

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday 20 November, 1929

Hosea 14 verses 1, 2 and 3

"O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto Him, Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods; for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy".

This prophecy of Hosea is a very remarkable one, very poignant, searching, convicting, condemning. No child of God, I am disposed to think, can read through this prophecy and find no conviction, no shame. When God opens a man's eyes to see his own courses, the ways of his heart, his heart life, for that is the life mostly to be judged, although a child of God walk consistently in the world, yet he finds that shame and confusion of face belong to him. And I should judge that all exercised people in this church and congregation must, from time to time, find themselves in the dust, and hear their hearts saying, woe unto us, the crown is fallen from our head; we have sinned, and it is a great mercy to be under conviction of wrong things when we have indulged in them. I would bless God with humility that He takes candles again and again out of the Scripture, and searches the corners and holes of my heart. If He is doing it with any of you, O may He keep you from trying to put the candles out, for mercy is in the end. An easy, quiet, level profession may land a person in a terrible condition at the end, if that person be godly, but an exercised soul, often brought up to the bar, often placed under a searching light, that discovers corners, holes, idols, filth, hidden things, wrong worship, well it is very painful, piercing, shaming, shameful, but the end is in the text. Let us, as enabled, follow the church in the Lamentations - "Let us search and try our ways and turn again to the Lord." Do any

of you feel barren now? Are you complaining that you do not get the Lord's ear as formerly? Are you confessing that He is, for the most part, silent to you? Cannot you get very near to Him as you used to do? Are you not indulged in some things as you formerly were? Now search and try your ways. Ask why. There is a reason, and if God is good to you, He will let you know the reason, and you will say, it is my heart; I went wrong there; I turned aside on such an occasion and I listened to my nature, I listened to a worldly spirit, I listened to a spirit of aversion to prayer, I listened to reason and to unbelief and I wanted a bed and I got on my bed, and I was comfortable there. And when I was touched and made to know that I was in an improper state, then I said, I cannot be disturbed, I am in bed, I have washed my feet, I am comfortable. And when such and such things are opened to you, I know what you will feel, for I have had the whole of it in my own case more than once. You will say - "Woe is me for I have sinned." O it is a great thing that God is merciful and although that is such a trite word, heard all over the world where the Scripture is, it comes to be a great word to a sinner. I hope the Lord wont let this church and all gracious people in the congregation get easy, wrongly easy. If we do, we do not know where we shall be at the end. O what work there may be for a death bed. But if we are brought up daily, taught, searched, tried, and if we are enabled to weigh matters, and ponder well the path of our feet, then the end will be good. Now God comes to bad people. O we can never thank Him enough for that. He comes to this fallen nation and says "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." What a word for God to speak, either to a nation by His prophets, or to a church, by a minister, or to a conscience in secret. "O Israel, O church, O sinner, "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity". Do any of you feel it? He says, return. What a word. "Return unto the Lord thy God". It is a great blessing that our backslidings do not, cannot, dry up His mercies. But when He speaks so, when a sinner's conscience feels the piercings of the accusation, "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity", then discouragement, fears, an army of fears, guilt, sinking guilt, will come. Then the sinner needs encouragement. Then the Lord does not, when this is the case, does not send Moses with a rod

to smite; He sends the gospel, and because the sinner is so out of heart and so truly discouraged, He graciously tells him what to do. You have had your own way; now this is My way. "Take with you words". O dumb sinner, listen to this; not your own mind, this is the dictation of the Spirit to a sinner convinced of his sins. "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord." You went away from Him when you were full of something. Now that you are empty, turn to Him, and say to Him, "Take away all iniquity". Whoever could have thought it, if it had not been recorded in the Scriptures, that an offended Majesty, a displeased parent, a dishonoured Lord, could say such a word as this. You have heaped up iniquity against Me - take it away. This is the gospel; this is the sinner's gospel. "Take away all iniquity". And that word "all" is wonderfully full of love. It expresses the kindness and love of God, "all iniquity". All the perversions of my spirit, all my evil thoughts, all my pride, all my turning away from Thee and from the heavenly counsel of Thy Word. "Take away all iniquity". You have a good deal of iniquity, have you not? O poor backsliding child of God, you have so much iniquity, you do not need a single frown from a saint, you need all the encouragement God's saints may give you. But then you will need more than that. God may give you many a smile from His people at such a time, and you can hardly think it was from Him, but you will find it so. But then you will need this "Take away all iniquity", the forgiveness of sin. And this is the gospel that the Apostle John was inspired to write in his wonderful Epistle - "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What a word. How does God take it away? He takes it away by the blood of the everlasting covenant, the blood of sprinkling. "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin". He takes it away by the application of the blood of the cross to the conscience. Purged then is the conscience from dead works. What an amazing thing this is. Those of you who have had it know well this, that no living tongue can express the happiness, the humility, the shame, the love, the peace and the praise a sinner is filled with when this "all iniquity" is taken away. Things are put straight then, straight with God, really straight with

