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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"

This chapter deals particularly with the Priesthood of Christ. Comparison is made between the many priests who were not able to continue by reason of death and the dispensation in which they ministered was not a perfect dispensation, and the covenant, the national covenant that they administered was not a perfect one and God found fault with them under that covenant; it could not make them perfect; it could not bring any real, abiding peace, to their consciences; it could not tell them that they were perfect in the sight of God, and so God could not deal, did not deal, with them as perfected. But, when coming to deal with the Person and the Priesthood and the Priestly offering of Christ, he tells us in the text that what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh - and that all the sacrifices of the dispensation under which the Hebrews had long, long lived, could bring in no perfection - the One Person and the One offering of that One Person did and by Him and by His work they, with all true believers, drew nigh to God. So we have two things particularly before us; an imperfect law, a law incapable of rendering all who lived in it and walked by it, perfect and another law which made perfect all who were under it and are under it, and by that all of them draw nigh to God. Said the Lord, by the Psalmist, "If I were hungry I would not tell thee. Will I eat the flesh of beasts and drink the blood of goats" Can creatures, such as in myriads were offered to Me in sacrifice under the old dispensation, give Me satisfaction? He could never eat, to satisfaction, anything that was brought to Him under that dispensation, and because He was not satisfied, no sinner can be satisfied in and by that dispensation. An important point this is for us to notice. What shall we offer to God? Will the Lord be pleased with all the beasts of the field, with ten thousand rivers of oil?

These are not required by Him. There was an imperfection attending the sacrifices which He ordained. He did not ordain them with the view of rendering perfection to any sinner, with the view of receiving satisfaction to Himself. Thus, the law made nothing perfect. There were two things that the law could not make perfect. First, the tabernacle itself. It was a shadow, not a perfect thing; it was a shadow of good things to come and all the sacrifices that were offered; the entrance into the Holiest of all once a year with blood to offer to God and much incense, a cloud of it, that covered the high priest for the time being; these could not make perfect the tabernacle. They only shadowed forth another tabernacle; that other tabernacle is what the Apostle treats of in the next chapter, the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man. The high priest under the Levitical dispensation, in his very person and in his office, only shadowed the great High Priest of our profession. The shadow was beautiful, the preaching was beautiful. It said - both of them said - there is One coming who is to be a perfect Priest and whose offering will be a perfect offering; so we are not to depreciate the Levitical dispensation because it could not give satisfaction to God nor make the comers under it perfect, because it was a real, a beautiful type, setting out and preaching of the great High Priest of our profession and that sacrifice once in the end of the world by which He put away sin, and it were well for us, as I think, if we were enabled more carefully and prayerfully to study that dispensation that so powerfully, though not perfectly, preached Jesus Christ and His one offering. The Apostle asks in this Epistle: If it had been perfect, if those sacrifices had made "the comers thereunto perfect", "would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins." But they were continually repeated under that dispensation because they could never give those two things to sinners; first, satisfaction to God and then, and consequently, satisfaction to the offerers - "could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience" Conscience in Scripture clearly has a very important position and a function that God has given to it with respect to Himself and with respect to the person in whom it is. If you notice these two, notice respecting conscience, you will see the blessedness of a sacrifice that satisfies God and makes the person bringing it perfect before God. Conscience? that created faculty,

that faculty that is warped and hardened by sin, deflected from its straight rule and walk before God. Conscience? that when enlightened by the Spirit charges sin on the sinner, tells the sinner that he is wrong; tells him where he is wrong; brings up before him his many, many sins; tells him that God, against whom sin has been committed cannot be satisfied with anything that the sinner can bring before God; that there is no sacrifice.

Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience ease
Or wash away one stain

and conscience says that in the sinner. If our consciences are truly enlightened that is what they will say to us. No rivers of oil - not ten thousand of them - no beasts - not all of them in creation - could ever give satisfaction to these two - a holy God and an enlightened conscience. Take notice of your consciences; listen to what they tell you; take notice of their testimony for they will speak well for God. They will speak well for you though what they say to you will torment you. This being the case, are we hopeless? Must we remain hopeless? Are we to be in despair because ten thousand rivers of oil and all the beasts of the forest could not satisfy God? Is God never to be satisfied? If He is hungry is there nothing that will satisfy Him? If He is hungry with respect to you, to me, is there nothing that will satisfy Him? Is His justice hungry for blood? Yes. Sinners have made Him angry; their sins have provoked Him and He must have satisfaction. And since all we can do, all we can think, all repentance that we may have, cannot render satisfaction to that infinite, that glorious attribute of Deity, what then? Are we, I say again, to be hopeless? Shall we sink into despair and shall we say to our consciences - and shall our consciences ratify what we say - there is no hope? Must we - driven away by sin, expelled from Eden, by God Himself in justice - shall we, never draw nigh unto Him? Is there no way back? Must we ever remain at an infinite distance until death shall swallow us up and hell shut us in for ever and ever, away from Him? Important questions these. A heady Calvinist may say, of course we all know how we can get back. But then to one who is exercised, the thing is this, may I go back? Is there an honourable way for my

return? Is there a ground for me to stand on? Is there a plea for me to urge on the notice of God? To such questions my text gives a perfect answer. "The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did". "Hope" here is the object of hope. This is the very Person of our High Priest, and this is the bloody sacrifice that justice is hungry for. This is the sacrifice that God accepts and so this makes perfect. There are two things in this perfection, first the tabernacle. O, what a tabernacle we have, typified by that that Moses made according to the pattern shown him in the mount. How particular God was about that building, that tabernacle. Moses was not left to use any discretion, no religious discretion, no trimming, no making round corners that would seem to be not pleasing. No discretion was left to Moses. "See", said the Lord, "that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount". Why so particular? Because the earthly tabernacle was a shadow of the heavenly one. It shadowed out the Lord Jesus and so a man's discretion was not to be here; no room for it here. Human wisdom must not devise any improvement or imagine that this could be better than the Lord ordered. The tabernacle is perfect, a perfect tabernacle. O sinner think of it. Of this tabernacle Paul speaks in this epistle. He said, "the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man". No human agency here, no hand of man here. God pitched it, the Holy Ghost pitched it, in the Person of the Saviour. He pitched this tabernacle, a perfect tabernacle, our Lord Jesus Christ. O, it is beautiful; if you see it by faith you will adore, you will admire. You will run to it by faith. You will say, here would I live. "Here would I constantly abide and every moment live". Why? Because "here is all a God can give" All His wisdom could devise, all that His love could bestow, all that His mercy could give, all that His grace could give, in this tabernacle. Perfection is not found except here. Perfection of salvation, perfection of holiness, perfection of a way of approach, perfection of a place wherein to worship, is not found but in this true tabernacle. I wish the Lord would bless me with more knowledge and help me to preach it better to you. I think I can say, I love this tabernacle and wish your hearts and my heart might be more and more attracted to it by the revelation of it by the Father, and drawn to it by the Father, and that the Father would meet with us in it. Here we may worship; here care is swallowed up; here pain is sanctified; here loss is turned to gain. Here is the smile of the

