

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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HEBREWS 7 v 19

"For the law made nothing perfect but the bringing
in of a better hope did, by the which we draw
nigh unto God"

It may very well be that from my inability and lack of grace and of the power of God, I may be tedious to you in bringing before you the great subject of Christ's Priesthood as I have done so on several occasions lately, and I would, if God in His kindness would help me, press on your attention this vital subject, the Priesthood of Christ. It is indeed our life. If we live, we live by Him. If we ever get access to God, it is by Him. If any healing of our diseases is experienced by us, it will be through Him. So may we have the spirit the Apostle Paul had when he said he esteemed all things but loss and dross and dung that he might win Christ. And, "forgetting those things which are behind" he says "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ". Doubtless there are many things injected into our minds or springing from our vile, proud hearts, which are as so many objections to seeking this one thing, but whatever these things may be, may the Lord grant that we may be enabled to keep this in view - One thing is needful, one Priest is needful, one sacrifice is needful, and only one, and the application of that one thing will make heaven on earth, subdue our sins, break us up, melt us into repentance, and cause us to a little know what Christ meant when He said - "These things have I spoken unto you that My joy may remain in you and that your joy might be full". It is a great thing to have one object.

Here the Apostle tells us what the law could not do. There is a law which is universal, the moral law binding us since Adam's fall, and we have that law in our hearts, written there by the very finger of God, and that - though not known to be that by men generally - that is the reason of conscience working even in ungodly men, for the Gentiles which have not the law "show the work of the law". It is written in

their hearts and the work of the law is in all. Therefore says he, their consciences bear witness and their thoughts the meanwhile either accuse or excuse them. (Romans 2 v 15). This is from the law written in our nature. God made Adam upright. He came complete out of the hand of God who formed his body of the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and so he became a living soul. And thus blessed, God gave him full liberty, except regarding the prohibited tree. But this upright man forsook his liberty and transgressed the law of God. He broke through it, made a breach in it, and now it can never make any creature perfect. "What the law could not do, God, sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." This law will perfectly condemn every man, either by grace in time, or judgement to all eternity. It can never make a sinner perfect. This law, as esteemed in national and civil relationships can regulate and order the footsteps and the mind and the affections and the will and the understanding of a man, but it is not the Christian's rule. It has no power to do him eternal good. It has no power to do you or me good in God's sight. However, the law in this text and in this Epistle generally, is the Mosaic law, the Levitical dispensation. We have nothing to do with that; we are not Jews. It could make no creature perfect. All the sacrifices that it ordained and that were offered by the priest according to God's ordinance, could not make the comers thereunto perfect. This law was a shadow of good things to come and not the very image of the thing and, says Paul in the 10 chapter of this Epistle, it could not make him that did the service perfect. He was just as he was before as to his nature and as to his condemnation, but if he had faith in the offering as it set forth Christ, then he was a believing Jew and a justified person, but as to any perfection in the sight of God, meaning the removal of sin from a person, that was impossible to this law. They made constant reference to sin whenever the sacrifices were repeated, as the Apostle says - "The law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered?" If those offerings could have perfected any person, or that nation, then there would have been no repetition, but the

sacrifices continually offered showed that there was no perfection by that law. It was a dispensation given for a time till He should come who should be the body and so the shadow should depart. The things of the law, says Paul, are a shadow; the body is Christ. This is then what the Apostle means, as I judge, by this word - "The law made nothing perfect". Therefore there must be another law that could make sinners perfect. Of this change the Apostle speaks - "The priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law "For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of the tribe of Juda of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning the priesthood" (Hebrews 7 v 12) There is a great change. God, as it were, put entirely aside the law that could make no-one perfect, put it away altogether. The Jews clung to it and despised Christ, but it is, to God, gone, out of the way. All handwriting of ordinances, that dispensation under Moses, all offerings and sacrifices, these are put away and there is nothing left of them, as before God. There is another Priest after the order of Melchisedec. The honour of the Priesthood was given to incarnate Deity, Jesus Christ of the tribe of Juda. God called Him to this. "No man", says Paul, "taketh this honour unto Himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." Sovereignly Aaron was called, and the ante-type of Aaron in that particular was called by His Father to be a Priest. "Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." This day have I begotten Thee in that particular; after the order of Melchisedec. And this is the better thing, this is the hope in the text; this is the great Object of hope. Dear friends, if we have a living hope as a grace in our souls, the Object, the centre, the end and the fulfilment and the glory of that grace is Jesus Christ; the bringing in, bringing in by God Himself. This day have I begotten Thee. Thou art a Priest unto Me, a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. And this bringing in of the better hope displaced the other, and in this Epistle it is said - "He taketh away the first that He may establish the second". That which is old, the dispensation which is old, passes away. Then the second, that could not wax old, that can never pass away, is established. "He taketh away the first that He may establish the second". And this establishment of the gospel is expressed in the word, the everlasting gospel. There is no dispensation to succeed, to supersede, this. This is the last; this is the first; this is the best of all. Every other Covenant shall fade away and die but this

shall remain. And every other dispensation shall pass away but this shall continue. Because He continueth ever, therefore He hath an unchangeable Priesthood. And so, by the Lord's help, I would bring before you two or three things with respect to this better hope.

