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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 29 July 1928

HEBREWS 12 V 15

"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"

This is a continuation of the subject of last Wednesday when I addressed you on that Scripture: "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest....." According to Scripture it has always been seen that many name God's Name who do not know Him; many start on pilgrimage who do not reach heaven; many disciples have there been who, after a time, have gone back and walked no more with Him and so like real disciples have these people been that Apostles have been deceived. Ungodly men crept into Apostolic churches, and if that were so, if, in such a day, with such ministers, such discernment, such authority, what of today, when the eye of the church is all but closed, when her ear also is nearly closed, and when there are but few and feeble communications apparently made by God to men. What a solemn thing it is to profess religion. The universal effect of man's dying is before us, and we must needs die; Scripture reveals the immortality of man, the responsibility of man under the law, his accountability for all his actions and his thoughts. It reveals also a heaven given to some, a hell deserved by all. It reveals likewise one only way to escape from the wrath to come. Now we, this morning, are faced with that revelation. Whether we face it, look at it, are concerned about it, is another matter. In this Epistle, the Lord Jesus Christ, as our great High Priest, is revealed; His precious atonement is insisted on; the perfection of the church by one offering is distinctly set forth. A great cloud of witnesses is before us in the chapter preceding that from which our text is taken and we are exhorted, as professors we are exhorted, to attend to the testimony of this great cloud of witnesses. They distinctly tell us that the way to heaven is rough, difficult, dangerous. Not so with respect to God; the way to heaven and heaven itself cannot be made more sure than God has made it by promise and by oath; there is no

peradventure in that particular. But to a sinner, a weak believer, very ignorant in many regards, particularly knowing little of God, to such a person O the dangers, the difficulties, the deaths, and especially from the deceit of the human heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Now says the Apostle to you Hebrews I address this exhortation. Look diligently, take a very particular look, examine closely, lest you should, while making a profession of God, fail, have not, lack, entirely lack, His grace, and this belongs to us, to this congregation. In a way we profess to believe in God; we receive the testimony of the Scriptures; we believe, as a congregation, in the infallibility of the Scriptures, that what they say is absolutely, eternally, true. True when it says that the wages of sin is death; when it declares that the gift of God is eternal life; when it says the wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God. "The soul that sinneth it shall die". We are exhorted here then to look diligently lest we should fail of the grace of God. Here are two important matters for us to consider. The first is the grace of God. When, as in this text, God is named without any particular reference to either Person, the whole of Deity is intended, the Eternal God. It is a good rule for us to observe in reading the Scriptures, that when, as in this text, God is absolutely spoken of, the Trinity is to be regarded, so that the grace of God here is to be looked at as the grace of the eternal Trinity, not leaving out one of the Three Persons, each Person possessing of the whole of grace. There is therefore to be noticed first of all God the Father, as possessing grace. Grace, divine favour, not deserved by any creature. No sinner can lay claim to the favour of God. We lie exposed to His just wrath because of sin. Now the favour of God the Father is expressed in Scripture, in the Scripture which I read (Ephesians 1) thus : "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself" This is the love of God, the free love of God; infinite, bestowed wisely and sovereignly, as and where He will. This grace takes in everything that is necessary for the salvation of all interested in this eternal love. It were

presumption for any creature to imagine himself deserving of this, but when it is manifested that every man and woman descending from Adam is fallen deprived, has defaced by his own hand, so to speak, the image of God in which he was created, having brought himself under the curse of the law - "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them" - does it not follow that if any sinner of the world of sinners is saved, is delivered from the condition into which he has brought himself, from the hell he deserved, from the guilt under which he lies, from the curse to which he has exposed himself, it must be absolutely by the free gift of that precious love of God fixed upon him before the world began. Ah it was grace indeed in the Father to choose a sinner, to choose, to speak in Scripture words, a bride for His Son; the church of which He should be the Head, a body that He should have in union with Himself, members to whom He should communicate His life, branches within Himself by vital union with the living vine. O it is grace. I know proud, haughty, ignorant man rejects this. I am sure there is no sinner in this congregation who ever hated or could hate this truth more bitterly than I did, and wonder of wonders it is that God spared me, notwithstanding all the vile expressions to which I gave utterance with reference to this precious doctrine, this grace of the Father, precious grace, undeserved, undesired, unwanted entirely. It is a great, a grand truth, that God loved the world and so loved it as to give His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. As the Apostle John says in His epistle "In this was manifested the love of God to us in that He sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him." "He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all". "When the fulness of the time was come He sent forth His Son made of a woman, made under the law". Having One only Son He sent Him. All these scriptures set forth beautifully the free, eternal love of God to men. He wrote a book of life, the names of His dear ones written in it, and this is the grace of God. His glory is in this; this is His purpose, a purpose of love that is to issue in His glory. "When neither of the children having done good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, it was said unto her the elder shall serve the younger". God, if I may use such a word, has taken great pains in holy Scripture to exclude for ever and ever the pretensions of men to a deserving of this, His love, and every one

