

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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ISAIAH 40 v 8

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the
Word of our God endureth for ever"

We noticed a little this morning of this grass, what caused it to be grass, to die; what made man, who was created in the image of God, a perishing creature; what brought mortality to him, for he was created pure, and there is no corruptibility in purity. Sin brought death and death passed upon all men for that all have sinned. And the entrance of sin into the world is spoken of thus - By one man sin entered into the world and death entered into the world by one man, so death passed upon all men in that all have sinned. As in Adam all die, because they all sinned in him. Here is no exemption. There may be deliverance from this state, but there is no exemption as to this state in which all men are born. Now we have to look, as helped, a little more at the second part of the text - the Word of God - and it is quite clear from the comment of Peter upon it, that it is the gospel. Quoting this Scripture, Peter says, "All flesh is grass and all the goodness thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away, but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you." The gospel is the expression of God in the Person of Christ. The manifestation, that is to say, of the good pleasure of God, the infinite grace of God, the infinite love of God, the everlasting justification of the church, her sanctification by the death of Christ, her deliverance from evil, her title to, her fitness for, heaven. The manifestation of the Person of Christ, of His marvellous birth, even by the Holy Ghost in the virgin Mary. It is the manifestation of the relationship, new, wonderful, ineffable relationship, of the church to God in Christ, and it is the manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh, made under the law. It is the manifestation of the perfect work of Christ Who said "It is finished" and bowed His head and gave up the ghost, and Who, after being in the grave three days and three nights, was raised again by

the power of God. And it is the manifestation of the ascension of Christ into heaven, and His prevailing intercession there. And further it is the manifestation of the church's condition and of her eternal blessedness in God. This is the Word of the Lord, and this Word is said to endure for ever, which secures all in whom it is for their everlasting habitation. It is preserved for them; they are reserved and preserved for it. It is prepared for them and they are prepared for it, and there can be no miss in the matter. Now for a short time, I would, as enabled by a condescending Lord and Master, speak a little of this Word. Firstly, what we are to understand in some particulars by it; secondly, the duration of it.

First, what we are to understand in some particulars by the Word of the Lord, and firstly this is to be understood, namely the regeneration of the Lord's people being, as Peter says, born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, which liveth and abideth for ever. And this brings the subject of such a work into the eternally predestinated, new relationship to God. No more an alien, but a child; no longer dead, but a living soul; no longer openly fighting more or less against God, but brought down with labour and sorrow to the footstool of mercy. No longer wholly and only corrupt, but now blessed with an incorruptible life that pants for its Author and its end. No longer swayed, without interruption and conflict, by Satan, the god of this world, but influenced and drawn and taught and led and controlled and reigned in and over by God the Author of this new life. Happy art thou O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people thus blessed and thus saved? O the mercy of being born again. And this Word of God in you who have it, is so effectual as that it turns you, from time to time, from self. It will effectually bring every subject of it to lose and hate his own life, to deny himself, to take up his cross and follow Jesus Christ. It will make the world as vanity, its best things as a shadow. It will make sin bitter; it will make holiness desired, desirable. It will cause the possessor of it to flee from the wrath to come and make the favour of God in the judgment of that person better than life. This is the beginning of that kingdom in the heart that cannot be moved. "We" says Paul, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear". O, my brethren, let us sincerely and anxiously look at this question,

whether we have ground to hope that by the incorruptible seed of God's Word, we have received a new life, a being that God alone can satisfy. This was not in the old creation; it was not contemplated by the law; it was not commanded by the law; it has nothing to do with the law, nor the law with it. When God gave the law, the earth shook. When He speaks the incorruptible ^{word} seed, He speaks from heaven as the God of all grace, and the kingdom is then received which cannot be moved. And of this kingdom it is said, it is an everlasting kingdom, and the dominion of God in it endureth to all generations. How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders. How great are the signs of His grace here. How mighty are the wonders of His everlasting love in begetting anew a seed to Himself, in fulfilling that word in Genesis that we read this morning - "I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise His heel". Now Christ bruises the head of Satan when He speaks the incorruptible word, the seed of the living God, into the soul, thereby begetting it anew unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. O, it would require more time, more grace, and more ability than I have, to speak of this new birth as it ought to be spoken of, for the greatness of God is in it; the greatness of grace, the greatness of love, and the greatness of wisdom and the greatness of power. This greatness of God is in the new birth. It makes the sinner a great person, not in himself, not in his own eyes, but in the sight of God. It is great in its effects. Some know not when this came to them, but they know the effects of it. They know not the means God used to bring it to pass, but they know what has been done. "Whereas", each says "I was blind; now I see". And though for a time one may see men as trees walking, the time comes when he sees God, and Christ and blood shed for sinners, and righteousness wrought for sinners, and mercy to be built up in sinners and Christ to be the King, the Priest, and Prophet in and for sinners. And they see the throne of grace and heaven promised. They see these things and yet they understand them not, but in a little measure, only as opened and revealed. And that is true in ^{tham} that this prophet in another place says: "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." O, you who are troubled about sin, and who are troubled by God in His holy Word threatening you; who fear His Name and fear missing that prize such numbers never seek, such numbers seek in vain; wait on the Lord. He has not said: Seek ye

