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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
on Sunday morning 10 June 1923

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 that is 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."

This important word and exhortation containing a remarkable example for us to follow is addressed to people weary under affliction and exposed to danger, and particularly exposed to a forgetfulness of God's Word, to His children who are under His hand. "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children 'My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him, for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.'" And it would seem that the sin against which they had been warned in an earlier part of the Epistle was that which the Apostle would particularly warn them against - unbelief - and he sets before them wonderful examples of its opposite - faith. A noble army of believers who, in great afflictions, were enabled to hold fast to their God and obtain victories and die in faith. And these examples are spoken of in a figure; a cloud, a great cloud, a cloud encompassing them. We are compassed about with it. A speaking cloud, a cloud of witnesses, bearing witness for God. Testimony on testimony that the faith He gave them stood them in good stead, and they were enabled to hold on, to endure, as seeing Him who is invisible. Faith is a great grace. One needs

particular wisdom to speak rightly of it. It is a great grace. It seems to me that it is a mercy to be enabled to divide rightly in this important matter; not to ascribe to faith anything that does not properly belong to it, nor to take from it the prerogative that God has given to it, for faith has a great prerogative. What belongs to God in respect to faith is its being; we are saved by faith through grace and that not of ourselves, that is, the faith is not of ourselves; it has its being entirely from God; it has no part of human nature, so to speak, in it; it is wholly a creation by the Holy Spirit in a sinner's heart; the gift of God. It is called the door of faith. Then hath God opened to the Gentiles the door of faith whereby they should see how God can be approached. This also is part of it, its nature, that all its actings must stand in the power of its Creator. Naturally we live and move and have our being in God, and spiritually it is so. Every motion of faith is in the power of God. Now these two things I hope the Lord will help us constantly to hold, that if we have faith, God has given it to us, created it in us; that we neither possessed it nor wanted to possess it naturally, but unbelief, that is a perpetual turning from God with all its sad consequences, is all we have. But if we have faith it is as much the creation and gift of God in and to us as our being is His gift, His creation. But faith, thus given, has its own blessed prerogative, its privilege, and its privilege is this; first, that it pleases God. We cannot please Him by nature for "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin". But this faith which He has given pleases Him, gives Him pleasure, because it goes against nature; it gives Him credit for what He has said; this pleases Him better than rivers of oil and forests for fire, than all the beasts of the earth for sacrifice; better than the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul. O if we have faith we have that principle in our hearts which does really please God. It may not be strong enough to make us know it lives in us; it may not be strong enough at times to obtain any victory, but it gives pleasure to God. Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. Ah sinner though you go to him with all the guilt and pollution of your nature, and all the wickedness of your life and

heart, and though you go with that feeling that you only deserve that He should banish you from His presence, yet the faith that takes you to Him, the faith that enables you to plead the blood and the righteousness and the Priesthood and the intercession of the Lord Jesus, gives Him pleasure; it pleases God. And secondly it is the prerogative of faith to hold fast to, and look on, invisible things. The things which are seen, we see, we look at, we are affected by them. But God, who is not seen, is seen by faith. O it is a great thing to see invisible things. The Apostle Paul endured his afflictions this way. He said "Our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal". He is a remarkable person who can see unseen things because he has faith. Moses endured as seeing Him who is invisible, and thus all things became possible to Moses. A right esteem of things was possible to him. Because he had faith he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; could not have done it without faith. Gold, silver, honours, a place in Pharaoh's court, the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, these were his riches, together with the wealth of learning which he had, but he esteemed them not, compared with the esteem which he placed upon the reproach of Christ. Without faith he could not have done that. And he endured the afflictions that came to him, the burdens of a rebellious people, the difficulties of the wilderness, the perpetual murmuring of the people; now hungry, now thirsty and in difficulties. He endured all, as seeing Him who is invisible to nature's eye, to nature's intellect, to nature's perception. Ah if you have faith my friends you are highly favoured. A believing man is a great man, not in himself, but in Him in whom he believes. And therefore the third prerogative of faith is this, that it gets victories, yes, many victories. It holds fast to God, and believes there are no impossibilities with Him and therefore overcomes the world. "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God". That faith wont let Him go, though a legal heart of unbelief be in us; that faith cleaves to Him. Though there are innumerable