God. Then you can take your cross up and follow Him. "Receive us graciously". You may have expected a frown. You have thought that He might frown you away; that if He did not quite do that, you thought He could not smile again while you lived, even though He might take you to heaven, so base has been your conduct. Now you say, according to His own teaching, "Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously". You go creeping to Him, tremblingly; you pray, pray with shame, and say with Daniel, "To us and to our kings and our princes belong shame and confusion of face for we have sinned against Thee". And now the sinner goes like this "Receive me graciously". And what is it to be received graciously? It is to be welcomed; it is for the Holy Spirit to take you, as it were, by the hand, and conduct you to the Father through the Son; to give you a sweet smile, a sense that God does not hold all the iniquity now against you; that He has cast your sin behind His back; that He wont remember it again according to His covenant promise, "I will remember their sins and their iniquity no more." And there you are accepted in the Beloved; received again. "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them", sits at table with them, and takes their shyness and backwardness away by saying "Eat O friends and drink abundantly O beloved." And perhaps you walk about your house filled with wonder and humility and shame and happiness. It is a happiness that only God can give, the humility that forgiveness begets; a genuine humility of heart; the greatest sinner, the least saint, dealt with so wonderously, so kindly. Love, kindly, tenderly expressed. The prodigal has got the heavenly merry-making, the fatted calf, the renewed love and the ring and the shoes and the father's kiss. Well, I can only say this, I believe this is God's way of breaking sinners to pieces. Receive us graciously, embrace us. "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth." "Thy love is better than wine". And faith has courage enough to ask all this, and ask to be allowed to come to the Beloved and sit at His feet, to admire Him and delight in Him and sit down under the shadow of His cross. Well dear friends, then there is this feeling - "So will we render the calves of our lips". The very kernel of praise, the spirit of gratitude, the heart's thanks rendered, offered, brought to God. But forgiveness will

always beget thankfulness; say, - If Thou wilt do what Thou didst tell us to come to Thee and ask for, then we will render the praise of it to Thee, the fruit of our lips. By the Spirit of God, we read in the Hebrews, "Let us go forth unto Him without the camp bearing His reproach; "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks unto God". And when you are blessed you say, O I will praise Him. And you go about perhaps your work, and, your heart thanking Him, humbly praising Him, do not know how to speak well enough of Him in your heart, how to lift Him high enough in your affections, and all your trust is in Him.

Now then you will come to this, the third verse. "Asshur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the works of our hands, ye are our gods". Here are three sins confessed and forsaken, and whenever God blesses a sinner, He does forsake his sins. Three sins confessed - Asshur shall not save us" Israel was apt to turn to Assyria; Israel is charged by God by this prophet thus - They cried to Egypt, they go to Assyria - Asshur. O how apt we are to go to a creature, an arm of flesh. We may quickly be turned aside and scarcely know it for a time and go to some creature and O we shall always prove the evil of it. By Isaiah, the Lord said - Woe to this people who go down to Egypt, go for horses, trust in the shadow of Egypt. Have you gone to somebody, leant on some arm, and has the Lord brought it to you that you have sinned in that? Now He says, "Come back to Me". And then you say - "Lord, I am ashamed and I wont trust to that arm of flesh." That is the language of a repenting sinner, a believing sinner; that is the language. "We will not ride upon horses." You know it was God's forbidding to Israel to multiply horses and when He anticipated, as Moses tells them, that they would ask in the future for a king to be set over them, that they might be like the nations round about them, God says, - now he is not to multiply horses and chariots. He was to be their strength. That, as I think, was His special reason for forbidding the multiplication of horses by Israel. They might say "O these horses, they will be enough for us; these chariots, we will use them." Now say the Lord's people in