First, it is in the Covenant, and established upon better promises. The first Covenant has waxed old; God has no further use for it; He has done with it as He will do with the elements when they melt with fervent heat and with the earth when it passes away and is dissolved. He has rolled it up, never to be unfolded; put it away, never to be brought in again, never to be used again. But this second, this first, this best, this better hope, it is in the Covenant of grace. I have made a Covenant with My chosen; the enemy shall not exact upon Him. I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. He brought Him in, this better hope, in the day of His birth. O what a song the angels sang when they, with a mighty multitude of the heavenly host, sang that loud praise. "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace and goodwill toward men". No other song should be sung but this. This shall be sung throughout eternity by the Church, by angels, elect angels. "Glory to God in highest, on earth peace." Now sinner does not your hope hang here, does not your eye rest here, on Him who was brought in by God? After God brought in the old dispensation, He introduced on Mount Sinai, He gave a good law, and He gave His Spirit, but O it was a different bringing in when the Son of God took that body which was prepared for Him and the heavenly host sang with loud voice - "Glory to God in the highest". Men crowded the Inn so that the Saviour must be placed in a manger, but God gave Him a great incoming. He signified the birth of His Eternal Son with that song. Angels celebrated what men knew nothing about and when they came to see Him they despised Him. God brought Him in and when He brought Him in He said, as in the first chapter of this Epistle - "Let all the angels of God worship Him. They did worship Him and they do worship Him. They acknowledged Him. Blessed be God, some of us have acknowledged Him. They said of old "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth." May we attend to the birth of the Lord Jesus. May we remember how it is recorded of His birth that that holy thing that was born of the virgin Mary is the Son of God, and that when the Lord Jesus appeared then all Deity was there, and

the purposes of God were in Him, and the Ark was there, and the Covenant was there, and the law, which men had broken, was there in its completeness; and the love of God, and the justice of God, all were there in Him whom God brought in. The bringing in, the bringing into the world and the bringing into the Church of Him in whom God said He was well pleased, the bringing to a sinner's conscience of the infant Jesus, is a great bringing in. You will find more or less distinctly that what people speak of as the life of Christ on earth will be living truth in your own soul as God is with you and reveals His Son in you and that invests the Scripture account of Him with singular beauty and glory. O when the Lord Jesus is brought in by His good Spirit into a sinner's soul, what a birth there is there; born in a sinner who is born again. "Formed" - it is spoken of as being God's act - "Formed in you the hope of glory". This is the cause of all rejoicing; this is the ground of all expectation of good; this is the foundation of a sinner's hope that God lays in his soul as it is said; He lays in Zion a foundation. When God brings this to you then you have cause to say, now I hope all that heaven has good. Now my soul looks out for this blessing that maketh rich with which God addeth no sorrow. Look for this and when you get it you will say I have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus, born of the virgin Mary; Jesus, growing in favour with God and men; and Jesus crucified brought into my soul by His good Spirit, formed in my heart the hope of glory. There it must be.

And the bringing in of a better hope includes the death of Christ. He was born to die. He was born by a voluntary act of Himself as coming by a gracious and voluntary love. He was brought forth; He was born by the mighty operation of the Spirit. He was sent by His Father and for this reason, that He might lay down His life. O, the voluntary nature of Christ's coming and Christ's dying, we should very much prize. It was necessary that He should die; it was necessary in two respects, and first necessary in the nature of God. If God sovereignly decreed to save a sinner, there was a necessity in His nature that all His perfections, as expressed in the law which was broken, should be magnified. It was necessary in the next place because God gave His dear Son a commandment to lay down His life. A most wonderful truth; believed and received into the heart by faith,

it becomes a source of life and peace and comfort. This death of Christ, this blessed death, filling the fountain for uncleanness and all causes of separation from God. When a sinner perceives this by faith he says, for substance he says,

My treasure is Thy precious blood
Fix there my heart and for the rest
Under Thy forming hands, my God
Give me that frame which Thou lik'st best

The treasure is everything, the inheritance is everything. The giving, out of the inheritance for our living, the giving us, so to express it as others have done, giving us a little pocket money, this is of God's own kindness, and sovereign mercy; but the thing is, the inheritance. O to perceive that your treasure is there, your inheritance is there, your all is there; given, put there by God Himself. It was brought in thus; when Christ said - "It is finished" the better hope was then manifested and brought in. And this is brought into the Church, this is brought into the Church, as every sinner who is favoured with forgiveness knows.

