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(Morning Sermon P.S. 139)

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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 22 February 1920

Isaiah 25 v 4

"For Thou hast been a strength to the poor,
a strength to the needy in His distress, a refuge
from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when
the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm
against the wall"

What man, what angel is worthy to speak of this God, so high, so glorious, just, holy, righteous, wise, merciful, full of compassion, tender pity; full of pardon. Who is fit to speak of Him, and who is worthy to hear of Him. What favour He confers on men when He condescends to speak to them; when by His attractions He draws them; when by His love He kisses them. O it is a favour to be a Christian. It is an infinite mercy to be a Christian. It is beyond all words to know God savingly. Our lips are so polluted, we are not fit to speak of Him, and yet He condescends to send poor sinners to speak to poor sinners and says - Lift up thy voice; cry aloud, say - "All flesh is grass and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of grass; the grass withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever" and say "this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you"; and this is the word which by the gospel saves, humbles, brings into conformity to the image of Christ, according to predestination, and this gospel, the word of God makes known. And the more the Spirit of God reveals it and applies it and makes Christ brighter than the earth, deeper than the sea, higher than heaven, more wonderful than all creation, than angels, than men, than providence; all things put together are not to be compared with Him, who is worthy to speak of Him. I am deeply conscious at this moment of being unworthy to open my lips concerning such a Person, and yet what should we do without Him. O bless God for Christ; bless God that the whole of Deity is in the Man Christ Jesus, and the whole of infinite love is in the Man Christ Jesus, and all human perfection is in the Man Christ Jesus. And these are one Person, one Person, one Saviour,

the way to God, the hope of a sinner, the foundation of one who knows that his foundation is in the dust. My beloved friends, it will be wonderful to get to heaven, and if we do get there it will be by the man Christ Jesus who is the Mediator between God and man. But between us and heaven there may be storms; there may be a long time; there may be much affliction; there may be many doubts, many devils, many snares. There is a wicked world; there is a wicked heart of unbelief between us and heaven. There is the Jordan of death. And how shall we get through all these storms and temptations and afflictions and a world hostile to us and to Christ, and the Jordan of death. Do you ask yourself the question, how shall we get through? Die we must. How? If a man die, shall he live again? Man dieth, yea man wasteth away. He giveth up the ghost and where is he? Do you question yourself respecting your future abode? This glorious Being condescends to sinners, He condescends to sinners. "He looketh upon men and if there be any that say "I have sinned and perverted that which was right and it profited me not, then He is gracious" If He were to come with those burning feet of His and walk among us and look on us, look on our hearts, our thoughts, would He, so seeing us, hear us say "I have sinned and perverted that which was right and it profited me not?" If so, what would follow? "Then is He gracious unto him". That would follow, surely it would follow. But there are storms, there are storms. There is the world; it is hostile to Christ; it is an enemy to everybody who is after Christ. No man can have the life of Christ in Him, and the spirit of Christ teaching him and guiding him, and not have the world as an enemy. Persecution of outward sort we do not experience, and yet the world will let us know, so far as we may have to do with it, that it is hostile to Christ; that it has nothing but ridicule or censures or bitterness for that little religion that separates us from it. We shall know it in some form, and we are so natural, have so much nature, as to feel that that may come on us from the world. This is a storm. Sometimes it has been a storm; often in the history of the world, the gates of hell have taken counsel and used all possible means and craft and power to destroy the church but she is built on the Rock; to destroy individual believers, but Christ proves to them that He is a refuge for them

from such a storm. They see Him sometimes as Moses saw Him and seeing Him who is invisible they endure the storm, they live at last. They stand every storm, this among them. There is a storm, yea, and it does toss a frail bark; it is a tempestuous sea sometimes; it has tossed martyrs about. The world has thrown them into fires and into floods and into graves and buried them alive, and it will do much yet against the Church of Christ, but all who have had to suffer and have suffered for His Name have found Him to be a refuge, a refuge from the storm of the world's anger, and the world's ridicule, and the world's censures and the world's bitterness. It may have come to some in their families; some here, it may have come from the most tender of all relationships; it may have come from parents to children or from children to parents. It is a storm. Now when the storm is high and strong and the sinner wonders how he shall stand and thinks he cannot stand, the Holy Ghost leads him to Christ and he finds a refuge there.