to whom it comes in the Spirit's grace, says, "Why me? O why this love to such a sinner?" Each one looks about him and says, I cannot see anyone so wicked as myself, yet this love has fallen to me. The lines indeed of sovereign grace have fallen in pleasant places to the church of the living God. Yes, they are pleasant places where Christ is, where His incarnation is, where His temptation is, and where His suffering is, and where His precious blood, sweating great drops, and where the cross is; and all these pleasant places fall to the saints of the Most High through the grace of the Father. O, my brethren, surely this sometimes shines in your eyes. It is better than gold, more precious than rubies and all the things to be desired are not to be compared to this love of the Father; precious grace. Grace in the origin, grace in the purposes, grace given to subjects that shall be in heaven one day to celebrate it. Now I would say this to you in affection, there is nothing that can do you good, no pursuit you can engage in, nothing you can put your hands to, nothing you can imagine, that can, for blessedness, preciousness, desirableness, be compared to this grace of God the Father, and you believe it. Those of you who are taught of God believe it. However tossed you may be concerning your interest, there is this settled thing at the bottom, you believe in this grace of God.

In the next place there is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ who is very God, the self-existent God, the second Person in the Trinity, in essence one with the Father, in Person distinct from the Father, and, says the Apostle concerning this: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor that ye, through His poverty, might be rich". Now then this grace evidently begins, as to manifestations, with the incarnation of the Son of God. God sent Him; He freely came. "Lo I come" is His own word in the spirit of prophecy in the Psalms. "Lo I come; in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will O God". This Person, the Person of the Son of God, eternally in His Father's bosom said, "Lo I come". He came forth, left so to speak, left His Father's bosom, and flew on wings of willingness and love and grace and pity and mercy, to the womb of the virgin where was prepared for Him a body of which He speaks: "A body hast Thou prepared Me". Thus He speaks in this epistle. And He took this frail nature of ours without its sin into union with His divine Person. If we have faith to believe in the

second Person in the Trinity, if we have faith in the eternal blessedness of the second Person as dwelling in the bosom of His Father, if there has ever been conveyed to our minds a true apprehension of the glory of God as a Trinity, then in that measure we shall be able to apprehend this grace of the Lord Jesus in becoming a poor man, having nowhere to lay His head; a poor man in respect of reputation, for they took away His Name and His honour in the day of His humiliation. Poor in all outward respects was this Lord Jesus, but I apprehend that the greatest part of His poverty you will find in this that "He was made sin", and apparently poor in righteousness. "He was made sin" a mysterious, wondrous, glorious word, never to be fully understood. "He was made sin"; He did no sin, yet "He was made sin". By the taking away by the hand of the Father, the sin of His church from her and laying it on Him, the spotless Son of God, Jesus, became sin. "Ye know" - O what a blessed thing it is to be in that word "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor that ye, through His poverty might be rich." He became, as it were unrighteous, that the unrighteous people given to Him might be made righteous. He became a guilty man by imputation, that guilty men might become just. He became subject to all infirmities, sinless infirmities, and exposed to Satan's temptations, and to sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, and to the humiliation He endured when He was in the Judgment Hall, and to the curse of the law when He was crucified. Poverty? Who understands poverty when poverty is regarded as belonging to the Lord of life and glory? Poverty of spirit is blessed but the poverty of the Lord Jesus in this particular is marvellous, beyond our comprehension. How He, to whom belongeth the cattle upon a thousand hills, the gold and the silver, and men and all creatures, and creation, how He should be poor; that that word poor should ever properly belong to Him as under the imputation of sin. I say this is a mystery; we can never comprehend it. Comprehend we may under the Spirit's gracious teaching. This is grace. O it was grace when He undertook to obey the law for His people who could not obey it because of sin. Grace when He endured the presence of that foul spirit, the devil, in the wilderness and was tempted of him. Grace when He permitted vile men to abuse, to malign and to speak against Him continually, and grace when He prayed that sacred, that wondrous prayer in the 17 John, holding communion with His Father, and praying for all the sheep

given to Him to bring into the one fold, and grace when He endured the cross and despised the shame, when He said "It is finished" and bowed His head and dismissed His spirit. Grace when He suffered Himself to be buried; grace when He rose from the dead; grace when He condescended to manifest Himself by many infallible proofs to His doubting disciples; grace when He entered within the veil in the behalf of His people.