It was brought in, in the next place, when Christ ascended into heaven. "Wither" as Paul expresses "the Forerunner is entered, even Jesus who delivered us from the wrath to come". Was not that a bringing in, when the Saviour took possession of heaven for His people, when He went to prepare mansions for them, when, having perfected them by His sacrifice for ever, then He went to heaven; said, ere He went - "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

And this bringing in of a better hope did something, which is the next thing for us to notice. "The law made nothing perfect but the bringing in of a better hope did". The law could not effect that; Jesus did. The effect of His death is perfection. Perfection? It means that there is no lack of any kind in the person who is perfect. No lack; and here we are a congregation of sinners, and every sensible, exercised sinner here, says, why I am full of lacks, and a great deal worse than that; it is not only negative; O, the positive

evil, the law of sin in our members, the vile affections needing the precepts and exhortations of the gospel, needing the warnings and the admonitions of divine truth. And, feeling as we do at times, that we mar everything we touch, that we are vile creatures, more vile than can be expressed - do not I speak the feeling of some of you - more vile than you can express - and yet perfected; perfected. The bringing in of a better hope perfected every saint of God. And this means the removal of sin. "Jesus, that He might sanctify the people with His Own blood, suffered without the gate". "He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself". For this purpose God "made Him to be sin who knew no sin" and then it follows - "that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". And it is this way that "what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His Own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Thus "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth". And the death of Christ put divine justice on the side of a sinner. Divine justice is pleased with the escape of a sinner from the wrath to come. And when the Holy Ghost brings this into a poor penitent's heart, the heart of one who, though a penitent, often seems as hard as stone, then all the hardness goes, the doubts fly away, the burden of guilt is gone, and the sinner knows a little in his experience of what it is to be "accepted in the Beloved", and of all the sweet things you can feel in this life, this is one of the sweetest, that God finds no fault with you. It has been very wonderful to me, the vilest of all men, to have some little inkling of that. No man condemned? No; I dont. Says a sinner, I condemn myself, can do nothing else. I dont. O thou art all fair, there is no spot in thee. There is the perfection, the blessed perfection. Love is in it; the love of God, that is in it, washing sins away. Righteousness is in it, justifying the ungodly that believeth in Jesus. Grace is in it, reigning over sin. Life is in it, reigning over death, animating the soul with spiritual affections. And all that God requires, all that He will have in His people they find in Him who is their better hope, their good hope, connected with everlasting consolation.

Now the Apostle introduces another great subject. I have tried to preach the gospel in these few remarks. Now see what he says about

it - "By the which" - that is by this better hope by Jesus Christ - "By the which we draw nigh unto God". Now here is one of the most gracious things, one of the most blessed experiences you can have, drawing nigh to God. Contrast this with the effect of the giving of the moral law on Sinai, the law to a covenant nation. Said God to Moses, fence the mount round about, let no man come near it. If a beast touch it, it shall be thrust through with a dart or stoned. I say, contrast that with this, draw near; by the which we draw near to God; God puts no bar in the way. Let us notice that first, God puts no bar in the way. You say, there is a bar. If there is, it is your own; it belongs to yourself, it comes out of unbelief, and lusting of pride and hardness of heart, and a natural enmity to God. No bar, no justice to stand in the way. The perfection of divine holiness does not stand in the way. Everything in God in Christ invites the sinner. Dost Thou invite, dost Thou say, Ask what thou wilt? O what a mercy it is to have grace to seize the golden hour, the gracious invitation. He who gives it means it. Giving an invitation He will never put a hindrance in the way. You do, I do, the devil does, circumstances may do, but there it is; a good God opening His love and His mercy to a sinner. Moses dismissed as it were, put out of court. No harshness, but all mercy, tenderness and love. There is plenty of Moses in us, but grace reigns. Grace reigns, love reigns, and an open way with no bar in God. By the better hope, by the Person and the death of our High Priest we draw nigh unto God. Well this is a mercy because it has in it several particular things, as first, the Spirit of grace and of supplications and this gives a sinner liberty. "Having therefore brethren boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh, and having an High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near." You get liberty. The weariness of the flesh sometimes is put away, the aversion of the flesh is killed for the moment, and the soul with all its wants and all its burdens and all its cares draws nigh in liberty. This liberty is beautiful, it is sweet, it is powerful. It overcomes objections, it removes difficulties, it enables the soul favoured with it to say to God - "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me". And that is very solemn; it is not to be lightly said, it is not lightly said when you say it rightly. When faith has got a hold of God - I speak that, I hope, reverently - when faith has got a hold of God, you please Him in it,

