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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham at Galeed Chapel, Brighton

Wednesday evening January 24<sup>th</sup> 1923

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 to God.”

This was the subject last Lord's Day evening when I endeavoured to show what is the imperfection of the law and what is the better hope, that is brought in. This better hope is the object of hope, not the grace, that beautiful bounty, bright, blessed grace wrought in the heart by the Spirit, but the object - Christ Himself, His whole gospel and this brought in when He died on the cross, when He entered into heaven with His own blood. This is the better hope that makes perfect, that makes the people of God perfect, perfectly righteous, perfectly holy, perfectly acceptable, perfectly saved, that is eternally saved. God is pleased with perfection and nothing else, and this perfection He finds in the Son and, as that is imputed to His people, He finds them perfect. “Ye are complete in Him.” - nothing to be added. The best, the deepest, the clearest, the richest experience that the Spirit of God could be pleased to give to any of us would not add one iota to the perfection that is in this hope, the hope of our text. It is good to have good experience but that experience is the fruit of perfection not an addition to perfection; it comes from this it does not add to it. The grace of hope comes from the object of hope and every other grace. The Spirit works faith but Christ wrought the perfection that faith receives. I only touched briefly on the latter clause of the text and shall now speak a little about it.

“By which we draw nigh unto God” that is by Christ, by His gospel, what He did, what He is and what He is doing now in heaven. We poor .wretched sinful creatures under the teaching of the Spirit draw nigh unto God. That is the position that meets the worst sinner out of hell, who has not sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost; that meets the poorest, the vilest and the most distant rebel that can be found out of hell, who lives to feel his need and his sinfulness. Such a person by this better hope is taught to draw nigh to God. Drawing nigh unto God. Take an opposite case; take Israel by the mount that they might not touch. When the lightening flashed and the thunder clap came God manifested great power and majesty and glory – did they draw nigh to Him then? No! they fled away, they found that an approach to God, an immediate drawing nigh was impossible and so they wanted and sought a mediator and found a mediator to their mind in Moses and said to him “Speak thou to us and we will hear, Let not God speak lest

we die.” He was a man but he had access to God, intimacy with Him. He came down from the mount and now he was between these poor terrified people and God in His infinite majesty. Some of us know what these Jews felt in measure. We know a little of the terror of the Almighty and how impossible it is to think of approaching Him, as we have seen Him in the law. We found it impossible, He was a terror to us and He sometimes is now through the working of legality. How shall we speak to Him? How shall we bear Him speaking to us? How shall we look at His majesty and live? How shall He come near to us in the law and we live? It is a terrible thing to have to do with God, to have to do with God out of Christ; and if any of you have to do with God without a mediator you are lost. His terror will not only make you afraid one day but will utterly consume you in perdition and yet you will never be consumed. O it is fearful to contemplate the awful majesty of God. Paul said he knew the terror of the Lord so he persuaded men that it was real and also that there was a mediator. I know a small measure of the terror of the Lord. I knew it many years ago and trembled in myself. ‘Tis fearful. I wish each one of you present, ignorant of this, might come to know it, for terrible though it is, it makes way for the Mediator and prepares the sinner to approach God in the appointed way by which hope we draw nigh unto God.

There are several particular things in this matter, in the matter of prayer, for that is what is intended. Drawing nigh is, as Paul says in this epistle “Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace that ye may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” It is what Christ said “They that seek shall find; to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” This is what is intended as we also read in the psalm “Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest and causest to approach unto Thee.” When people draw nigh unto God by Christ they draw nigh in some particular way. It is not anyhow. May we beware of taking the name of God in vain. May we be taught to remember that God is not to be mocked, that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap; that if we sow to the flesh we shall of the flesh reap corruption and that on the other hand if we sow to the Spirit we shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. Therefore may the Lord make us careful and particular remembering that He is not mocked. Remembering too that it is profitable to pray to Him and in the great matter of drawing nigh unto God this is necessary – faith, real faith. Paul in this epistle says in another place “Let us draw nigh with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” You will never draw nigh if you have no faith. You will never seek God unless you have a God wrought faith given to you by the operation of the Spirit as Paul speaks in the Ephesians “ That ye might know what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places far above all

principalities and powers and might and every name that is named not only in this world but also in that which is to come.” If you have a grain of faith you will be raised by that above all principalities and powers and devils and sins and draw nigh to God. Think of it. Here is a worm, guilty and sensible of his sinfulness, ignorance and weakness with a grain of God given faith in his heart, and the power that brought Christ out of the grave, lifts that sinner by that faith above principalities and powers. He believes in God and draws nigh to Him. What a great person a praying person is. Real religion is great – it does not make the possessor of it great in his own eyes but it is a great thing that lifts an earth bound worm, a poor sinner, full of cares, often worn and corroded in his mind with care and drunken and surfeited. Faith lifts him above all these things, the devil and his wiles, sin and its filth. Do you know what this means?