"He passed within the veil
Did on His bosom wear
The worthless names that did prevail
With Him to enter there

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thirdly the grace of the Holy Ghost, that divine Person who is One with the Father and the Son, a distinct Person in the Godhead, who, as the Holy Ghost, has taken on Him to be the minister of righteousness, the revealer of Jesus, the quickener of the dead, the teacher of the foolish, the guide of the ignorant; the grace of the Holy Ghost. It is called the communion of the Holy Ghost, because He communicates, He gives, He imparts, He teaches, He is the Unction from the Holy One who teaches all things. It seems to me that it is proper to regard this grace of the Holy Ghost in the beginning of the manifestation of Christ namely in preparing the body that Christ assumed, took into union with His Divine Person. The love of the Church was there, and so He performed that great act whereby there was to come forth that holy thing that the eternal Son of God was to take up into an indissoluble, ineffable union with Himself, and I would say to you, my brethren, do not pass this by as a point of little or no interest. It has eternal interest for the church of the living God. It was not only an act of infinite power, a miracle, but it was an act of love, and love not only to Him with whom He is One in eternity, the Son of God, but love to His body. "For the children, being partakers of flesh and blood, He also", the Son of God", likewise took part of the same". But who prepared that same body for the Son of God? The Holy Ghost. The Spirit of the living God came, came forth in an act of love and power and prepared for the Son of God that sacred body in

which He is now glorified in heaven. He was a Divine Person though found in fashion as a Man, in whom the Holy Spirit dwelt without measure. This was grace. By faith John saw Him "full of grace and truth". This Holy Spirit was given to the Son without measure and the relation of this to the Church is very beautiful, efficacious to her salvation, for whenever the Spirit comes down to a sinner to quicken and bless him, He comes from the Lord Jesus. He is called the Spirit of Christ; He is the Spirit of Christ. He comes as the Unction of and from the Holy One. "Ye have an Unction from the Holy One". He is called the Spirit of promise, because the Father promised Him, promised Him to His Son. My Spirit which is upon Thee, which I have put upon Thee shall not depart from Thee, nor out of Thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of Thy seed's seed from henceforth and for ever. O, dear friends, you who have had given to you this Divine Spirit, have received Him from the Lord Jesus. And before His resurrection Christ made repeated promises of Him. He shall come; He shall be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life. He shall dwell with you and be in you. He shall glorify Me for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you. He shall seal you unto the day of redemption. He shall be to you the earnest of the Spirit in your hearts. These great promises are all in Christ, and they flow from Him and are certain in Him, so that when the Spirit comes He comes as the Spirit of promise. The grace of God, a three fold cord that cannot be broken, a glory that is to shine on, and fill the Church, through eternity; grace to save from sin, death and hell; grace to instruct the foolish, grace to justify the ungodly, grace to make holy the polluted, grace to strengthen the weak, grace to nourish the feeble, grace to revive the poor; O this is grace, great grace. One may say, we believe all this; why dwell particularly upon it? Well, it behoves ministers to do, as well as God helps them, this great thing, speak well of God. There is one Scripture that has often greatly attracted me; it is in the book of Job; the commendation God gave concerning Job. He said that he had spoken of Him the thing that was right, and only the Lord knows how often that has been my petition respecting this position I hold here, that I might speak of Him the thing that is right, and if I do then I shall exalt the grace of God. I shall magnify the riches of His grace, His divine purposes of grace, and how that He works all things according to the purpose, the good pleasure of His will. Grace? 'Tis a charming sound, and I believe it

is a charming sound to some of you. You need it; you see, you feel your need of it, every day, every hour, every minute; God promises this grace, and His people are brought to feel their need of it. If we do not feel our need of grace it is a sign that we are dead in sin, but if we really are born again, then we feel our need of grace more and more.

