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Sermon preached by Mr J. K. Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 11 March 1928

TEXT: HEBREWS 12 verses 15 and 16

"Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright"

This wonderful Epistle contains in the first part of it, doctrine, particularly the doctrine of the Person of Christ in His Person as the Son of God appointed by His Father to be the heir of all things; in His priesthood, in the excellency of that priesthood above the priesthood of the Aaronic line; in His one offering for sin, by which offering He put away sin, perfecting for ever them that are sanctified. One thing should be noticed by us. If we carefully read Holy Scripture, this must be evident to us, that always, when the Lord is addressing His people, He lays the foundation of doctrine. Always regard doctrine. If you are loose in respect of doctrine, you will be loose with regard to experience, and certainly weak in practice. You can be no stronger before the Lord than you are strong in doctrine. Weak there, you are strong nowhere else. I do not say that every child of God has an equal knowledge of doctrine, but that there is laid in every soul the substance of doctrine and that precedes, and is a foundation for, experience, and experience always has an influence upon practice. If you know but little of God, you will care but little to please Him, but if you know Him in some gracious way of manifestation of Him to your souls, then you will want to please Him, and the way to please Him is to honour Him. "They that honour Me, I will honour." And to honour Him is to believe in Him as He reveals Himself. Having laid the foundation of doctrine, and as you will perceive, there is an experience. The Apostle in the latter part of the Epistle takes up exhortation to practice. Practice is a good thing and is, as I have just said, the fruit of experience. This chapter opens

remarkably - Wherefore, seeing we, these Hebrew christians, suffering at this time from persecution, christians probably in Jerusalem and in and about Judea, were compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses, and we saw it - "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." The great cloud of witnesses, we have in the preceeding chapter, as indeed, speaking generally, throughout the whole word of God, and these witnesses all unite in saying God is faithful, and where He gives faith He finishes it. They all say, trouble, persecution of every sort and kind cannot extinguish faith, cannot blot God out from the view of faith, cannot overcome gracious believing resistance. Do we see this great cloud of witnesses? Do we hear what they have to say? Do we see them believing? Do we see Moses, enduring as seeing Him who is invisible? Despising all the wealth of Egypt and preferring to suffer affliction with the people of God before the enjoyment of sin for a season. Do we see this blessed people suffering persecution, poor, despised, persecuted, sawn asunder, hunted, wandering about in sheepskins and goatskins, in dens and in caves of the earth, of whom the world was not worthy? Listen to what they say. There is a city and we are seeking it. It hath foundations, the Builder of it is God. They all say - It is worth all suffering and no suffering can at all be looked upon as a price for it. They say - the world is as nothing, a vapour is our life. They all say - God is faithful, by whom we have been called and He will fulfil in us His testimony of His Son. We are called to the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ. My brethren, these witnesses are the saints of the Most High God, and they tell us distinctly that God is faithful and will not suffer His people to be tempted above that they are able but will with every temptation make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it, and that eventually all His people, loved and redeemed, shall come to that inheritance which is reserved for them in heaven. And this chapter, this opening, comes to chastised people, sons, and it looks at their dispensations and sees them ready, either to despise chastening, or to faint under it. Probably some of these Jewish christians, these Hebrews were, under the strain of persecution, weak and

showed weakness, and the Spirit moves the servant of the Most High God, Paul, to write to them in respect of that, their position, their manifested weakness, and says to them - My sons, you have forgotten, you have forgotten God's word to you. "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." What a disposition this is. What child of God could say he has it not? Whenever trouble comes, one or the other of these two things named will be sure to come up. Either a despising, which is nothing but as it were lifting the head up and calling into requisition a natural spirit of courage, saying we will bear it. The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity. You notice it; you will probably not be long in a trouble before that spirit will show itself and you will be ready to say I will get through as well as I can, or, if that does not come up, this probably will, you will be ready to faint. I have provoked the Lord, you may say, and He has sent this trouble and it may bring me to my end and instead of, according to faith, saying "Speak Lord for thy servant heareth" there is a disposition to say I shall never lift up my head again. The Lord has afflicted me in His anger, He has led me and brought me into darkness and not into light. He has filled my mouth with gravel stones, He has broken me all to pieces. I shall lift my head up no more. This is fainting. And if you observe you will discover this, this will be like a block in the way of prayer; it will stop the mouth of prayer; it will fill you with self pity; it will make you think you are hardly dealt with. "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me". This will be your language, this will be your spirit. And here God speaks against it, warns us against it. Dear friends in affliction, notice this. Do not lift your heads up and God grant you may not faint. Hear what He says, listen to the charming word, the sweet name He gives "My son" and begin to reason in the way of faith with yourself. Of whom does the Lord take notice, with whom does He take pains? Does He notice strangers, does He take pains with aliens? He says "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth"