A refuge for sinners
The gospel makes known

Blessed refuge. And "they" says the Psalmist, "that know Thy Name will put their trust in Thee". There is a storm experienced from the flesh. The world and the flesh, they unite in their enmity to Christ, and they unite sometimes in making a great storm. Every child of God carries anger, bitterness, unbelief against God in his own breast, and he finds to his grief that when he would do good, evil is present with him, and sometimes he may think that he would rather have any circumstantial trouble, any storm in providence, than feel what he feels against God in his own breast. O it is bitter when the storm of some indwelling sin rages, when the wind blows, when it is like Euroclydon, when you have not a moment's rest, when every kind of evil thought, when the most terrible bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour you feel working in your heart and when you are driven and scarcely know which way to turn, or what to do. When it seems as if you cannot contain yourself. Your sweetest mercies in providence are made bitter by this. Your table seems to be a

snare to you by this. Your friends are helpless when this is upon you. It is a great storm and a dangerous storm. Many have been swallowed up of indwelling sin; few struggle and swim against this storm. The reason so few understand it is that they go along with it into perdition, but the few who swim and struggle against it and look at the waves sometimes with fear and alarm, thinking that they will be swallowed up, these find their way into Christ. Yes, and He is a refuge from this in one or two particular ways, as first, He is a refuge from the guilt of this indwelling sin. He took it away when He died. Every saint here lost his sins when Christ said "It is finished" as to their guilt. No guilt remains for the church; no guilt remains on the church; no guilt shall sink her into hell, and from this Christ is a refuge. Is there no hope of deliverance but in Him for you? Do you expect to get through without Christ? Do you think you will live without Him? Stand this storm and live at last without Christ? No, He is made so real, so necessary, as that if He for a moment during a storm were blotted out of your sight and from your heart and mind, you would sink into despair. God has made this refuge and opened it. This is a city of refuge to him who, as it were, has killed himself through indwelling sin. This city of refuge is open and God is pleased to make it known. Also He is a refuge in this storm with respect to habitation. "Because thou hast made the Lord which is my refuge, even the Most High thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." And there is a sweet feeling sometimes that this monster that rages and lashes and raves against God and Christ and the soul's interest, shall never invade that house, that sweet, wonderful house of defence to save us, to shelter us, to solace us. "Thou hast made the Most High thy habitation", and therefore, O child of God, no evil shall come near this dwelling. No plague shall invade this dwelling. No devil shall come into this dwelling. No lion shall enter this dwelling; the Most High is the refuge of a sinner who comes to this place. "Thou hast been a refuge from the storm". It is a great thing to be here; this refuge, this habitation is more wonderful than any tongue can describe. O the power that makes the sinner safe; the comfort of this home, this habitation

that delights the soul; the peace that pervades it; the sweet comforts and provisions that are seen to be in it. This habitation is God in Himself, the man Christ Jesus. "The Eternal God is thy refuge" The Eternal God in His love, in His infinite merit, in His blessed righteousness; in His prevailing intercession; in His faithful word; in His omnipotence to save. This is the refuge, and when poor sinners are here, they are delighted, they are refreshed, they are solaced. Love solaces them; peace controls them; happiness fills them; bright prospects fire them with heavenly zeal to reach the place where Christ is a refuge from the storm.

There is a storm of circumstances sometimes. A Sennacherib comes; a Nebuchadnezzar comes; and these raise a storm of contempt. "Let not your God deceive you" said Sennacherib - Rabshakeh his servant spoke it for him - "Let not your God in whom you trust deceive you. Where are the other gods I have gone against" O my friends, things may come, circumstances may transpire, and matters may assume such a threatening aspect and speak so seriously and threateningly as to be like a Rabshakeh, like a Nebuchadnezzar, like violent enemies coming to besiege, to surround and threatening to take and destroy. It is no easy thing to be travelling to heaven through an enemy's land. It is no trifle to be running to the Lord Jesus, and yet the things that come make Him necessary.