Me, in vain; He never will. Well, that is the first thing, the Word of God new begetting, breathing a new life, creating a new principle, working a radical change, in the person. Not casting out all sin, but breaking its dominion. Not removing all darkness, but causing light to penetrate the understanding. Not taking away all the stubbornness of the will, but subduing it and again and again bringing every thought into captivity unto the obedience of Christ.

The second point in this word of the Lord that I would bring to your notice, to which I would earnestly solicit your closest attention, is the word of righteousness, the word of righteousness which we preach. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth and with thy heart believe that God raised up Jesus from the dead, thou shalt be saved." And this is called believing unto righteousness. Yes, there is a word of righteousness, which is justification. Justification presupposes sin, guilt. It supposes an accusation, an accuser, and an accused; a judge and his verdict. All this the gospel shows. It supposes sin from which the sinner is to be justified and delivered; delivered from all things from which he could not be delivered by the law of Moses. Justification changes the state of a person. It changed the state of the whole church the moment Jesus Christ said "It is finished". It brought into reality an everlasting purpose of God, and it brought, so to speak, into the view of God really a people who had been in His decree eternally holy and without blame. And now it brings the sinner into this new relation and experience. The word of righteousness. Justification is more than forgiveness; forgiveness may be, and all the sin forgiven remain on a person, as if you forgive a person that has injured you; that is the end of your power. You cannot justify the person; you can never render him an innocent person as if that which he had done had not been done; never make him as having no sin attached to him. Justification does this, and this is the word of justification in the gospel. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions and as a cloud thy sins. Return unto Me for I have redeemed thee". Not, I have removed punishment, remitted penalty; not that I have taken away the threat of judgment and punishment from you; but the thing that deserves punishment, the guilt that made you as a dead person, that I have blotted out. This is spoken home to the hearts of sinners sooner or later and I would it may please God to grant that all His children here and everywhere may

yet come to see that this is the soul of true religion as to its experience. This is the source and root and strength of godliness in the conscience and in the spirit, and this is that that produces the sweetest worship and the most evangelical repentance; that provokes the sinner to love and good works more than anything else. O, to have your sins remitted. "Without shedding of blood is no remission". God bears long with people who have no blood shed for them, but he never forgives a sinner without blood which takes away the guilt of sin. Many are borne with during a long life of wickedness, but that is not forgiveness. Many take forgiveness who know nothing of justification and I pray God that we here, who are concerned about our souls, may have this justification. The word of righteousness which we preach, says Paul, that if thou shall believe with thine heart, that is believe unto righteousness, and with thy mouth confess that God raised Jesus from the dead, thou shall be saved, and to be saved in the gospel sense is for Christ to save from sin, which is to forgive it, remove and blot it out. "Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is he to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile." And this wont be done where there is some intercedent godliness, where there is some preceding goodness. There is nothing in the sinner who is to be justified that predisposes him or in any degree or manner qualifies him for this. He is a sinner. God is said "to justify the ungodly that believeth in Jesus". What a beautiful word it is: "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions and as a cloud thy sins." Messiah took away sin; He made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. And therefore he wears and bears that ineffable name, ineffable to the Father, ineffable to the churches: "This is the Name wherewith He shall be called the Lord our Righteousness". Yet what child of God in his exercises and desires, through ignorance, does not wish to have some intercedent goodness. O, if he had but a broken heart; if he had but a spirit of prayer; if he were but sincere; if he were but humble; if his will were not so stubborn and perverse, and if it were so, insofar he would make God a debtor. Just think of it. He, God, justifieth the ungodly that believeth in Jesus. It is hard to receive Christ thus, but it is blessed, it is heaven, and God speaks the word and then the sinner receives Him; receives, as Paul speaks in the Romans, the atonement. An atonement speaks sin; sin speaks the law, the law that God will

not have broken with impunity; the law that He sent His Son to fulfil and magnify. And Jesus, having done this, having said "It is finished" brought in thereby everlasting righteousness. He was a Priest on the cross actively offering to God, actively offering Himself without spot to God. And when He had so wrought He gave up the ghost; He died a voluntary death as He had been commanded to do. None of us will die the same. Our willingness through grace, if we are so blessed to die, wont be the same. We shall die of physical necessity. If, through grace, we can say: I know whom I have believed; I know where I am going; I know Christ is my righteousness and I know that I shall be received of the Father; O, how blessed it will be, but it wont be - in the sense in which Christ died a voluntary death - a voluntary death on our part. He died of no physical necessity, no disease, no weakness of that kind. And this is the justification of the Church, this is the justification of every new born sinner, this is the justification in which you, if you are blessed with it, must stand before God without blemish or wrinkle or blameworthiness or any such thing. The Lord cause this simple word on this matter to turn your hearts to the righteousness of Christ. In that you will be just; clothed with that you will be beautiful; blessed with that you will have a right and title to heaven and a fitness.