and you cannot let Him go. Jesus made as if He would have gone further than the house where His disciples were to lodge that night, but they constrained Him, nor was He displeased with that constraint, for He entered the house with them. They constrained Him and said - "Abide with us". Nor is He displeased with the sinner who has faith given to him to say - "I will not let Thee go". Here many cases are dealt with. Yes, you deal with God with all your cases. Your sins, your sinful nature, your untoward disposition, your infidelity, the pride of your heart, the lust of life, and the pride of life, these are all dealt with. Your necessities, your weaknesses, fears, ignorance, and backslidings and devils and their enmity and their temptations, these are all dealt with here. Things you cannot name to men, to the nearest you have on earth, you speak about here. You understand it some of you, you draw nigh to God in these things and He listens. Jesus listens, "kindly listens while they tell the bitter pangs they feel within". Of all things, this is one of the best the Lord gives us here, a spirit of grace and of supplications. And another mercy is this, we have not the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of a sound mind, the spirit of love and the fear of God and of a sound mind. Here the soul gathers strength, here faith gathers more and more vigour, here love is warmed and drawn out into sweet exercise on the Object it has before it. The spirit of a sound mind enables the person to judge of his state, to judge of his ways. He sees his state to be good in Christ and he sees that God has ordered his steps. I have admired much, and coveted it, what Paul says of himself in one place. He says the people to whom he was writing knew his ways which were in Christ. What a wonderful thing for a sinner, a man of God, to be able to say that; you know my ways, they are in Christ. My preaching is in Christ, my ruling in the Churches is in Christ. So you may say sometimes when you have a sound mind, I believe my exercises, my wants, my soul's desires, my steps in providence, these are all in Him. He has ordered them for me, He has brought me into liberty, I have the spirit of a sound mind and the spirit of fear, filial fear, and you can say to the Lord I would not displease Thee if I could. You can say it. And the spirit of love. I love Thy Name and Thy gospel and Thy truth and Thy people and Thy ordinances. And these things come from having power to draw nigh unto God by that perfection that is in the better hope. What a wonder. Here a sinner and God are friends. Abraham, My friend, said God of him, and it is still true.

"I call you not servants for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you." "I have given them", said He to His Father, "Thy word and they have received it and they have known that I came forth from Thee". What a great thing. And all these things, more or less distinctly, are the fruit of this better hope. We, by it, draw nigh unto God.

Another mercy is this, that there is some perception of a prospect. It is a good prospect, O it is a good prospect. There is a good deal of trouble connected with it, as a kind of disappointment when you, having gone in, have to go out. When prayer, which you felt was heard, is not speedily answered. When certain unaccountable delays in providence are experienced. These things are all trials, trials of faith, and sent to be trials of faith. But there is a prospect, and it is thus spoken of - "The expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever." You may say, my expectation is perished from the Lord, but it is not. It is perished from your experience for the moment, it is perished from your feelings for the time, but it is not perished really. "The expectation of the poor shall not perish". O what a mercy.

Now one more word and I conclude. We draw nigh to worship Him. worship God. Of all the things in true religion this is one of the most important, worshipping God. I have said, as you may remember, on several occasions, that when one worships God one is right everywhere. In a sense it is very true. When you are worshipping God your affections are right, your will is right, your understanding in that particular moment is right, your steps are right, your ways are in Christ. Worship God. It may not be a common experience with you - I wish it were with me - but to have it occasionally, to have it in your soul, perhaps sometimes suddenly coming upon you, a power, an attraction, a light, a life, an influence wherein you find God is, and you worship Him in His Son, in His providence, in His word, on His throne; you worship Him. He has your affections, your reverence, your adoration, and your praise. Worship God. It is a great exercise, a sweet exercise, a very solemn exercise, and the moments in which you are engaged in it are among the most sacred moments of your life; getting near to Him. A poor child of God may be saying one

minute, O I wish I could repent. Sometimes he may say I wonder God lets me live, I am so wicked and so unprofitable. He may say, O if this hard heart were taken away and I had a heart of flesh given to me; if this unbelief were removed and I had but faith in the Lord Jesus. Now when God draws near to such a sinner and blesses him all those dreadful sins and things he deplored and prayed to have removed from him are gone; they have been taken away, taken out of the way, nailed to the cross, nailed there, and Jesus and the sinner are friends. The soul worships. He is loved because He is God. He is loved because of His glory beaming in the gospel, the glorious gospel of Christ. He is loved because of His kindness also, loved for Himself, loved for His gifts, and loved for His mercies. With all this there is that spirit of adoration. "By the which we draw nigh unto God." Now what is to be the end of it? The end of it is to be this, no cessation, but an everlasting experience of perfection. Perfection is not found in us. There is perfect grace. Perfection is awaiting us as it is expressed by John. "We know not what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." May the Lord help us to lift up our head believing that our salvation is nearer than when we believed and endear this better hope to us so that we may cleave to Him who is the hope of Israel and the Saviour thereof in time of trouble.

AMEN.