Bastards may escape the rod
Sunk in earthly vain delight
But the true-born child of God
Must not, would not if he might

Thus reasoning you will be enabled to wait on God in the trouble whatever it may be, for "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth". And so the day will come when each chastened son will bless the Lord for the rod, as used by wisdom and mercy and love. Does the Lord take trouble with you? O what a sign of His kindness and love to you. Does He hedge up your way, when you are disposed to turn away from Him? What mercy that is. Does He speak a cutting rebuke into your conscience? What love that flows from. Despise not the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him. If ye endure chastening. Well, people say, of course we will get through it. Yes, to live in trouble, to live through trouble, is one thing. To endure it, receive it, accept it, and wait on God in it, is another thing. God may open to you the difference between living through a trouble and enduring chastening. I hope never to forget how many years ago He spoke this to me and made me understand the difference between just simply living in and through a trouble and enduring it as His dealing. If ye endure chastening; if you do not turn your head aside; if you do not despise it; if you do not lift your head up and say I will endure it as well as I can, everybody has trouble and why should not I have some trouble. But if, on the contrary, you say Lord let me hear Thy voice in it. Make known to me Thy mercy by means of it. Sanctify it to my soul. Bring me nearer to Thee by means of it. If thus you go before the Lord, there is an enduring chastening. If you endure it. Meditate on this, dear friends. it may well pay you to do it. Look at the word "If ye endure chastening", bear it, submit to it, seek God in it, and feel His mercy, as well as the need of it, then it will evidence this to you "God dealeth with you as with sons" "What son is he whom the Father chasteneth not." The kindness of God in afflicting us, we shall never be sufficiently thankful for. Beware of being allowed to wax fat and kick. Beware of being allowed to multiply altars to yourselves. Blessed be God that He has taken such trouble as He

has with some of us.

Then the Apostle speaks a very evident truth, and yet a very little known truth. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous" This is naturally understood, but how little it is understood spiritually. "Nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby". This, rightly entered into, will lead us to examine our conduct in trouble. How it affects us, what influence it has on us. Wither our steps move, the trend of our spirit, whether we submit, whether we are enabled to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. Watch your spirits when you are in trouble. "Nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby". And this may say to you, do not expect the trouble to finish in a day, it may open a dispensation more or less lengthy. But it will also say when the Lord brings it to an issue, then you will have peaceable fruit, then you will enjoy God's mercy in it. Then you will thank Him for His love in sending it to you; then you will be ready to kiss the rod and bless the hand that used it so wisely, mixing love and severity, and giving you to realise that He cared for you. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore and repent." Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees. Courage dissolved, hands hanging down, confidence, as an issue, gone almost. Now lift these hands up.

And this leads to the text, "Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled". A very gracious, searching, important word, spoken, as this Epistle all through speaks, to professors, professing christians, professing the grace of God, not to the world. I pray not for the world. The scripture is addressed to the saints of the professing people of God. It speaks to them and here it tells them to look diligently, enquire closely, seriously, searchingly into the

question as to whether you have the grace of God. The word fail, does not mean fall from. It is in the margin, or fall from, but it was an unwise observation to make by those who made it when they compiled this reference. It does not, in the scripture, it does not, in the language used by the Apostle, mean fall from or lose. It means lack, lest you should be lacking, wanting, and it should thus be made manifest that you never possessed that which you professed to possess. That is the literal meaning of the word fail of the grace of God. And it becomes a very solemn question, and should be with us, as to how we stand in respect of this. Looking diligently, means, as I said, looking closely, enquiring seriously into the matter, and this will bring us to our own consciences, to our state, whether we have received what we profess, from God, or have simply taken it up in a way more or less of easy, comfortable profession. In the day when the Apostle wrote this Epistle, wrote it to people who made a profession, it was not easy to make a profession, but it is quite clear from the scripture that many did profess even in those days of cruel persecution, what they had not received from the Lord, and there were doubtless evidences among them which the Spirit of God noticed and inspired the Apostle Paul to speak of in this Epistle. For instance, in an earlier chapter, he says "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is", this probably arising from persecution, more or less, cruel, and inflicted on the people, being manifest, so that the consideration of what it might cost them to meet with the saints had an effect upon some of them - "as the manner of some is." I have been told by one of his hearers, and particular friends, that William Tiptaft of Abingdon used sometimes to say in opening his sermon - How many of you would be here if you knew that it would cost you a whipping in the market place tomorrow?" Some of these christian Hebrews were affected by persecution, and it had had the influence of causing them to dissociate themselves from the saints of God and public worship. Be careful of this, not that you will be persecuted at present, but be careful, and whenever God puts the opportunity before you, into your hand, as it were, to attend where the ministry of the truth is, do not neglect to take advantage of it. Mind that, "not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together." Be careful always to use and

