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GOSPEL STANDARD METHODIST

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on Friday evening 1 May 1936

HEBREWS 12 verses 1, 2 and 3

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds"

These three solemn verses call for the closest attention of faith. The first draws our attention to the 11 chapter and it likens the people whose faith we read there, to a cloud, a great cloud, a visible object, an object that calls for attention. We look at a cloud, we may think of that cloud. "If the clouds be full of rain they empty themselves upon the earth." If this great cloud of witnesses is seen by faith it will be something like that. It will let fall, if I may put it so, a gracious influence like rain upon our spirits. It will tell us that God had to do with these people; that these people had to do with God. That He called them by grace, that He gave them faith, that that faith met with difficulties; that the devil came and tempted them, that providence tried them, that men hindered, and injured, and persecuted them; but that, notwithstanding all that, they believed, they clave to God, they followed God. They were not overmuch discouraged. All the deaths that came, all the difficulties that confronted them, all the fleshly feelings they might have, all the cowardice, all the unbelief, all that came against them, their faith resisted. A very wonderful witness. You will feel - every one of you blessed with faith will feel - at times, as you may be led to consider this cloud of witnesses and be led to consider other matters, you will feel that your unbelief is no excuse. You will follow me, those of you who are rightly exercised; you will say - O if

I could but say - Begone unbelief. This wicked spirit like a devil in us, boldly, wickedly opposing God and opposing us. We have no greater enemy than our own unbelief. You may not think it, some of you may not, but it is so, and if you are the Lord's you will find it out. There is nothing more hindering, more perplexing, more confusing, more weakening, more hiding God from you, more ready to contradict God than your wicked unbelief, and, as you listen to it, you will find darkness, distance, hardness of heart, and other evils rising in you and that will prove to you that you have not much faith, but the little you have will be strengthened and will bring you to God from time to time.

"Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses", let us listen to what they say; that is what the Holy Ghost means, let us listen to what these witnesses say. And if you are led, any of you who fear God, to quietly, prayerfully, carefully read the 11 chapter that I have just read to you, you will find what their testimony is. Their testimony is this, to sum it up - God is faithful, mighty, wise; all goodness is in Him; all that we need is in Him; all that we can expect or hope for is in Him. His promises are firmer than heaven and earth; His goodness is endless; His love is eternal; His faithfulness reaches to the heavens. The witnesses will say these things to you as you have faith in your heart. They will say these things, and they will say, be not overmuch cast down.

Look to Jesus, kind as strong  
Mercy joined with power

My dear friends, do listen to the cloud of witnesses. You will have plenty to listen to in your own hearts; plenty of wickedness will talk to you; wrong desires will claim attention, worldliness will rise up and will be strengthened by unbelief. But when God helps you to turn your eye to this cloud, and open your ear to the testimony of it, then you will find something else to listen to. You wont want to listen to your own heart then. No, you will want the Lord to speak to you; open your ear and eye that you may hear and see. "We are compassed". It is not a cloud like a hand over you, but a cloud all over and all around you. Turn which way you will in your need, in your weakness, in your

ignorance, turn which way you will, you will find a witness here, a witness there, and every witness will say - God is faithful who hath called you unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ. They will tell you that death is gain when death is suffered for Christ's sake. I do not mean the death of the body; I mean that poor pilgrims will answer to Joseph Hart's word

All contained in that red list  
Were not murdered martyrs

Saints who feel the load within, these suffer martyrdom. If I could only persuade you to listen - but God can - to listen to this great cloud. How kind of God to give it. How compassionate of God to give such a cloud, to compass us about with it. It is as if He should say, I know your weakness, I know how tempted you are by your own wicked hearts, I know the vileness of your unbelief and so I have created this cloud, I have made this cloud for you; listen to it. I say it is very compassionate in Him to do this.