difficulties in approaching Him, though there is that worst of all sins, a natural abominable aversion to Him and to His heavenly throne, yet that blessed faith will cleave to Him and say to all opposition and entreaties of the flesh - "Hinder me not". "Entreat me not to leave Thee nor from following after Thee" Faith sees Christ to be first and last, the beginning and the ending. It sees Him to have all needed goodness and grace and mercy and forgivenesses and justification. And, seeing these things in Him, she goes to Him for them and struggles through difficulties and labours against many evils to get there. It is faith's perogative to rightly esteem the Son of God, to make confession of Him - "Thou art the Christ the Son of God". Faith makes this confession, nothing else could do. And it is this faith which the Apostle celebrates so wonderfully in the 11th chapter of this Epistle. You, reading it, may perceive by God's mercy to you, what this faith did in and for those in whom it dwelt and wrought. Why, if we had it (all these sayings of the Geologists, who tell us that millions of years were necessary for the formation of the earth as we see it, as they dig it here and there) faith says "We understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear". The notional error of these men is this, they deny by inference most fair omnipotence. Why could not the Lord make a thing as you see it in a moment without requiring millions of years to form it as you see it? Now faith will give God the honour of His omnipotence. And as I have said and will say it again faith will make a ploughman a far better scientist than all the learning and research of this world. I do not speak against learning nor against research, but there is a science falsely so called, and whatever derogates from the Word of God, whatever makes it seem that He could not do this and could not do that, may the Lord help us by faith entirely to discard, and hate. The examples of faith are in the 11 chapter set before us figuratively as a cloud, a great cloud, a great cloud surrounding us, as if, on every side, in every case that may arise, every doubt that may come up into our minds, this cloud has a voice saying - God is great; God is sufficient; God is full; God can do for you what you need; God can help you out of this trouble; God can subdue for you that lion. He can quench for you that

fire; He can bring you from that flood; He can raise the dead. God can do all this. If Pharaoh and all his power should be against you, if you see Him who is invisible, then the sight of Him will say - God is sufficient. It is great to hear what this cloud says; it is great to hear it speak and speak in our hearts. It is to this cloud, this great cloud of witnesses, which it might be good for us to carefully read often, that the Apostle calls attention and he says we are compassed about with it and therefore your difficulties, your weights, and the sin which doth so easily beset you, lay aside. Lay, them down, put them off. It is a great matter this that is brought before us; two opposing voices as it were, contrary each to the other. One saying in us - this that I have that is so pleasant to me; this that I possess; this treasure, this family, this business, this possession, this heritage, all so pleasing, I can't part with it, it is too dear; I cannot let it go. And the Word of God says, contrary to that voice - If you love father or mother, husband or wife, house or land more than Me, ye cannot be My disciple. And this cloud of witnesses says the same. These people left, laid aside, everything of that kind. They esteemed not the treasures of this world, the treasures of Egypt, the pleasures of sin for a season. They laid them aside; they looked to God; they went to Him for strength; they saw the invisible One; they believed in Him and held Him fast. And therefore, you who are followers of them who believed and who have inherited the promises without seeing them actually; as you have seen them, lay these things aside. They are weights, they are burdens, they are like a long flowing robe which, not girded up nor taken off, will hinder you in every step; will entangle your feet, entangle your affections and your hearts and your minds and your thoughts. And these runners in the race which are recorded here in the preceding chapter were able to put these garments off, to lay these burdens aside, to think nothing of them as compared with what was before them. Lay aside every weight. Listen to the witnesses, hear what they have to say; they had this to say - God was first; this to say, that the weights which would have hindered them in their race they were able by faith to put off, to lay aside. Now my dear friends, you know what some of your own weights are, if you do not know all of them. You profess God, you look to Him,