take advantage of the means God puts into your hands. If you do not, the day may come when you would give all you possessed to meet with a few of the Lord's people. The day will come when you will be in that scripture "I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the Lord," when men shall walk from the north to the east, seeking it and shall not find it, when the young men shall faint.

Looking diligently into the state of your mind with respect to God. Let that be our first examination, the first thing to look into. How stands the case with us? How is it with you? Day by day, how is it with you? I do not speak of the occasional, or even frequent, changes of feeling that you are subject to, that you may be again and again deploring. But, taking the case as a whole, speaking of the trend of your minds and spirits, how is it with you with respect to God? May I liken it to an appetite. What appetite have you for God? It is a great thing to answer to Christ's word "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness" Hunger? It is a natural thing. Is it natural for you, after that new life that God gives to His people, to hunger for Him? It is not more natural for us to have an appetite for food than it is natural to the life of God in the soul to be hungering and thirsting after God, after righteousness. It may be that you may sometimes accuse yourselves of having nothing more than a kind of spasmodic exercise, that very often you are dull and flat and have little or no moving. And then there comes a change and up your spirit rises and because that does not last, it may be with you that you say to yourselves, surely this spasmodic religion does not come from heaven. But now look closely into it, look diligently, examine it as well as you can, as closely as you can. Is it really always so? Is there not an undercurrent, or, in that looking, is there no undercurrent of desire, longing, panting, hungering and thirsting for God, or do you fail, lack this? "Lest any man fail" Because it is a gracious thing, it is the grace of God to give and maintain an appetite. There is a habit of hunger in nature, and I believe there is a habit of hunger in the soul. God gives it. Where He gives life there is just that

with the sinner - O had I but God; if I but knew Him; if He were with me; if He were my God. O if I had but the Spirit of God in me to be a well of water springing up into everlasting life. O if I only knew that the Son of God dwelt in me. There is an undercurrent of these, a habit of this looking diligently lest we should fail of it. You cannot get it; you cannot work it in yourselves; it is the grace of God that gives this, and where it is it will never die. Blessed be God, we, some of us, have to say, have this appetite, this hunger and thirst. We cannot be turned aside really by all the aversion, enmity, ignorance, deadness, coldness and corruption of our fallen nature from this great thing, this hunger for God.

The second point I would bring before you is this - Looking diligently into the kind of faith you have, into the kind of faith, for I suppose that everyone here has faith, a faith, I judge, that if anyone were to come to any of you and say the Bible was not inspired, you would be at once ready to say but I believe it is. If one should say, there is no Trinity, you would say at once, I believe in God the Father, in God the Son, and in God the Holy Ghost. And if one should say there is no eternity of punishment, you might quote that passage, from the passage, "These shall go into everlasting fire". There is a kind of faith in man, in men here. I have a kind of faith. I do not doubt it. I do not doubt this Bible. I do not doubt there is a God in heaven. I do not doubt that there is a hell for the wicked, nor do I question that there is a heaven for the righteous. But what kind of faith is this? Is it from heaven, or do I simply believe as James says "Thou believest and thou doest well. The devils also believe and tremble" Now look at your faith, look closely into it. How shall I know if it is God given faith, precious faith, as Peter calls it? We shall not find it out by looking, as it were abstractedly, at it. We shall find it out if we are led to search into the question, by seeing what it does in us. What will faith do? If you have it from God, if it be the faith of God's elect, the faith of God's operation, what will it do? It will do this first - bring you, bring me, to a solemn apprehension of the Being of God and a trembling at His word. True faith is not a light-hearted thing, a frivolous thing. Its