There is a storm of temptation sometimes. The devil, like Pharaoh may say in you - "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him, to let Israel go. I know not the Lord. I will not let Israel go". And your enemy may have captured you as to your feelings and he may be holding you and may be like the captor of poor sinners of whom the Lord speaks by Jeremiah - and their captors refused to let them go. Pharaoh refused to let Israel go; and the devil, with your sin complying, will refuse to let you go to God sometimes; to let you run to Christ; refuse to allow you to be quiet; will lash you and demand service of you, yea, he may tempt you to worship him, and storm if you do not, as you will not. And how shall one stand this storm? Not at all, out of

Christ. If you are in the field when this storm comes, you may think you will never reach the home, never reach the habitation that God has provided for you; you may feel it, fear it. A refuge from this storm.

There is the storm of death. Ah, sinner, you may miss the storms I have named but this last one you cannot miss; you must meet death; it will raise itself. This storm is high; it is a sea, you must cross it; a great gulf, it is now as between you and eternity. You must cross it. Like a fire, like a dark and black night; you must go through it. It is a storm. No escape, no discharge from this war. You must meet the last enemy. Well now, that being the case, what a wonder it is to believe it, really to believe it, and what a mercy that believing it, there is a teacher to say - Christ is a refuge from this storm; not to make it unnecessary to meet the storm and live through it, get through it, but necessary to secure us from the terrible consequences of dying out of Christ.

Now how is Christ a refuge from these storms? What shall we say, in what respects is Christ a refuge? A refuge from all that is dangerous, that comes against us, that would hinder, would swallow us up and keep us from a blessed and much desired heaven. First, He is a refuge from the world. If the world hate you, it hated me before it hated you. I have given you My word and therefore the world hath hated you. Now if Christ has brought you into this trouble, and I say it advisedly, if Christ has brought you into this trouble, set the world against you by coming to you and claiming you for Himself, will He leave you? O no, He will cover you in the day of battle, He will cover in this storm, and so He will see you through it. He will see you through it; He will bring you honourably through it; He will indeed. His love is such that, having claimed you, and having, by His word in you, put a difference between the clean and the unclean; between the living and the dead and made a difference so as that you really are among the living, then He will say "As I live ye shall live also". Be not afraid. Be not afraid of men who cannot hurt you really, but fear Him who, after He hath

killed the body hath power to cast into hell, and come to Me; I will protect you. My wings shall spread over you; My power shall defend you. I will bring you through. The world may shoot at you; it shot at Me before it shot at you; but I will defend you. And, from the storm of indwelling sin - in what respect is Christ a refuge here? Is not His merit a covering? Is not His righteousness a covering? Is not His precious blood that that covers our sin? Is not His grace that that saves us from living in sin, that saves us from the dominion of sin? Christ in His Person; Christ in His death; Christ in His resurrection; Christ in His intercession; Christ in heaven; Christ in the heart; Christ in His faithfulness; will be the refuge from the storm of sin. You wont get from sin without Christ; it will make an end of you if you are out of Him, and it will make an end of you my friends. Never expect victory over one wicked thought without Christ, and remember that without holiness you cannot see Him; and a wicked thought will be like a flood, like mire and mud, defiling the whole soul. The only salvation from that is this blessed Saviour of sinners. Thou hast been a refuge from the storm of indwelling sin, of all iniquity. Guilt removed, sin subdued, grace reigning, Jesus precious, Christ near, speaking, smiling, helping again and again and covering the sinner with His blessed Word. This, this is a refuge. He, He is the safety of a poor creature who feels that he is a mass of sin and has no hope of getting through without the Lord Jesus.