Father; here is the witness of the Spirit. Here is a place of rest; here is a refuge. All a God could devise and give. If you run anywhere else you will go wrong. If you are drawn to this and run into this you will be right for time and right for eternity. Go to yourself and you will be wrong; go to the Lord and you are right. It is the perfection of this tabernacle that makes the worshippers perfect. You say you are not perfect. Ah, but then when a sinner comes to a perfection of his imperfection - that is to say, when he perceives what a false, wicked, depraved person he is and is then drawn by the Father to the Lord Jesus - that precious Person of the Saviour conveys, communicates His perfection to the worshipper, to the penitent, to the broken-hearted, to the feeble, to the ignorant, to the lost, for, says the Apostle to the Corinthians: Of God, Christ is made wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. And what more can you wish or pray for than that? Perfection is found here. May I go? If you are drawn by the Father, you not only may go, but you will go. Will He receive me? "This Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them". Will He be pleased with such a traitor and wretch as I am? "I knew thee that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb. For My Name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for My praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off" (Isaiah 48 v 8/9). If you only have faith to try Him, you will find Him better than all your expectations, higher than your highest thoughts. Perfection is here; never look for it elsewhere. As you find your imperfections, your failing; as you feel that constantly you are coming short, the Lord help you to turn to this true tabernacle where perfection is and you will get all you need. The Law cannot convey, cannot make perfect any sinner, but the gospel does; the gospel does. O, the glorious gospel of Christ. May the Lord make it shine in our hearts, then we shall be abundantly satisfied. Not only is there perfection in the tabernacle, but there is perfection for those who are in it, who come to God in it.

"The bringing in of a better hope did". What is this better hope? It is the gospel; it is the glorious gospel of Christ. What is that gospel? It is the High Priest, it is the sacrifice of the High Priest. Only by these can forgiveness of sins be preached. "Go" said the Saviour to His Apostles, "preach the forgiveness of sins". How can this preaching be apart from the Priestly sacrifice of the

Saviour? "Once in the end of the world He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself". Ye know, said the Apostle John; you know that He appeared to put away sin, to make an end of it. If He put it away from certain people, such people must be without sin in the sight of God. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ". It is appointed unto us once to die, but after this the judgment and we must appear before that judgment seat. Now there are three appearances, to speak generally, which every sinner taught of the Spirit makes before God; three appearances. They are these. First the appearance of a sinner, convinced of his sins - and this goes on all through the life after the new birth - when he appears without any ornament. Said God to Israel, by Moses, after they had sinned, now come, put off your ornaments that I may know what to do with you; that I may see you in your unadorned, your guilty condition. God knows what to do with sinners, and what to do with His poor people when they stand before Him in their sins, without an ornament. Come, He said, put your ornaments off. Zechariah saw Joshua standing before the angel clothed with filthy garments and his adversary, Satan, standing there also. What an appearance; what a solemn appearance. Some of us have made it and have still, with respect to our conduct, the life of our hearts, so to stand often. What a solemn appearance. We tremble at His word when we go before Him in our guiltiness. Infidels yet; Christians have to confess their infidelity. Unbelief masters them here and there carnality overcomes them, cares press them to the earth and Satan tempts them and they yield to his temptations often and when that has been so, said God, Put your ornaments off; come without your evidences, come without your good things; put them all off, that I may know what to do with you.

Come needy, come naked,
Come loathsome, come bare

O, but it is hard; it is difficult. Every day, as God teaches us, brings this to us, that we are lost. Is this the first appearance? Yes, and often repeated. The second is this, when you stand before the Lord with that change of raiment that is sweetly, powerfully, graciously given; when the Lord Jesus is made known to you afresh; when you get a sight of His loveliness, of His perfection, of His righteousness, of His goodness and you stand before the Lord, and

while condemning yourself, thank Him for justification and He says: "Thou art all fair My love; there is no spot in thee". This is an appearance; O, what a standing this is. If we but get this we are ready for the third appearance which is when we stand before the judgment seat

When I stand before Thy throne
Dressed in righteousness, not my own

O what a blessed standing that will be. Here then is the perfection brought in by the sacrifice of Christ, when all poor, guilty sinners are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Come then, repenting sinner, come
Approach with humble faith
Owe what thou wilt, the total sum
Is cancelled by His death

Look then to this one offering by which Christ put away sin and made an end of it.