Now here is an exhortation attached to it. "Let us lay aside every weight". There are hindrances in our ways; there are hindrances in our hearts, in our circumstances, and the Apostle by divine inspiration said, let us lay aside these hindrances. You know, if you are observant, you who have faith, something about the weights, corroding care, care of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and other things. Weights, heavy weights. What shall I do, says the poor child of God, with this load of sin pressing me to the ground. What shall I do with the weight of care? What shall I do with the weight of affliction? All these weights are hindrances, and the Apostle, by the Holy Ghost, says, let us lay them aside. What is that? It is not to be careless about them. It is not to take no notice of them. To lay them aside is to cast your burdens on the Lord, to go to Him with them and by precious faith fall at His footstool and ask Him to deeply and powerfully convince you of your wickedness, your weakness, and your inability to stand and the readiness of your nature to take up every burden. And you will find, when you are enabled thus to lay your weights aside, you are helped. It is a great thing to know how to lay aside a weight. You cannot cast it on another person; you cannot loosen it from your shoulder and throw it down.

You cannot say, this is not a kind thing of God to let me have such weights. This is the point, to cast thy burden on the Lord. "Casting all your care upon Him for He careth for you." When, on occasions, you look at the effect of these weights on your spirit, how they hinder and wound your conscience, and barrenise your heart, and hinder you in your journey, then you will say, O if I could but follow this divine exhortation and cast them on the Lord; lay them aside in that way of believing. It is a good way of believing when you can lay your weights aside in that gracious manner. May the Lord help us to do it.

"And the sin which doth so easily beset us". What is this sin? There may be many conjectures about it, but I believe if you look at the chapter which has preceded this verse, you will conclude that the sin which so easily besets you is the very opposite of faith. What is that? Unbelief. And does it not easily beset you? Can you have anything more deadly in its effect on your spirit than unbelief? Is not unbelief that abominable thing in you that turns you away from God? Is it not the first step in backsliding? Is it not the first step in dishonouring God? Is it not the first step moving you to think, then to say, I shall never get through? Yes, O it does easily beset us. Nothing more easy is there to get away from God than by listening to unbelief. It will take hold of everything that is wrong. Your calling is wrong; it was not sufficiently distinct or powerful. Your evidences are wrong; at least they are not clear enough for you as you think. And unbelief comes and says, the Scripture is wrong. O this devil, this serpent in you. The serpent went to an innocent pair. This wicked spirit rises and whispers and howls and roars against God and against ourselves and it very easily besets us. If you have an hour free from it, be thankful. May we say in faith

Begone unbelief, my Saviour is near

Unbelief always turns us - whenever it has power - always turns us from God. And every time you turn from God and know it, if you search into the matter, you will find unbelief was the leader. O it is a dreadful sin, and when you have suffered from it again and again, you will say it is a dreadful sin. It is dreadful first because it dishonours God, and you will find your heart, when rightly moved, O

child of God, moved by that consideration, for is not His honour dearer to you than life? And then next it hurts you, it damages you, it begins to make your conscience a little hard, then harder. It calls some sins little; it calls some covetous desire prudence; it calls distrusting God a manly spirit, to lean on your own understanding. There is nothing too bad for it, but it has a skill in painting black things white. May the Lord help us to look at unbelief and hate it and flee from it by the little faith we possess. Begone unbelief, O wicked unbelief, vile unbelief, loathsome unbelief. I have suffered from it; I do suffer. "And the sin which doth so easily beset us" and hinder us and hurt us. It will knock the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace from off your feet, and take all the peace away from you. As you listen to it, O it will hurt you. As you are influenced by it, it will ruin every gracious feeling; it will touch the divine principle. It cannot hurt it, it cannot defile it, but it touches it in a way of its exercises. "Easily beset us". It has not much difficulty to beset the people of God. You probably will go with me when you come to look at your own case. You may say, I was easily turned aside that day. You may say, O how easy it was for me to go aside. I did not think God was here and there; I turned aside. "The sin which doth so easily beset us". The Lord make us afraid of it more and more and give us diligence to wait on Him. Some bit of tinsel painted like gold dangled before the eyes of a child of God, will be sufficient to turn him away, and that will be by unbelief. Pride will be used by this awful spirit of unbelief and make you murmur. Disappointment will be seized on by unbelief and make you say, hope is gone; God has left me. Love is touched by unbelief. Is God kind to do this? and you reply, No. A continuance in your profession is touched by unbelief. They might have had opportunity to have returned, and you felt like that; give it up. O the snares that unbelief will make for our poor souls. Well may the Holy Ghost say, lay it aside. It very easily hurts you and beguiles you; lay it aside. Listen not to it. We should suspect some danger nigh when this wicked spirit begins to whisper against God and against trusting Him. You will never trust God with the acquiescence of unbelief. Everything divine, unbelief hates.