their confessions, "We wont ride upon horses, our own strength, our own wisdom, our own judgment, Lord we wont ride on these". Ephraim is broken in judgment. You will find you will get broken in judgment when you are riding on some horse of your own, whatever it may be. It is very painful; I know it, having gone through all of it myself more than once; very shameful too. "We will not ride upon horses" - that was the second sin to which Israel was very prone. And the third sin is this - "Say to the work of their hands, ye are our gods". That sin commenced, that special sin commenced with Aaron's making the golden calf. Then we should have thought naturally they would have had enough of that idolatry, because that calf was ground to powder and they were made to drink it. And some of us have had to drink our idolatries in sharp convictions; we have had to drink the things that we have indulged in; ashes have been our meat, mingled with our drink. Bless God for such a painful experience; it has been wholesome. "Asshur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses" and we wont go to these groves, these pleasant shadows and there offer and pour out our libations to these idols. Self and self things are very pleasant shadows and we have gone unto them and rested under them. Israel was constantly making, planting groves in high places, and there worshipping their idols until God made them so sick of them as that here they say - We wont say it any more. When God deals with us for sin, we forsake it. You know what that means. When God shows you a sin, you have to give it up. In showing you a sin, He may build a wall around you, and nature and pride may say - do not remain within this wall, break through it. And when you have indulged in that spirit, you get a long way from God, and a long way from peace and you have to say later - "O Lord, other lords beside Thee have had dominion over us". Then you can say - "they are dead", (yes, God kills the idols sometimes) "they shall not rise". That is the language of faith, and though later you may get ensnared again, this is true at the time, they are dead, dead in your affections, dead in your judgment, and you have to leave them. But what a mercy you are not left destitute; you have this given you, God gives it - "In Thee, my offended Lord, my displeased Saviour, and God, in Thee on whom I have often turned my back, In Thee whose

throne of grace I have treated so badly, so constantly disposed to turn away from it; in Thee, I, a poor orphan, now destitute, can find mercy. Is not this wonderful; the God we treated so basely treats us so lovingly; the God against whom we have so often turned, turns to us of Himself and says - Now turn to Me. He turns His loving face to the sinner and the sinner, weeping, turns his face to Him and they meet again. "In Thee the fatherless findeth mercy".

Now this solemn scripture, to which I have thus called your attention, is very wonderful and it expresses several things. First, it expresses the heart and bowels of God's love and compassion. He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity; many a time did it, and did not stir up all His wrath. That is one thing that this text sets before us, the heart and bowels of love and compassion. He wont let a convinced sinner despair; He wont let your weeping face get too foul, but He will wipe away your tears. He wounds your heart with the arrow of conviction of your waywardness, and then sends the blessed healing balm, and the Good Physician lays His healing hand on the wound. He is full of compassion. "He is able to have compassion on the ignorant and them that are out of the way". If anything will move a sinner to shame and love, it is this manifestation of God, of His heart, of His love and His compassion.

And the next thing this text brings out as I think and feel is this, the wonderful power of God in dealing with a very haughty spirit, with a very wayward child, when one who has fallen from a good experience, fallen from a good standing in his conscience, fallen from the blessed worship of God in which he has been favoured to walk from time to time, that such a person gets another powerful touch on his soul and he is brought off from all that highness and pride, vanity and foolishness and made to see that the things which Christ has against him were real evils, and now he repents and does the first work, and comes back to his knees. He should never have left them but he did. Now he comes back to his knees to worship his God. That is kindness, that is power, that is the very power of God in his soul, and the