The third point I would call your attention to is the word of sanctification. This is a part of the gospel, an important branch of the gospel. In the Corinthians, the Spirit inspired Paul to write of Christ thus: "Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification." Now that is the thing; sanctification. Not, in that case the graces of the Spirit, not holy feelings, but a holiness that can know no rise, no fall; that can never be more, never be less; made yours as Christ is made over to you. What a blessed gospel this is. Does not it suit people who have no strength, and no goodness. This makes men holy in God's sight. Now may the Lord make us clear here. We shall need this if we are His people; we do need it in our feelings. But when we come to the end, when we have to say - as we shall if we are able to speak, and as our hearts will speak - that looking back on our profession, be it long or short, we can see nothing but imperfection; shortcoming; failures; cold love; little faith; poor, often beclouded hope; many times perverse in our wills, irritable against God even; many times thinking, Jonah-like

that we do well to be angry; I say, looking back on all these things, what should we do if this were our only sanctification? O, what thorns there would be in our pillows, what pangs in our consciences. And there will be more or less so, but not in the sense in which I would speak now. If the Spirit is pleased then - if He is pleased now, from time to time - to show us that Christ answers all that the Lord God requires; all that the law commanded; to love God with all our heart and all our soul and all our minds and all our strength and our neighbour as ourselves; if all that beauty of holiness that God calls for and will, must, have; if we see that Christ is made that to us, and we feel the power of it in our souls; then that that is in the Psalms will be understood: "They looked unto Him and were lightened and their faces were not ashamed" What child of God could look up to God, reviewing his life; what one of you here, myself included, could say before God: This day, Lord; this day there have been no failures? And so shame attaches to us all. But O, to look up through Him who is made sanctification; to believe He answers all God's requirements; that that perfect holiness of His is made over to us and we stand in it; this, this will be strong consolation to us. But I wont leave out the other. Although the sanctification in our spirits and affections and wills and understanding that is wrought in us is most blessed - I wont leave it out - it is not part of the other. It is not, so to speak, an essential thing that you should have years of exercise and the Spirit should come to you and do this and that, because, if that were so, what of the thief? He had righteousness and holiness made over to him, and went to heaven immediately. But if we live long we shall have conflict; then we shall have sin rising and against it, grace working; rebellion moving and against it submission wrought in us; lust and pride and envy moving, and then sweet, holy feelings and submission to God's will and a clearing of the enmity from our affections and minds; all wrought by the Holy Ghost. The word "holiness" is very great - "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord" - and the will of God is that we should be holy in our lives: This is the will of God that everyone should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.

Well, my beloved friends, these three points are very great and in these, if we receive them, we receive a kingdom that cannot be moved; can know no changes. Now who shall have the praise of this

word of the Lord? We speak of it as the gospel, and so it is, but who is the sum of the gospel? In whom is the gospel fulness found? Do not we sing the truth when sometimes we sing

A fulness resides in Jesus our Head
And ever abides to answer our need

This is the fulness, even in Jesus Christ. It is here, it is here, my friends. This is the word of the Lord in the covenant of grace - and you have it in that word of the Apostle Paul's where, quoting from Jeremiah, he says - This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers, which My covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them. But this shall be the covenant, I will put My laws into their hearts and into their mind will I write them, and they shall be to Me a people and I will be to them a God. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know Me from the least to the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their sins and remember their iniquities no more. So this is the word of the Lord.

There are many other things we might speak about, and if I were to add just this one thing, all the others would be included, namely the gift of the Holy Ghost, that divine Person by whose immediate operation the virgin Mary conceived the Lord Jesus, and by whom the Lord Jesus was anointed without measure. He is the revealer of Jesus and the sealer of all the saints unto the day of redemption, who works in them that which fits them for heaven, as says Paul "He that hath wrought us for the self same thing is God, who hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." All the promises which are enduring, all the sweet things God is pleased to say to His children, all the admonitions He speaks on their hearts, and the warnings and the checks and the rebukes and the chastisements, these belong to the kingdom and these are in the word of God; they come from the one gift; particularly the promises which cannot be moved, cannot be shaken.