you seek His face, but you are greatly hindered. You are grievously stumbled at times. There are certain things about you, certain matters in providence which you possess and they are a hindrance. And I need only instance in one or two particulars to show to you the hindrances that these weights are. When your minds are burdened with them do they not hinder you in prayer. If you go to the throne of grace clogged and burdened with some things that your affections entwine around, which you are not honestly willing to part with, there you have an effect of these words, a sad carnalising, bondaging, hindering burden; a weight. You will find when this is the case that there is an insubmission to God's will in your spirit; you have got some Zoar of which you say - spare it, is it not a little one. Lord I cannot part with this. And you perhaps have never been able to sing these words which we sing sometimes in our service

Is there a thing beneath the sun  
That strives with Thee my heart to share  
Ah tear it hence

It is a hard prayer and you need a good deal of grace to pray it honestly. You need a strong faith to pray that prayer. Look around, look into your families, your pleasures, look into your business, there is this pleasant thing, can you part with it; there is that pleasure, can you give it up. Father, mother, husband, wife, brother, sister, house, land. Are they loved comparatively speaking more than the Lord? Are they more in your affections? Do they occupy more of your attention, your thought, and your love and your admiration than the Lord Himself? Now, says the Apostle, look at these witnesses, look at that great cloud and no matter which way you turn with regard to this weight or that, the cloud will speak to you - lay it aside, lay it aside. Ah it is no easy thing to go to heaven. Nobody gets there by good works but nobody gets there by lying on the sluggard's bed. Nobody gets there without the blood and righteousness of Christ, the only fitness and title, but depend upon it, according to Scripture, nobody takes the world with him. And that part of the world which we possess, which we try to take with us in this journey, through this wilderness, that part will

be a dead weight and a hindrance.

So this Scripture has very great importance. Lay aside every weight. Every weight, not this little weight to be kept? The Apostle, by the Holy Ghost, says every weight. It behoves us my brethren to examine ourselves. The Scripture does lay upon the saints of the Most High this, examine yourselves. Covering things over will never improve matters. O the many weights that some of us have and the unwillingness there is in us to part with them. Let conscience speak to you, and when it speaks about this weight or that God give you grace not to turn a deaf ear, but listen to it. He who browbeats his conscience in any matter respecting eternity will find that God in some way will go out against him and that very weight, which has pleased his heart so much, shall become a bitterness to him; that thing which he has loved so intensely and looked on so intently and lovingly will become a scourge and a grief of heart, and he will find his folly bearing bitter fruit.

And the next thing is "and the sin which doth so easily beset us". This sin you have spoken of in the Scripture variously. "Put off the old man with his deeds". The corruptions of a fallen nature here gathered up as it were into one word "sin", and the word is put these off, lay these aside. No man can lay aside his natural corruption, no man can lay aside that vileness which belongs to him, but the working, the vile working of this sin, of these corruptions, the Apostle Paul here speaks of. He himself had this conflict, himself knew that he could not put off the old man as to its being. He found it was always a hindrance to him, and cried out "O wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from the body of this death". Now I will try, if the Lord will help me, and I have asked Him to do it, being greatly afraid of darkening counsel by words without knowledge, I will try to show how this is laid aside, the weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us. And first of all it is laid aside whenever you find in your heart as it were a start with horror from the very fear, and perhaps even of the prospect of indulging it, when your very heart rises up against it, in hatred to it, and you can say, sincerely say, you would rather