If prayer is an easy thing, if you can chatter, if you are pleased when you have done it, it is a very likely thing that you do not know what this word is – “By the which we draw nigh to God.” I do not mean that you will always be in the same humble, solemn, holy worshipping frame of mind, but I do say this that there will be moments when the thought of approaching the Trinity, because you are a sinner, will be very solemn to you and that word may make you afraid – “Be not deceived, God is not mocked” and yet what a blessedness there is in praying. “Who that knows the worth of prayer, But wishes to be often there.” Who is there that has for a moment the well pleased face of God in Christ but wishes to gaze on that face. Who is there that has felt the drawing power of Christ’s Person and of His cross but wishes to be under the attraction and influence of that power continually. It is a great privilege to pray. Drawing nigh to God is worshipping Him. What is it to worship God but to acknowledge Him, to acknowledge Him to be infinitely superior to you a worm inferior beyond all expression. What is it to worship but for the moment to leave things behind you as Abraham left his asses and the young men at the foot of the mount. To worship is to have some sense, it may be to us transient, some sense of the greatness of God on your spirit; a touch of that will bring you into the dust, will make you wonder at the forbearance of infinite goodness and holiness. To draw nigh unto God is to come to Him with and about some things. You will come with your sins. He who thinks he could worship if he were rid of his sins is under the power of ignorance and legality at the moment. True faith will tell the sinner that he cannot come too filthy, too burdened, or too sinful. It will tell him that there is a great difference between being a sinner and sinning wilfully, between falling and failing and persisting in sin. Faith can draw distinctions that have no being to human reason. You who have that faith now, will understand me, and with that faith in you, in the hope that makes perfect, you will come with your sins. They will be in your thoughts and on your tongue and you will make humble confession of all; and the only way by which one drenched in

sin, troubled by sin and burdened with his guilt, can come to God, is by Jesus Christ by whom we draw near.

What a view the church of old must have had looking forward to the promised Messiah when she said in the Psalm "Let Thy hand be upon thee man of Thy right hand upon the Son of man whom thou madest strong for Thyself, so will not we go back from Thee, quicken us and we will call upon Thy name." A sight of Christ made a desolate church bold in praying, helped her to protest that she would not go back from the Lord, but would seek Him. Did the gospel of Christ ever embolden you to pray, in the face of your sinfulness, of the Spirit. It is gospel-like to confess every sin with which you are charged and of the depravity that is made to you as coming from then fall. It is gospel-like to confess all that and yet at the same time to plead this better hope; to plead the Person and the work of Christ. We see in the scripture that this is set before us. Wicked men, even Manasseh called upon God in their affliction and the Lord heard them. Now the scripture affords us some rules or instructions with regard to drawing nigh to God. I just said that it is now anyhow that people pray, they are led by the Spirit according to the word of God. Now let me take the point namely – faith. If you believe you will want faith, you will pray for faith and everyone that has it will need it one day, every day, but perhaps one day in particular. Who knows what we are coming into, who knows what sorrows, anguish and trouble and it maybe persecution we may have yet to meet and can we stand without faith? What says the Apostle Paul to these godly Ephesians who had not attained to so much, that he could write under inspiration, that wonderful epistle. In the chapter that I read just now you need faith in a prominent place. "Above all taking the shield of faith whereby ye shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked."

When Peter's faith was low, confidence in himself was strong, then he could protest to Christ that if everyone else denied Him he would not, he would go to prison with His Master and die with Him; but the fiery darts of the wicked and the love of his own life proved too much for Peter and only the pitying, compassionate, rebuking look of His Saviour brought him to his senses. We do not know what we shall meet with. "Above all taking the shield of faith." Now you may feel so much unbelief, as to sink very low in your feelings at the thought of having trouble or meeting affliction but it is "by the which we draw nigh to God" by Jesus Christ. The door is open for a sinful worm to beg of God to increase his faith "Lord increase our faith." Look at the impossibilities, look at the things that we have to meet with, look at our weakness "Lord and increase our faith." Make us faithful unto death. It is good to be forewarned, as the Lord does forewarn His people, that they may lay up a good store for the time to come. That they may have laid up in heaven prayers for a time of affliction. If you are led by the mysterious