In what respect is He a refuge from temptation, from circumstances, from the devil and his wrath? The devil knows his time is short, and he has great wrath and comes against God's people with great wrath sometimes. Is not Christ a refuge as He is the Captain of our salvation? Is He not a refuge as He is a promising God to defend and to bruise Satan shortly under our feet? Is He not a refuge when He comes to a poor sinner and says - "Fear none of those things" They shall cast you into prison; they shall cast you out of the synagogue; they shall trample you under foot; they shall look upon you as the offscouring of all things, but fear none of those things. Why not? They touch us, yea they touch and they pierce us to the very quick and to our

hearts, and why should we not fear? Because I live, I, your Captain who led captivity captive; because I live in your interests, I love you and I care for you; because I see the enemy; I know his rage against you - it is against Me, but he shall not shoot an arrow into this city; I will defend and save this city, for My Name's sake. And this is the refuge from the storm. O what a refuge! That sinner is secure who is defended by God.

And how can Christ be a refuge from the storm of death? We must go through this, yes we must, but that which is part of the curse, that which is a penalty to us, on us, and in us, even our mortality, shall be turned into a friend and into a blessing. How wonderful is grace; how wonderful is Christ; how glorious is Christ; that that which we justly deserve, and which shall come to us, even death, shall not hurt us, but do us good, and the last day of life shall be the best to the saint, and many and many of the saints have said - It is better to die than to live. Yea, better is the day of one's death than the day of one's birth. We may leave the world sighing, but we shall enter eternity singing. Some have gone from this life singing. O they praise redeeming love; they praise eternal redemption; they praise justifying righteousness; they bless the dear Redeemer. He has seen them through, brought them well through the storm of death. And what He has been in all ages to His saints, He will be to the end of time to them. Thou hast been a refuge from the storm.

A shadow from the heat, a shadow from the heat. There is a terrible wilderness and there is a burning sun drawing up all moisture, afflicting all who are travelling through that desert, making life all but impossible, and there is no shelter, no friendly tree under which they may run; no rock beneath whose shadow they may repose, till one comes and makes Himself that shadow. Jesus Christ comes and He makes Himself the Shadow of a great Rock in a weary land. The heat is terrible when it is the heat of some dispensation, as when these enemies came against the land of Israel; it was a great heat, the heat of human wrath and

anger; and we may have the heat of some solemn dispensation of God in providence; it may be in our own persons; we may suffer much affliction. It may be in our families; we may have great trials there such as sickness coming. It may be in the nation, when the anger of God is on the nation and when judgment follows judgment. And these things may be, and are, at times, like a great heat, burning up life, threatening speedy destruction. And then, instead of the destruction threatened and feared, there comes, O sometimes suddenly - always it is welcome - there comes the great shadow, a cloud between the poor, burnt up creature and the burning heat. A shadow comes, the very Person of Jesus Christ; the very sweet love of Jesus Christ; the great gospel of Jesus Christ; the righteousness of Jesus Christ; the intercession that He is carrying on in heaven for His children. These come, and they are like a great cloud. They come in between the heat and the person. A shadow from the heat. You know it, as you have had Christ with you in trouble; have felt it, as you have felt Him near you and felt that the heat was no longer a burning heat; that the trouble was no longer a curse, but a blessing. This is Christ. O what a shadow to Hezekiah and Jerusalem, was the word of God to that King - "I will defend this city. He shall not shoot an arrow into this city." What a shadow was God to Jacob when Esau was coming with 400 men to meet him. What a burning message that was to Jacob, and how full he was of fear. Burnt up, as it were, was his faith for the moment, and yet he cried to God and God came in between Jacob and Esau; intervened Himself, put Himself between that heat and Jacob. So, with respect to Saul and David; David was often burnt by Saul's anger, but, as often as it came close, so often did the Lord make a shadow, a blessed shadow, and David was refreshed, David was solaced, David was strengthened. And this is the case with God's people from time to time. They get this; you get it my friends. Heat comes; heat comes from some violent temptation perhaps, some very violent temptation to infidelity; to doubt, doubt your interest and doubt Him in whom you would have an interest. And it is a great refreshing and a great preservative when some sweet word comes to you, when Jesus gives a view of Himself and comes in between you and that temptation. A shadow from the heat, a blessed shadow. Nothing can burn up the child

of God who gets that. Nothing can burn up his faith; nothing can burn up his love, when this shadow comes.