die than sin. When honest conscience works that way and by faith takes you to God for help, that is laying aside the weight; that is laying aside the sin which doth so easily beset you. Save me O God, my spirit cries, and on Thy gracious word relies; save me from sin, save me from pride that angel form, which swells a poor, weak sinful worm, that moves the hands, the tongue, the eyes, and often takes me by surprise. That is one way of putting it off. Put off the old man with his deeds and put on the new man. As the elect of God put on the new man; be renewed in the spirit of your minds. Who can tell the cries and groans that a child of God finds in himself rising to God with grief of heart lest he should do the things which are within him, and to which he is sorely tempted. We read of Enoch walking with God; he did it by faith. "By faith Enoch walked with God." And this was not a secluding of himself from all things in this world. No, he lived as other men naturally; he had his family about him; he had his concerns; but in all, he walked with God. And if you have faith you will sometimes enter into that; with the very things that you are troubled with, the things that give you pleasure, which, allowed, are snares, these very things, in them you will walk with God by going to Him for His gracious help, His merciful power. You will go to Him for all that He has promised in Jesus Christ and faith will see the rule by which He can, and you hope will, supply your needs; not even the rule of your asking, that is great, but the rule is this, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus; that goes beyond all our ability to ask, all our capacity to think, even to think of God and to ask of Him. It goes beyond all; and a man of God with this life to contend with in various matters; a man of God with his family, his business, with his pleasures; a man of God with his sins, his lusts, his pride, his abominations, may walk with God and does walk with God when, with grief of heart, and fervent desires to be right, he goes to the throne of God's heavenly grace. Do you understand this? I believe some do. Do you feel sometimes that you must lie down and die if the Lord does not open His ear to you and enable you to tell Him your griefs and your sorrows and pray to Him that He will help you day by day. Another way of laying these things aside, the weight of sin, is this, honest, humble confession of them as being hateful things,

from which you desire to be delivered. The death, the slothfulness, and the ignorance, the benumbed state of your spirit, your aversion to all that is good and gracious, the many things that arise within you, the enmity, the hypocrisy, the malice, the guile and all other things which the Scripture condemns, and which you condemn, as possessing; these things you confess. The Lord only knows the bitter tears that these things occasion God's people, and the strong cries and petitions that go out of their hearts in their confessions. Confess, confess, confess, that is the great thing and He who can sincerely confess his sins before Him who sees the heart, is a good man, and in confessing these things sincerely he is laying them aside. His intention is in his confessions; his hatred is in his confessions. He has that, what may be called, universal hatred to sin as sin, and would not indulge it. It is not according to his mind that ever he does this or that; he has these things but he confesses them to His God and would forsake them. He would be quite straight with that Scripture "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall prosper. He that covereth his sins shall have no mercy" Now a child of God is saved from covering his sin; he lays it out before his God; he comes before the best friend, the Friend of sinners, Jesus Christ, with this humble sincere confession, and he can sometimes say to the Lord, I would not do it; it is not myself; it is not with the consent of my mind; it is not with the consent of my judgment; it is not with the consent of my affections that I do these things. Lord save me from doing them. Here is a confession that goes up with acceptance to God. A confession that is only in part, a confession that, while you are making it, is belied by your glances at this and that sin that you fain would keep, such a confession has no acceptance. But a confession that brings out these criminals and would see their execution gladly, that confession is acceptable, as it goes to God through the atonement of Jesus Christ.

A third way of putting these things off is this. By cleaving to the very Person and cross of Jesus Christ. No virtue but from Him. No reigning sin can <sup>be</sup> snatched but by His work in the soul. No efficacy in tears and prayer or anything else,