grace of the Spirit to seek God for a future day, a day you may greatly fear sometimes, you will find when that day comes answers will come also. "My grace is sufficient for thee." will be made good. When a poor sinner looking to Jesus Christ, depending on that which He did and by which He made His people perfect, comes to God and lays up prayer for faith, for an increase of faith, that he may be kept to the end and be made faithful, as Christ said "Be thou faithful unto death" that person, weak though he maybe in himself, will find strength according to his day. Poor sinner if unbelief dismays you, if you have the Spirit, that will be a reason and incentive to you to go and ask for more faith. Lord increase our faith. How I feel to need this; the fiery darts of the wicked one come, they are hurled at us and we seldom resist them, seldom quench them, often give way to them, yield and turn back in the day of battle like a deceitful bow. More faith would enable us to stand. Who can give us faith? The Lord can; He who brought Christ from the dead exercising omnipotence in that, He can by the same power work more faith in our unbelieving hearts and there is great encouragement given to us in the scriptures, in the gospel of God's grace, to go and ask for this by the which we draw nigh to God. Go poor sinner, the chains, the rags, the poverty, the weakness, the ignorance, the failures, the sins that you have to mourn and confess won't be a bar. They are your shame but they will, by God's Spirit, show how great He is in forgiveness and your unbelief won't limit Him in giving you more faith. As the Holy Spirit enables you ask for it by which this high privilege is given to us to draw nigh unto God.

You may need direction; you may have a path before you which you have not been in heretofore. You may apprehend danger; you may feel weak and unable to know what to do or how to do right if you know it. Now what a thing is this to come to God with and to draw nigh unto Him. O how shall I express it, the kindness of God in drawing us, in opening a new way to us and in saying "Open thy mouth wide, I will guide thee with Mine eye, I will teach you which way to go, I will say, either by My Spirit and providence, or by My Spirit alone, or by the word that I will say to you." "This is the way, walk ye in it" He who can wait for guidance is all the while making progress. He is going on. That is the best movement that is possible to us that is expressed in the text "By the which we draw nigh to God." We may not seem to make any progress, or to be moving in anything, but if we are waiting upon God and coming to Him, drawing nigh to Him, that is real progress. It is not true, though the devil says it is, reason and an unbelieving heart may say so too "If you do not act it will be too late; if you do not take that course then there is no other way open." O, but when faith says that that he will go to God and wait on Him by His help and His power, that poor sinner is making real movement; is going to heaven and going in the way that God has appointed for him; and the difficulties surrounding

him and the uncertainties that fill and try his mind are no bar, yea they are an incentive and a reason why he should draw nigh unto God saying “Show me the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul unto Thee.”

What saith the scripture on another important point that may have tried some of us much at different times – about the mortification of sin. The Holy Ghost in the Romans exhorts the saints not to yield their members unto unrighteousness but to yield them unto God and you may be put to it sorely, but then the scripture also says “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law but under grace.” How attractive has that been to me. Ye are not under the law; that provokes sin, that seems to give it power, that appears to be an opportunity to it to break out, that only discovers impurity. Ye are under grace, therefore sin so rampant, so insistent shall not have dominion over you. This is an encouragement to one who is often defeated and feels ashamed of his defeats to go for more grace; but there is a way by the which we draw nigh to God. You may be defeated when you are on your knees, you may be defeated all in a moment – one moment seeming to call upon the name of the Lord and the next your mind has gone to the ends of the earth. Then a fiery dart will come in saying you are a hypocrite, you are mocking God, you are taking His name in vain; and then another fiery dart may come saying you had better leave of this, rise from your knees, it is not good to do this. Now when the Holy Spirit works what is the effect? You go on confessing, confessing and asking the Lord to give you more grace that these sins that are ever ready to catch you, to take you by surprise and entangle you may not have that power; but rather that God would break the power.

We draw nigh to God for more grace therefore says Paul “Finally my brethren be strong in the Lord and the power of His might.” The sight of Christ’s righteousness will fortify your faith against indwelling sin. A sight of the breastplate will give you courage; a touch of God’s word, the sword of the Spirit, will give you a good deal of hope and the shield of faith will enable you to resist the dreadful things in your heart. We draw nigh to God by this blessed hope, Jesus Christ and His great work of redemption.