Now in the next place, for a few moments, notice the duration of this word of the Lord - it shall stand for ever. And we have to make,

what is difficult often for us to make, a distinction between the enduring word of God and our fluctuating experiences. The latter often leave us distracted, dismayed, hot and cold in half an hour; today, zealous in God's way, to-morrow dull and flat; now anxious to know and serve Him alone, and then full of self-will and pride. O, the changes through which we go are many and very sad many of them are; grievous, many of them. Like the changing wind, fickle, scarcely ever at a point; always moving about. Although we are convinced that here we have no continuing city, like fools we are always seeking a city of this kind wherein we may rest and be at home. Well, if you judge by yourselves, if you judge your state by your feelings, you who know the Lord, you wont be at a point at all. But, says William Gadsby

Why should the Christian judge
By what he feels within

He may judge that he is a sinner, and a particularly vile sinner; he may judge that there is in him no certainty at all; that he is not to be trusted for an hour with anything. He may say, and honestly say, was there ever another child of God, if child of God I be, so fickle and so troublesome to God as myself. He may say all that honestly, but why should he judge his state and his standing before God by what he feels within? Is there anything else by which he may judge? Yes; what is that? What he has received from heaven. What has he received? The Word of God. The Word of God is in thy mouth and in thy heart, the word of faith which we preach, that if thou shalt believe with thy heart and with thy mouth confess the Lord Jesus, thou shalt be saved. And this word shall stand for ever against temptation, declension, and everything of that kind. We are told that God laid in Zion a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone. Christ was tried. Sin tried Christ; wrath tried Christ; the Father's rod tried Christ; the grief the Father occasioned Him tried Christ; death, the curse, and the grave, all tried Christ, and He stood; and trial is needful for us. "If need be ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ". And now my brethren, let me put the case to you. You have been tried for

some years; your hope has been assailed; your faith has been tested; your love has been put to it; your religion has been nearly gone, all gone sometimes; you have had no godliness in you to your own judgment and sense. Providence has tried you; a hiding God has tried you; unanswered prayers have tried you; begun, but not finished matters, may now be trying some of you; hopes, born of the word, not fulfilled, try you still; desires, long felt and often expressed in secret, but not yet gratified, try you. How have you stood? What hand has supported you? On what do you stand still? And when you can plead, what do you plead? Faith will help you to answer these simple questions. Had not your life been in God it would long since have perished. And though you can bear Him no fruit to your own satisfaction, the Root bears you. "Thou bearest not the root, but the root thee". This is the thing; the word of God in the new birth, the word of God in Christ's righteousness, the word of God in sanctification, stands for ever. The word of the Lord shall stand for ever, and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you, and this will be the standing of the Lord's people for ever and ever. O, but I am afraid I shall come short. Said Moses, If Thou slayest these people, then the enemy will say Thou couldst not bring them through. One said to the Lord in a like case: "What wilt Thou do unto Thy great Name?" Judas went to his own place that the Scripture might be fulfilled, and the saint must go to his own place that the Scripture may be fulfilled - Where I am there shall My servant also be. Yes, poor, afflicted soul, that is the word; hang on it. Wait on Him who has spoken it. Plead it before Him; He cannot, He will not deny Himself. The word of the Lord shall endure for ever. Then it will outlive you. Yes, and yet it will not, for you will go with it, and it will go with you into heaven, and that blessed One who came to you here, Jesus Christ, will lead you and all the rest of His redeemed ones in heaven to living fountains of waters, so that you shall thirst no more and God will wipe all tears from your eyes. And I do think, nobody, when he comes to the end and has a bright hope in his soul, will grudge the way that he has had to come to that, however rough the way may have been. O, no; he will say, it is good for me to have been afflicted. It was good of God to deal with me so and so, in such and such a way, at such and such a time. Ah, He has opened many of our eyes by trouble to see what fools we are, and how slow of heart to believe Him. He has brought to light many hidden things which, if a man had

told us we possessed, we would not have believed him. He has revealed our tendency to fall away from Him, which we would not have believed otherwise. But with all this, what shall we have to say? Though we can thank Him, perhaps, for every twig in the rod which He has used to chastise us, we can also say, blessed be the hand that used it; blessed be the wisdom and the grace and the love that brought it to bear upon us. Blessed be the result; no, rather blessed be that God who dealt so kindly with us and who, although we often forsook Him, yet did not forget His own word. He has abided faithful; He has not denied Himself. "All flesh is grass". Go, said the Lord to the prophet and cry this: "All flesh is grass". But also - Thou shalt see the glory of the Lord. And what glory? The glory of God in His word, in His gospel. This thou shalt see. I hope we shall see it; I hope that we, poor and fickle and foolish and dying creatures though we are, shall see the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ.

AMEN.