In the next place, look at the consequence, look at the sweet effect: "By the which we draw nigh unto God". Ah, sin shuts us out; the law shuts us out; conscience tells us often we are not fit to go, but, says Paul, by this better hope, this doctrine of Christ, this blessed sacrifice of Christ by which perfection is, we draw nigh unto God. Here comes in faith, faith that, as Hart expresses it, has omnipotence. Yes; In thee, he says, speaking of Hezekiah, in thee we see miracles of prayer, the omnipotence of faith. He drew near, he came to God in his affliction. A poor afflicted man with the sentence of God in him that he was to set his house in order, for he was to die and not live. Then he turned him to the wall and poured him out a prayer that conquered pain, removed despair with all its heavy load, brought the recanting prophet back, and turned the mind of God. He drew nigh unto God. Here are two parties, God and man, and they come together, they come into contact with each other. A very solemn thing; the most solemn act that a sinner is capable of in this life is to draw nigh unto God. Different states of mind the sinner

experiences but in them all, through them all, by this one offering of Christ he has this high privilege, this great mercy bestowed upon him by the Holy Ghost; grace to draw nigh, faith to believe, faith to plead, faith to lay hold of eternal life whereunto he is called.

Now let us look, as enabled, at two or three particular things in this. "We draw nigh unto God" when we are convinced of our sins and I am not speaking of the first work only, but always. There was a remembrance made of sins every year under the old dispensation; they were not allowed to forget what they were and we, if Jews in spirit, will never be allowed long to forget that we are sinners, and I do not speak, merely, of a fruit of our memory; I speak of the work of God, that work of the Holy Spirit, whereby He continually, more or less distinctly, brings to our memory our sins. We have many, many things to remember, and He causes us to remember them. Much unbelief, many acts that are not pleasing to God, thoughts that we can neither quell nor rout, desires that cannot stand in His sight because of their blackness. These, these we remember, and a legal heart and a tempting devil will make it difficult to do this great thing - draw nigh unto God. The difficulty is not in the Lord; the atonement is sufficient. There is no bar there, no hindrance there, but the difficulty is in self. Now we are enabled by the Holy Spirit to draw near. O, it is a beautiful word you have in the Psalm: I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord. Mine iniquity have I not hid. I said I will do it. And every child of God, in his measure, says the same. I will not hide my transgressions; I will confess my sins. He draws nigh unto God in this, and here there is a distinction to be made between the many times there is little or nothing but formality in praying, and the few times, the occasional seasons, when there is a reality, when we draw nigh with a feeling heart, when we drop the silent tear, when we are ashamed of ourselves, when we say, "O God, we are before Thee in our trespasses and we cannot stand before Thee because of this", and yet there is also just what Ezra felt and expressed: "Thou art righteous and we are escaped". Thou art righteous, Thou art good, Thou art faithful; the atonement was made; we are escaped. Confession of sin out of a feeling heart is not despair. It is Gospel-like to own what you have done and plead what the Saviour did; to take shame and confusion to yourself and yet to glory in Him who offered Himself without spot to God. There is then

this drawing nigh unto God when we are burdened with this. There is a drawing nigh unto Him when affliction comes upon us. The law said, sin has procured this; conscience says the same, you deserve this, you brought it on yourself. You say, yes Lord, it is true, but faith in the atonement enables us to say, Remember not against us former iniquities; stir not up all Thy wrath. Faith will teach us how to say it; the Spirit will help us to say it. Remember not against us former iniquities. Psalm 79 v 8) What is the Lord asked to remember? Remember the Covenant; remember Thy holy promise; remember what Isaiah was inspired to write: "When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin"; when you can plead the offering of Christ and its acceptance before the Lord; remember the covenant of grace between Thee and Thy Son, The BRANCH; when you crown Him, pleading His Kingly Priesthood "for a memorial in the temple of the Lord", (Zech.6 v 12/14) then, then affliction loses all penal sense, all evidence of its being sent in wrath, and it is bearable; you draw nigh. You draw nigh to Him when you are hungry. There is a hunger; O, thanks be to God, there is a real hunger in gracious people when they are properly exercised and that hunger is thus expressed in the hymn

Give me Christ, or else I die

"Pardon mine iniquity O Lord, for it is great". Cause Thy face to shine and I shall be saved. This is the hunger, hunger for God. Hunger for His presence, for the blood of Christ that speaketh better things than that of Abel; for a word to be spoken in season. "A word spoken in season, how good it is". Something to touch your case, something to satisfy your conscience, to appease your mind and to give true solace to your soul, so sorrowful. Hunger? "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled". So this is one of the many things in, and for which, we, through Jesus Christ, draw nigh unto God.