Wherefore, looking at this cloud. Poor child of God, tossed about by unbelief, look at the cloud. It is a big cloud; it is an all

surrounding cloud. Look at it; listen to it. All these blessed believers are in this cloud and they all say, God is great; God is good; God is love; God is powerful; God is faithful; God does not leave His people. These are the things this great cloud says, and unbelief contradicts them. We have no greater enemy, I repeat, to our journey, our pilgrimage, our hope, our comfort, our peace, than unbelief. I am sure there is no child of God here who has not received some wounds, hindrances, pains, and shame by this wicked spirit, unbelief. Now the cloud says, the Lord says, your own experience will say, this is an injurious spirit, and you may be praying, Lord help us to lay it aside. There is nothing right for it that is divine. Everything that is right unbelief hates.

"And let us run with patience the race that is set before us". Paul says in the Corinthians, all run in a race; only one is crowned. So run that ye may obtain. Many shall say in that day, Lord have we not prophesied in Thy Name? We were professors, we took up Thy Name, and we preached in Thy Name, and did this and that in Thy Name; but they never ran. They did not run this race. "Let us run". There is a danger my friends. Run, flee from the wrath to come; run after God, run away from sin. O, free-will ! Yes, there is free-will, but not that wicked will that we have in our fallen nature, but what God speaks of in the Psalms. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power", and with this let us run. Two things. Run from something; run after something. Run from self - O when we are rid of self we shall be well. I say it, when we are rid of self we shall be well. Till then we are sick often; often in a sickly condition and then we are weakened, too weak it may be to run at all or even to move after God. Let us run after Him. "My soul followeth hard after God" said the Psalmist. "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee O God." This is running, running after Him.

"Jesus" - one sings - my soul's athirst for Thee  
Absent from Thee I cannot rest

Is that true of us? O what a great thing it is to be after God. The end of faith is God. "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls".

"With patience". Patience when everything about you and within you irritates you; when the enemy says, you wont reach the crown. When unbelief says there are so many hindrances, I must stand still. Now says faith moved by the Holy Ghost, I want to reach heaven, I want the smile of God while I am here. "The race that is set before us" Some people set their own end before them, their own course before them. Easy, not difficult; a pleasant religion. God sets another kind of race before His people. Not smooth, not clear; it is described by the Lord Himself: "In the world ye shall have tribulation" and you have got to run through it. O what a blessing to have a race set before you; not your own religion, not your own strength, not your own wisdom, not your own intelligence, not your own determination; the race God has set before you. Has He; has He started us? Has He set before us the end of it, Himself? Himself on earth, then in heaven. Himself on earth to be known, to be felt, to be enjoyed. Well it is a wonderful mercy to be made a pilgrim, to be made a sinner, a sacred thing; to be made sensible of being lost, ruined, polluted, unrighteous, ignorant, helpless, weak and then for the Lord to say, there is an end and that end is Myself, and faith says, O if I could but call the Lord mine; that is what faith wants. Well dear friends, as the Holy Ghost is with you, as He is with me, this will be our aim, to run, not loiter; run with patience trusting God, leaning on Him, following Him, believing Him, trusting in Him.

To trust Him endeavour, the work is His Own  
He makes the believer, and gives him his crown

Well my believing friends, God help us to hold fast to Himself; to believe in hope against hope; to believe in opposition to all that may contradict God. Mind that; whatever contradicts God in you, in me, must be wrong, and may we be enabled constantly to reject whatever the wicked principle of unbelief may say to us. "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us". The prize that is set before us, the prize is this, God for your God; Christ for your Redeemer; the Holy Ghost for your Teacher; heaven for your inheritance.

AMEN.