoice not in this that the spirits are subject unto you but rather rejoice in that your names are written in heaven". Be that the main thing with you, with me, to stand right with God. But still, when fears do come, and seem to come naturally and properly, because of certain circumstances, we need the Lord to come and say "Fear not" O but what can be given as a sufficient reason why Abram should not fear? Why this. "I", your God, "I" who have entered into a Covenant with you, "am thy shield". Abram needed it; Abram got it. He never went anywhere without this shield. He never fought a battle without this shield. He never undertook without this shield. God was with him. Now look at this in respect of ourselves. Have we a shield in Him? Have we a shield in God. What can be a shield, that is to us a proper, a sufficient protection, a covering, such a covering as would preserve us from all dangers and keep us from all deaths, preserve from all the arrows and the pestilences that walk about and are shot at us? Only one Protector of whom we sometimes sing

A sovereign Protector I have
Unseen, yet for ever at hand

But this may be beaten out into two or three particulars. First, the precious blood of Christ is a protection. O dear fellow sinners, we need this every moment, every day, every night, always and God said to Israel by Moses when they were to be brought out of Egypt and the blood sprinkled on the lintols and door posts of their houses - "When I see the blood I will pass by you". That was their covering, their shield, their safety. Beneath that blood may we live, by that blood may we be cleansed, and by that blood protected from all death, that is to say, from sin. O it is a great covering, a sufficient covering,

an endless protection, never moving away from those it covers. Therefore, when the Lord speaks to you about safety, this will be the reason, He will see the blood of Christ. "Redeemed by the precious blood of Christ as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." Plead that covering, and when you are in danger, sensible danger, fly to that covering. When you feel that you are exposed to sin because it is in you and working mightily in you, you will find no covering sufficient for you but that. When the enemy walks about as a roaring lion seeking to devour you, there will be no covering but that for you.

"I am thy shield". They sing in heaven what we whisper and lisp here - "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." The blood covers all sin. "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven whose sin is covered". It covers the conscience and fills it with peace. It protects the sinner against infinite anger and judgment. It covers the sinner against all enemies connected with sin. So may the Lord say to you and say to me, from time to time - I see the blood. You see your danger; I am your safety, your shield. You feel your exposedness; I am your shield. You fear death; I am your shield. No protection apart from the atonement. Well, my friends, we shall need this as long as we live. We shall need it when we die. We shall sing of it in heaven.

Then there is this also, the covenant of grace. In that covenant, God was Abram's shield. He had made a covenant with Abram; He had told him that He would be with Him and that all the families of the earth should be blessed in him. Now this covenant runs to all the saints of God. It was very gracious of the Holy Ghost to teach by Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians that the seed that was promised to Abram was Christ. "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ". (Galatians 3 v 16) That covenant therefore covers, as a divine shield and protection, all the people of God. Have you seen it? Have you hoped that God has made a covenant with you? that to the end of your days this covenant will stand? "My covenant will I not break ^{not} ~~not~~ alter the thing that is gone out of My lips". "Gather my saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice". That is, that God, carrying

out His covenant promise and engagement, and faithfulness to His saints in Christ, teaches them how to come and lay hold of eternal life whereunto they are called and by denying self and taking up the cross they enter into a covenant with Him. Some of you understand it no doubt, when again and again the Holy Ghost has enabled you to go to the Lord and He has manifested the Saviour to you, and your heart, by faith, has ^{been united to} ~~closed in with~~ Christ. You have found Him to be yours and felt that you were His. This will be a protection to the end.

May it not be said in the next place that the power of God is the shield, nay, Himself is the shield. "The Lord God is a sun and shield". O the power of God that covers a sinner; infinite. The attribute of omnipotence engaged to preserve a worm, a worm against whom the devil and men and sin and providence may also seem to war against. And this poor worm Jacob is spoken to by the Word of God. "Fear not". "Fear not worm Jacob". Fear not your weakness, fear not the devil, fear not indwelling sin, fear not untoward circumstances. Yet we do fear all these things, but, says the Lord, "I am thy shield", and none of these evils, which are likened to pestilence and arrows and death, none of these evils can penetrate and break down or weaken, in the least degree, this shield. "His shield is spread O'er every saint".