Another matter that brings us to Him from time to time when we are in affliction is this, that He would sanctify the affliction. Berridge says

I must expect a daily cross
Lord, sanctify the pain

Bid every furnace purge my dross
And yield some patient gain

You cannot get that gain anywhere but at the throne of God's heavenly grace; there it is He conveys mercy, communicates grace to the sinner. To have any affliction sanctified to your souls is to have your heart more weaned from the world, to be brought to hold things loosely, to see the world as it really is in God's sight, an empty thing, incapable of giving any true satisfaction to the soul. To see it in that way is good, and as you see that through the operation of some affliction on your mind you may say, now it has been sanctified in that particular. To have the sins that procured the cross, the trial, broken as to their power, removed as to their guilt. To be made to feel before the Lord that you hate the sins that made Him mourn and that provoked Him to send some reproof, some rebuke to you. Draw nigh to Him afflicted sinner; draw nigh to Him. He is very pitiful. You say, I am always making mistakes; He is very pitiful. It has been sweet to me to reflect on that lately, how pitiful He is. He wont be always rebuking and chiding. He will not always chide nor keep His anger for ever lest, says He, "the souls which I have made should fail before Me". O, you cannot express - if you know it you will understand it - you cannot express the tender compassion of the Saviour to a poor, penitent who comes and says, Lord I have made this mistake, I have committed that sin, I have done evil on all hands and sinned as with a cart rope. He says I pardon whom I reserve, and, as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. As I was reading today where the Lord said to His disciples - asked how often they should forgive, He said - if one offend you seven times a day and seven times a day say I repent, you must forgive him, it was pleasant to think this, now if the Lord says we are to do that, if He says, now an offending brother says I am sorry I have done it, you are to forgive him, will He do less than that? Think of it, if the gracious Lord says do forgive a repenting friend when you, his friend, when he, your friend, shall come together, will He not forgive the many things you have to confess to Him? Draw nigh to Him. O, it is so sweet to draw nigh to God. Sitting alone, walking about, doing your duties, God graciously help you to draw nigh and say I am sorry for my sin; I am sorry that I have done this; I grive that I committed that evil; and He is kind. Plead as well as you can the

atonement. O, that does go well with Him, for though He would not eat the flesh of beasts nor drink the blood of goats, He did eat the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, that is, He was satisfied with an infinite satisfaction with that precious atonement, and He will be satisfied with you and with me when we draw nigh unto Him in that blessed, precious atonement of the Saviour of sinners. Let us draw nigh unto Him. By this we do it; always keep that in view, may the Lord help me to keep it before you, the hope that brings in this perfection, the better hope that makes perfect what nothing in creation can make perfect; by that, for if you draw near with anything else you wont be accepted but if, with this, you draw nigh to God, He wont reject you. Sinner though you be, weak and foolish though you be, full of wrongs though you be, He wont reject you. He accepts His Son; He heard Him in an acceptable time; in the day of salvation He heard and received His Son, and in that same day of salvation He hears and receives His poor penitents, orders the fatted calf, commands a change of raiment, puts a ring on the hand and shoes on the feet. "By the which we draw nigh unto God".

And may the Lord help us to draw nigh unto Him with respect to one day that is coming, and that is the last of our life on earth. O that we may finish well our race. Lay up in store, you exercised people, a good foundation against the time to come. You will find it go well with it I believe if you are enabled to do this. "The law made nothing perfect" cannot, but "what the law could not do" - either the moral law or the sacrificial 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" - done, wrought in us - "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit". (Romans 8 verses 3 and 4).

Now may the Lord open this mystery and convey this mercy to us, so that we may draw nigh unto Him and live at His footstool.

AMEN.