first and its last act, so to speak, is an apprehension of God. I was stopped instantly from worldliness by an apprehension of God. That apprehension has never left me, though often it has been as if it had never been given to me, but there it is. If you have true faith, you have some apprehension of God. We shall not know much while we are here, but we shall know something. You cannot comprehend God. God can never be fully defined by any human divination. If you could fully define God there would be no mystery in Him, but He is the Eternal God and faith apprehends Him as such. And this leads a sinner into some knowledge of what He is as a sinner. And this is by the Holy Ghost - the faith that apprehends Jesus Christ. "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifested in the flesh, seen of angels, justified in the Spirit, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into heaven". O, and to see this Person, this Jesus, is very great. And this will bring you to confess sin. A christian is a person who confesses sin all his life, and the more faith he has, the deeper his repentance is. The more he knows of God, the more ashamed he is of himself as a sinner. And the closer he gets to Christ the more he hates himself and abhors his sins. And the more he sees of the loveliness of the Lord Jesus, the more hateful is himself to himself. And this faith brings a sinner to deal with God. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee". I can have nothing to do with others. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee". Close dealing. "And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee". Very solemn it is to come to that. And this faith will make you humbly acknowledge the need of chastisement and thank God for it. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him". This faith puts the world into, so to speak, a very small compass, and makes it a very empty thing and makes God great, and full and sufficient and beautiful and glorious. Look at this, what is your faith? Hast thou faith? Sinner, hast thou faith, the faith of God's elect, the faith of His operation, precious faith? If you have, I will tell you one thing, you will never be put off with no, by the Lord. When you seek life, you will never, never be put off. He may be silent, but you will press the case. He may even discourage you, yet you will press the case, because He will draw you while even

He seems to be putting you back. Do you deal with God? I use the word deal because you can easily apprehend it naturally. You know what it is to deal with men. Have you dealings with God? To deal with Him is to ask for His things and perhaps you may see sometimes that word in the Corinthians - "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ. The bread which we bless, is it not the communion of the body of Christ," and that will put before your faith the great object, the centre of faith, of love, of hope, the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. And, when you are in trouble, this faith will take you to God, and ask Him to bless it to you. And sometimes you will see, better is it to be under chastening than to be free from chastening. Faith works wonders; faith works miracles; faith holds to God, hangs about the cross, hankers after the Lord Jesus. Have you got it? Try, if you can, to make a distinction between comfort and faith. There is a distinction to be made between comfort and faith. Faith lives in flood and flame; faith holds the soul in every hour of trouble; faith goes to God; faith will believe when there seems nothing to believe but the naked fact that God is, in His Son. Have you got that faith? "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." There may be that and no comfort. Comfort is given by an immediate operation of the Spirit. It comes, so to speak, as a complement of faith. It is the immediate gift of the Spirit revealing Christ, giving some sense of interest in Him, of nearness to Him; of His blood as cleansing from sin; of His righteousness as justifying the soul; of His power as sustaining the sinner. Ah many an hour and many a day do the saints believe when they have no comfort. Affliction is not joyous but grievous. Look into this, have you got this faith? Can you hope that you have got the faith of God's elect, peculiar to them, the faith of God's operation? Now one word here before I sit down, this faith, this divinely given faith, is a prevailing spirit. Jacob wrestled and had power over the angel and prevailed. If you have this faith, the day will come when it will go in a most direct act to the Son of God, Jesus Christ and Him crucified. When, if a thousand devils in your breast, if a life of sin, if all the guilt of your life were with you, and howling and raging and raving against you, this faith would cast one prevailing look on the Son of God crucified,

and bring comfort and peace into your soul. It will eye the Saviour, and God will take a very gracious notice of this. As you honour the Son, God will honour you in it. You may say I get little or nothing, O but the time will come when God, who gave you that faith, and was delighted with the working of it in your soul, on your sin, will honour you and fill you with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Ghost. Great is it to have faith that will take no denial, plead, argue, urge and wrestle and again and again go to the throne of God's heavenly grace for the blessing.

Now let me in conclusion this morning put it to you again. Look diligently, examine closely, anxiously, carefully, as to whether you have got this faith. Do not regard the question in an abstract way, but look at it in respect of its working, in respect of God, and you may, if you so look at it by the help of the Spirit come to a comfortable conclusion that, though often destitute of peace and stability, you have a real faith which will eventually prevail and overcome the world. As John says, "who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God."

AMEN.