When the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. Perhaps a mud wall was in the mind of the prophet. Thick, it may have been; well set, it may have been; but a blast, a rattling, whirling wind comes, and the flood brought by torrential rain, and this poor wall is threatened as if it cannot stand. It is not a wall as we have, perhaps, well bonded and strengthened, but just such a wall as they would have there. And now, what shall keep this wall? The same God, the same dear Saviour, the same Friend of sinners. He shall come, and O, if He but come and put up His hand between the storm and the wall, the blast shall be helpless and break, just as the wave and the froth of the wave you find broken on the beach, harmless. And so shall this blast be harmless when God is pleased to be this to His children - a refuge from that very terrible blast when it comes. When the blast of the terrible ones - terrible sins, terrible devils, terrible enemies to Christ and terrible wrath coming from men. These terrible ones, Sennacherib and all the enemies of the land of Israel, come with a sort of terror; lightning flashes and thunder claps, terrifying all who heard and saw. O but God came and said, "He shall not shoot an arrow into this city". These people shall do you no harm, yea you shall gain by all this, for you shall see what a God you have, what a defence you have, what a Saviour you have. And beloved friends this is more or less a common experience of the church, the people of the living God; that they have their troubles, their dangers, their difficulties, their afflictions, their heats and persecutions, but with respect to all of them, when they are brought together and are as a blast to overthrow and carry away a poor believer, they shall be only just harmless, for the refuge is here. As you were singing just now, that beautiful hymn, so it shall be; is, in experience

A refuge for sinners, the gospel makes known

And this refuge is the dear Redeemer, Emmanuel, Almighty God in

our own nature. Look then, my dear friends, at this point. First, the way to heaven is full of danger and that arises chiefly from the awful truth, that we are full of sin. He is always safe who has no sin, and he is safe, who has sin, but not safe always to his feelings. Dangers on every hand are found by the Lord's people. Everywhere, at every turn, in all ways, there is danger. Then, says a cowardly heart, the evil heart of unbelief, that brings up an evil report of the land and of God - We wont go up. Then, says faith - "Lord help me"; "Lord deliver me". Then says the Lord - "I will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble." "I will be a refuge". Then look for trouble. I am not to preach despair to people; blessed be God, I have no reason to do that. Nor would I preach anything but what would lead me to speak well of Christ. Your dangers are but as wind, when He comes. They exercise you and do you good; they make room for Him, make way for Him. Your trouble from sin and guilt must make way for Him in His atonement. That will go with you wherever you go; that will be with you all through the wilderness, with you in all your dangers; will cover you in all your sorrowful journey, and be a shadow to you from the heat that you feel would consume you sometimes. O bless God for Jesus Christ, my friends. We have dangers, but we have a Protector, and faith will make us sing sometimes

A sovereign Protector I have

and He is ever near; yes, He is ever near to His people. They, poor creatures, they are weak, they are ready to faint, they are ready to say - there is a lion in the street, I shall be destroyed. He says, "Fear not". "Fear not, I will be with thee, even to old age I am He, and to hoary hairs will I carry you. I, even I, am He. I have spoken." The mighty God hath spoken, and the hymn well sets it before us

What more can He say than to you He has said
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled

So then, if we are to look for danger, that is not all. No, no

my friends, that is not all. He says - "Look unto Me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth, for I am God and beside Me there is no Saviour." I will save you from indwelling sin; I will save you from your rebellion, from your pride, from your baseness, from your lust. I will bring you honourably to your graves. "Because I live, ye shall live also". This word then, well it shows us that we must go to heaven through trouble, and through felt dangers, and through storms, and through burning. It also shows us that these very dangers shall bring forth Christ; that they shall bring Him forth to us as we are pilgrims and as we are experiencing these things. This word says - these troubles shall bring Him to you; His grace shall bring Him to you; His faithfulness shall bring Him to you. And when He comes, where is the danger? Where is death? What is a storm, what is heat, when He comes? "Thou hast been a refuge to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall."

May the Lord encourage us; may the Holy Spirit bring this word to us and make it our own, so that we may bless the Lord and draw water from the wells of salvation.

AMEN.