Now the Holy Ghost is pleased here, by the Apostle, to say this. You of the dispersion, you have fainted; because of chastisement you have fainted. You have not properly regarded the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto sons, 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." Now he says follow holiness; mind this, follow holiness, for without it no man shall see the Lord. And if you indulge rebellion there is no evidence in that that you are the children of the living God. Follow holiness. And because you have a nature as wicked as that of all men, be diligent, look diligently; not take a cursory glance at religion and say, O everybody more or less professes religion. Do not take an outside, cursory glance, but look diligently into the matter. Look diligently into your own cases, and see whether you have grace, lest you fail - not fall from it, but fail to possess it. Let us look for a few moments - no more remains to me than that - at this great question, looking diligently. It supposes a concern, a close concern, deep concern; am I right? have I that religion that will stand the shake of temptation and live when I cross that chilling flood? Have I that that will make me fit to stand in the presence of infinite holiness and justice? Have I that that makes me, and will always in the power of it make me, hate sin and cleave to the Holy and Just One? Have I faith to believe in my ruin and in God's threatenings? Faith to justify God in His severest denunciations of sin and threats against sinners. Am I fit to die? Momentous questions, never to be lightly put aside by honest people. Always, as grace is in exercise, there will be questions that will stir up prayer, move the soul to the throne of grace and open the mouth of petition, that there may be given to the sinner the grace of God. Saved by grace, bought with blood that grace brought the Saviour to shed. Clothed with righteousness that the infinite pains of incarnate Deity wrought out. Look diligently, see how you stand, and here let me take up the first thing, faith. You can never look

rightly into any divine matter if you have not faith. Consider this for a moment. You can never rightly consider the nature of God if you have not faith, yet the nature of God must be in some measure apprehended, regarded, respected, revered, by every person who is to go to heaven. If He be but a Name, not a Person, if that Name that may be in your minds be not enough to bow you in the deepest reverence, inspire you with a feeling of awe, and fill you with a sense of your own wickedness, you have no faith. True faith has always, as its proper object, the infinite God. Look diligently into this, for if you never know, so as to reverence Him, if you never know God, you have no grace. The grace of life is great and faith believes in this. Have you faith? Have you faith? Does faith tell you there is One in heaven who is infinite? Does it tell you that you on earth are finite? Does it tell you that you are a sinner? Empty you of self-importance and self-wisdom, and self-strength, and self-goodness, and bring you as a poor vile sinner to the throne of God's heavenly grace, pleading the Name and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ? There is no third state. There are two states among men; a state of being a believer, and the state of an unbeliever, one who has no knowledge of God, no faith in Him. Now this is an important matter; faith in the Almighty. But who can bear the thought of infinite justice and purity, the thought that that infinite God, just and holy, bends His Word against sinners? Who can bear the thought without trembling unless, which indeed follows always, unless it please the Holy Spirit to give a view of incarnate Deity on the cross? Christ dying, drawing sinners to Himself; Christ dying, sinners drawn by the Father to Him; Christ dying, removing sin into the land of forgetfulness for ever and ever.

Now notice this second point which must be my last this morning. Faith in the Lord Jesus; have you got it? It will do several particular things for you if you have. If you have faith in Him it will greatly endear Him to you, making Him the chiefest among ten thousand, better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired. You will see in Him all you need, and more than you can receive. Love divine, grace divine, merit infinite, righteousness sufficient, the atonement sufficient to remove from your conscience a load of dead works. Grace sufficient to sustain you in affliction; wisdom sufficient to guide you from hell to heaven. O what a Saviour; what a Saviour. If a minister were what he should be how He would exalt the

Lord Jesus. What a Saviour. Why dear friends, you may say again and again, as realising the truth of it, that your sins have a kind of infinitude in them, but this must be said, that Christ has a real infinitude in His Person, in His merit, in His righteousness, and that covers; O that covers. This is the one thing needful. Now if we have faith this will be one certain infallible effect. He will become dear to us, more precious than gold, yea than the golden wedge of Ophir. None to be compared with Him. Fairer than the children of men, with grace poured into His lips that He may pour it out. And what is that grace? Nothing less than His infinite love and mercy. Now another effect of this will be we shall entreat Him to take us up into union with Himself, to be branches in the true Vine, members of His body, living stones built on the living foundation, Himself. You will never be content to be apart from Him if you have faith. You want to say

One with Jesus, by eternal union one

and now by sweet experience, one. One with that Person, that Saviour, with that Redeemer, and your faith will go out in many many petitions to Him. Pray for us; O pray for me, you will say, as Thou didst pray for Peter. "Remember me with the favour Thou bearest unto Thy people. O visit me with Thy salvation, that I may see the good of Thy people, the gladness of Thy nation and glory with Thine inheritance." Look diligently at this. Have you got this? I do not say have you got sin, for you have and you know it, but have you faith in Him who can forgive sin, remove it, justify you, and make you pure and holy in the sight of God. Looking diligently to see this great thing, this wondrous truth. Faith in your heart brings you to the Lord Jesus. Now I shall leave the matter here for the present, and as I have spoken the truth, though I have spoken it feebly, I have said enough for you to go home and meditate upon it. Looking diligently lest any man, any professor, any man in whose mouth is the Name of Jesus Christ, fail, come short of the grace of God.

AMEN.