Sanctification is a beautiful thing, but it is a very trying doctrine, trying I mean to men who are always failing, defiling themselves even when they are panting in their hearts for the holiness which the Lord enjoins. O what a word is that – “Follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.” There is a holiness in the heart as well as Christ’s holiness imputed. The work of the Spirit is that holiness in the heart, His grace, so in the Epistle you know the saints are addressed “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession” and a believing consideration of our High Priest and

Apostle Jesus Christ will have a very sanctifying effect on the heart and mind as some of you know. We draw nigh unto God for the promised grace and gospel power that sin may not have dominion over us and let us draw nigh unto God for fresh, clearer and deeper knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. I do not know how you may feel, you who have been in the ways of God sometime and you who are young in the way of God, about your knowledge, but I know this that at my time of life I am often ashamed and grieved at heart that I know so little of Him. What a solemn thing it is to live year after year talking about these things and yet knowing so very little of them and especially of Him, of whom the Apostle writes so wonderfully in this epistle. He says a solemn word to the Hebrews “for when for the time ye ought to be teachers ye have need that one teach you that which be the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. Ye have need of milk and not able to take strong meat which belongs to them that are exercised and have their senses exercised but you babes have need of milk. Does this touch any of you? Blessed be God there is a way of approach to Him who is the only wise God and who says that He will teach His children. “All Thy children shall be taught of the Lord.” “Every man therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto Me.” The teaching of God is that which brings effectually all to the Lord Jesus in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. What a congregation of foolish people we are, and some of us have lived ever so long professing religion, and yet we scarcely know the alphabet of Jesus Christ. But is this a reason for despair? No! It is a good reason for shame but not for despair. Why not? Because the Lord Jesus is able to have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way by the which hope, the better hope, the holy gospel, the glorious gospel of Christ we draw nigh unto God.

Let me hasten to say one or two more words, the subject is very full and I live to prove that I am exceedingly poor. First of all let us draw nigh unto God for grace to persevere to the end. The end is coming; yes it is coming to us. How shall we meet it? Here comes a king with twenty thousand; have I, a worm with nothing of my own, enough to meet the king? There is a battle from which there is no discharge. Have I enough to meet it and enter into it? Have I courage and reason to hope that I shall be a victor? Look at the blessed armour of God, my friends and the Lord give it to us and give us faith to put it on. “Put on” says the Apostle “the whole armour of God” that ye may be able to resist the wiles of the Devil. Put it on by precious faith. What is this armour but the very Person, gospel, grace and righteousness of the Lord Jesus expressed under this very beautiful and striking promise – the helmet, the breastplate, the shield, the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace, the sword of the Spirit and the weapon of all prayer. “Put ye on the Lord Jesus” says Paul “and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lust thereof.” By the which we draw nigh to God. One may say ‘Well I go to the Bible and fortify

myself with the scriptures' but he who does that and nothing else will fall a prey to his enemies; but he who says 'Lord I am weak and I may be exposed to worse than I am now, I feel exposed and vulnerable give unto me, a sinful creature, the whole armour of God that I may withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand.'

Ah you may have trouble that will be a danger to you, indeed when is it not so? for it may stir up rebellion. You may have prosperity which will be a snare to you since your circumstance makes you satisfied with yourself and your position and then it is a danger indeed. There is nothing out of God, nothing that we have, nothing that we can come into but what the Lord, allowing it, can prove a snare and a danger to us. With all that now and again you find that sweet touch of the Spirit that will say 'Call upon God's name; fly to the throne of grace, awakened sinner fly, that will say in your heart there is room in the gospel, there is room in the Lord Jesus for such a wretch as you are, fly to His blessed throne.' And that being put in you by the Spirit will be an enabling, for the Lord's biddings are enablings and so we draw nigh to God for perseverance.

Lastly do we draw nigh to Him for an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom? Do we draw nigh to Him for that, that we may have here and when we reach to gate – the certificate, the robe of righteousness, the sanctification of Christ and have all that is absolutely necessary for heaven. Who can give all that says the Apostle "The law made nothing perfect," it leaves a man a sinner and imperfect and being imperfect he can only be rejected and turned away "but the bringing in of a better hope" did make perfect, does make perfect, complete in Him and that wondrous perfection brought in is the reason, given here, for drawing nigh unto God. Look at your foundation; look at your reason for praying for urging your case on God's notice. See if it is a good reason. Is it Christ? Is it Christ opened up and made known to you by His Spirit? Then all will be well, must be well.

Now brethren, I have laid this before you. May God speak it home to you. It is a great and a grand principle that is here set before us, neither sin, nor devil, nor time nor eternity shall weaken this reason for a sinner drawing nigh to God namely the very Lord Jesus and His blessed work. O it will fill your mouth with arguments when you see it by faith and you will then say 'Why should I then poison cherish, why despair of cure and perish, look my soul though stung to death.'

Amen