text brings it forth. You have fallen; Come to Me, return to Me. You are ashamed; take these words He gives. He gives faith; faith utters them, uses them, pleads them, urges them on the notice of this good God. "Take away all iniquity". O, when you look through your tears of shame on the way you have walked, you see your sin. You may look at a bad state and say well, I am not where I would be and yet I have no heart to go to the Lord. But now it is different, you not only see your sin, but you weep over it. There is a power in your soul to bring you to the footstool of mercy, a power in your conscience making such furrows of conviction that God sows the seed of His mercy in and brings forth fruit, the fruit of repentance, the fruit of a return to Himself and that is the second thing that this text brings, the power of God. The third thing which I would name is this, that He lets His mercy run out to these sinners, and they say, (you have said it) they say, "In Thee the fatherless findeth mercy". Christ said He would not leave His children orphans; He would not leave them comfortless orphans. He would send another to them, the Holy Spirit and He it is who comes and brings the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ into the soul. "Findeth mercy". You have been digging for it in prayer, in confession of sin, in forsaking your own ways; you have been digging for this, and now it comes. You find it. Wisdom is now pleasant to you; the wisdom of God which is Christ, is pleasant to you, and it shows you how to walk. It says - Now no more horses, no more Asshur, Assyria. O, says the sinner, I am sick of these things. I wish the Lord would cause some of us to be every day sick of what we have been and where we have been and what we have been doing. It would be well for me if I had this grace every day of my life, to turn away from myself, to take up the cross, go to Christ, bearing His reproach. It is a reproach to the world to be a poor sinner depending on the Saviour, but that is the reproach that a living soul loves to have and feel. "Findeth mercy". What is this mercy? It is the mercy of forgiveness; it is converting mercy and converting mercy in some respects is sweeter than the first mercy. O it is wonderful to get it again and again and again. Many a time forgave He their iniquity and did not stir up all His wrath. "Findeth mercy". Then there is this mercy. He restores

the years that the locust hath eaten. I will restore unto you the years that the locust and the caterpillar and the palmerworm, hath eaten. And what is that? It is Christ coming to you again; it is the love of God coming again; it is the renewing of some old mercy and promise to your soul; it is making fruitful in your experience some promises perhaps given to you in your beginning and often forgotten. Now He renews them and that renews the days of your youth and makes your flesh fresher than a child's; so rich is God's mercy. And the fatherless, comfortless and orphans find it. Where do they find it? They find it first in God in Christ. O the ocean, the illimitable, the everlasting ocean of mercy in God in Christ. God delights in it; it is His delight. He delighteth in mercy. Then they find it in their own hearts, their straitened bosoms open, their minds open and they receive mercy. A gracious opening is wonderful. "Lord give my straitened bosom room". And now mercy makes the room; mercy gets its own welcome, effects its own sweet intention in the sinner. What a God we have. I would like to commend Him to you while crying shame on all of our sins and our evil ways. I would commend to you this wonderful God, the love of the Father, the blood of the Son and the grace of the Holy Spirit. Some of us hope we are going to heaven; O that we could live more heavenly lives. There is only one way of doing it, and that is finding mercy, mercy in God. O dear friends, I wish we did live near to Him; I wish we did live near to Him. Things that are attractive to us in the world would lose that attraction; we should walk properly, we should walk tenderly if we lived near to Him. And what is this? "Keep close to Me" says the Lord. "Lord tell me what tis close to keep" the helpless sheep replies. And this is the conclusion, Hart was right,

Thy whole dependence on Me fix
Nor entertain a thought
Thy worthless schemes with Mine to mix
But venture to be nought

Not much, some people may say. Ah, but such people do not know. It is a great deal if you venture to be nought. I will tell you

what it is that you have been enabled to do, to mortify the deeds of the body. What is it? - to kill them. "If ye through the Spirit do kill the deeds of the body". What a word it is. Asshur cannot do it for you. Do not go to Assyria. Horses wont help you do it; do not mount any horse. Idols wont do it; O to be saved from idolatry. Then this is the thing, the mortification of the deeds of the body, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.

Now dear friends, a christian man is as two people. He has got the old man, it is true, the law of sin, and by his experience of that he is saved from self-reliance; he is saved from self-righteousness; he is saved from self-wisdom, for the Spirit of God comes and enables him to utterly renounce them. And renouncing them is mortifying them, leaving them. And then a christian man is a holy man; he is a saint of the Most High God; he is dear to Christ; he is a son of God; he is the younger brother of the Lord Jesus; a child of Abraham, he is the friend of God. He has an inheritance in store. He gets a little out of it to live by while here, but the inheritance is reserved for him, and he is reserved for it. So a christian man is a strange creature, strange to himself often, but he is a good man and he is dear to God, and one day he will let fall and leave behind all his offensiveness, his iniquity, the body of sin and death and go in and go no more out. Now dear church of God and dear saints in the congregation, you may find it profitable, though very shameful and shaming, to read through this prophecy. You may find it very profitable because it will tell you of the wrong things you indulged in, but you will find it very profitable because it will bring you and God together again, and what a heaven that is.

AMEN.