apart from the Lord Jesus. Now my friends, come to this. Is Father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, house, land, more than the cross of Christ to you? This is a test to which conscience will sometimes bring you. Now true faith has this one object in view. The proper object of faith for the soul's salvation is Christ and His cross. Christ and His cross will ever be, under the Spirit's gracious teaching, the proper object of faith. And while you are cleaving to Him, are you indulging sin? Are you gladly and affectionately looking at some weight, a thing in itself not a weight to you, but a weight through grace. Are you looking at the two together? No, while Christ is in view other things go down. While He is seen by precious faith He is esteemed, and nothing else is esteemed comparatively. All the world dies to us when we look to Christ and there is a kind of sweetness in dying at the cross of Christ. Dying to self, dying to this thing and to that by the death of Christ is very sweet, beautiful. Lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset you. Lay these things aside in these ways. O Christ, He is the Friend of sinners; He is the light of life; He is the sweetness of God; He is the reconciliation of a sinner to God; He is the hope of a sinner for eternity; He is the strength of faith to fight; He is the warmth of love to love; He is everything; and, so perceived by faith, the sinner cleaves to Him. A black sinner cleaving to a pure Christ; an unrighteous person cleaving to Christ, his righteousness; a weak worm, cleaving to divine omnipotence as it is in Christ; a poor, ignorant thing, holding Christ who is the wisdom of God. You cannot so cleave to Him and not, at the same time, lay aside the weight and the sin that does so easily beset you. Of course most men would say, some here may be saying, why the things you speak of as weights, they are all pleasures; yes, pleasures to us, but weights to a soul which is going to heaven. Burdens to a man who would fain have God for his God, Christ for his Saviour and heaven for his inheritance.

Let me name one more way in which a sinner lays aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset him, namely, love. Love of the Spirit, love of Him who begat, love of His dearly beloved Son, love to Jesus Christ. This will put aside all other

loves. I speak comparatively of course, for the gospel wont make the husband love his wife less, nor his children but O the supreme object is Jesus Christ and there are moments when the child of God can say, when his heart does say to the Lord, that he loves Him above all else.

Compared with Christ in all beside  
No comeliness I see  
The one thing needful dearest Lord  
Is to be one with Thee

Ah sinner would you have Him, would you be united to Him, would you be in heaven with Him, would you fain bear His image here, walk with Him as Enoch did? Then that love that prompts these desires, that love that makes Him so great, so wonderful, so high, so beautiful, so glorious to you, that love will move you to lay aside every weight and say to all things - hinder me not, hinder me not. Native land and friends were as nothing to Ruth. "Entreat me not to leave thee nor from following after thee". "Hearken O daughter" says the Lord to His church, "Hearken O daughter, give ear." What to? To this. Forget thy father's house, forsake thine own people, leave them all. O but nature says I cannot, nature says I will not. Says the Lord, so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty for He is thy Lord and worship thou Him. And faith responds - Enough my gracious Lord, take me, bless me, let all else go. Christ and His cross together will do. Christ and the world will never do, and we shall prove it as we are God's people. What have you given up for Christ? Everything if you have really had a sweet and gracious knowledge of Him given to you, everything. And yet nature, so strong, will be always cleaving to these very things which, by faith, have been laid aside and given up. Wherefore, he says, "Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, seeing that the Old Testament believers had Jesus Christ in view, and that their testimonies are gathered up so wonderfully by the Spirit in this chapter, so as to form a great cloud, a cloud who shall bear testimony to Him in whom they all believed, on whom they all depended and through whom they all obtained victory, lay aside, follow their example, walk in their footsteps. They laid

aside their weights, they laid aside the sin that did so easily beset them, they ran with patience the race that was set before them. Now says Paul, be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. May your attention be gathered to this by the Holy Spirit. May He open it to you as that high and blessed privilege which is given to every saint, to be a believer; to have that faith that reckons God above all else, and more than all else; that faith that cleaves to Him, enables the possessor of it to esteem His reproach greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. O my brethren I do not know how you may feel individually about it, but perhaps you may say with me, we are poor believers after all. We have not yet resisted against sin unto blood. Perhaps your consciences may carry you to many days and many spots and many circumstances of which you may say, there we indulged the old man; there was an unwillingness to lay a great weight aside; there was an unwillingness to put off the old man. There is repentance for such people, and there is forgiveness, blessed be God, if we are not in Esau's case. Blessed be God if we find a place for repentance, God giving it to us, and causing us to approach Him with humble confession and fervent petition that He would pardon our sin and take us for His inheritance. May He command such a blessing to rest upon us.

AMEN.