And may it not be said again that the blessed promises of God in Christ are a shield. The Spirit, by Paul, speaks of the promises thus - "For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us". The promises, in Christ, yea and amen. And thus it is that faith can say, has said in some hearts here,

His honour and His Name's at stake
To save me from the burning lake

We have trusted His righteous character. One said - O it was a great word for a man, though a man of God, to say to the Lord - What wilt Thou do to Thy great Name? In the event of our being overcome and destroyed, what wilt Thou do unto Thy great Name? "I am thy shield". O fearful saint, God give faith to you to run to this blessed Jesus Christ. He is the shield. His very Person, His great work, his divine robe, His almightiness, His wisdom, His love, His power, all

these make up this shield. Like as the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, guiding, covering and protecting Israel from all enemies, so the Lord Jesus is with His people guiding and covering and preserving and protecting them against all the enemies who may come against them. Ah, some may say, we wish this were ours! Well, if that is your wish, my advice to you is this, go to Him and by humble prayer put yourself under His protection with all your fears and all the sins which occasion your fears, all the sins in your heart which cause your fears. Put yourself under His protection. And I will venture to add this, He won't fail you. Your doubts, your fears, your misgivings, your lack of assurance, will not put you into any danger. He has said "I am thy shield". When He says it to you, you will be happy, but until He does say it to you, may you be enabled to do that - go and put yourself under His blessed protection. Lord, here I am. I am exposed to myself, my sins. I am exposed by my sins to Thy anger. I am exposed to the curse of the law by my transgressions of it. But here I am, a poor creature. I have no power, I have no help, I have no protection in myself, but I come to the cross, I come to the blood of atonement, I come to the righteousness of Christ, I come to His protection; O afford it me. He hears prayer.

And then notice His gracious promise. "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward". It might be truly said that very nobly Abram had refused all that was offered him as having been the victor in the war. Yea, so to speak, he had let Lot choose all the wealth of the country and perhaps you have said, Lord, I do not feel afraid of poverty if I may have but Thyself. Naturally we do fear that. Who would not fear the impoverishment and pains of poverty? But the Lord came and He said "I am thy exceeding great reward". God for your portion; what more can you wish? If we have given up thousands of gold and silver and God came to us and said "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward" might we be said to be poor? But reward is a debt, but God is in debt to no man. He uses this word to meet our apprehensions of things, as if, when Peter said, we have left all, what shall we have? He said you shall have Myself, you shall have Myself. And would Peter say, Lord what else is there, nothing else? No! If Jesus says He is yours, if He gives you a sense of divine protection and blessing, if He drops His love into your heart and soul, if He makes over to you His righteousness, if He speaks to you in His

gospel, you will have everything you want. All other things, He says, shall be added unto you.

Now one may say in two or three words a little about this. This exceeding great reward may be said to be His eternal love given to a sinner. O is not it wonderful for God to love a worm, a wicked man? "I have loved thee with an everlasting love". My love made me quicken thee when thou wast dead and wash thee when thou wast in thy blood and clothe thee when thou wast naked and enrich thee by giving thee wine and oil and gold and silver and fine linen and flax and so on. Love gave all that. If God gives a little of His love to our souls in experience it makes us very rich. And also is it not wonderful wealth to have the blood of Jesus Christ sprinkled on your conscience? "The peace of God which passeth all understanding". To have the righteousness of Christ made yours, imputed to you, received by faith. Is it not wonderful wealth for God to let you know that He has called Christ to be your great High Priest and that Christ is now in heaven in your interest, that He watches over you, intercedes for you, looks after you, takes care of you, speaks peace to you and makes you know that He intercedes for you. "Thy exceeding great reward". And is it not wonderful that God gives His blessed Word to His people? this inerrant Bible, and parts of it made over. Here a word of reproof - O do not think that is poverty; it reveals your poverty, but it is not poor, it is not poverty. O we ought to value every reproof God gives us. It is better than gold and silver. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend". And sometimes He gives a promise. Sometimes He drops an encouraging testimony into the heart. Is it not wealth indeed, when you, at His blessed footstool, are bemoaning your bad state and lean soul, He lets you know that He is your life, that He is your God. "Thy exceeding great reward". If I knew more about it, I could preach Him better in this particular as in other particulars. My poverty in preaching arises from my poverty in experience of this but these hints may just let you see a little into what God does give to his people - Himself; Himself. One sang, and we sing it with him sometimes

And if our dearest comforts fall
Before His sovereign will
He never takes away our all
Himself He gives us

Sometimes - I must close, though things open a little - sometimes He gives that inestimable, ineffable word "Abba Father", the Spirit of adoption, so that a sinner, an orphan alone, poor, destitute, weak, foolish, wicked, can say, humbly say to Him

My God, My Father, blissful Name

You will never forget the first time you say it, at least, I think not. At any rate, I have never forgotten the first time I said it. It is many many years ago. O the sweetness, the bliss, the brokenness, the tears, the repentance, the joy, the happiness, the peace, the reverence, the humility, the confidence. And then what? The end; the best is to come. At least the best as to measure, not as to kind. The best is to come, and that is "Where I am, there shall My servant also be". Now may the Lord speak this gracious word to us. And God came to Abram in a vision saying unto him "Fear not I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward"

AMEN.