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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 20 July 1919

ISAIAH 40 v 8

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the
word of our God shall stand for ever"

The question that may be asked - "Why is man compared to grass?" - must be instantly answered, distinctly answered. The reason is, man sinned. The fall as related in the Scriptures was a most awful, appalling fact, and the consequences of it are most visible and terrible. God made man upright, but they, says Solomon, have sought out many inventions. God made man under a law, else there could have been no sin. An illicit desire would have been impossible if God had not said, "Thou shalt not covet", and this law we are all under even as Adam was under it. The doctrine of federal union which the Scripture teaches, reaches to us as in Adam. We were in him. He took the forbidden fruit and his children's teeth are righteously set on edge. We are guilty in that fall, and the legal consequences of it, the penal consequences of it, we are all under, and if we die so, then the penalty of the law will take full effect upon us, for penalty is the punishment of guilt. It is this, then, that makes all flesh grass, that is to say, mortal. Mortality, a terrible word to a sinful creature. Mortality bought by sin, procured by our transgression of God's law. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" - Dying thou shalt die. This then is our condition. Death reaches the entire person and reigns there. Death reigned from Adam to Moses and has reigned ever since the fall of Adam. In the soul - "the soul that sinneth it shall die". In the body - when the allotted days are completed of a man death then reigns in his body; and this is what is intended in the word "all flesh is grass" There is a period, there is a full stop to our being in this world, and I would, a little while this morning, dwell on this, so gloomy subject. It may be to some of you extremely forbidding, disagreeable and you would prefer not to hear about it, but I would speak to you about it, for, depend upon it, you wont get to heaven through ignorance of the hell you deserve. You wont see the Lord Jesus through having no sight of

yourself. You wont value the gospel without knowing your condemnation in the law. Let us then look at the awful condition in which men are and because of which men must die. It is called death in trespasses and sins. It is called alienation from the life of God through ignorance that is in us and wicked works. It is called enmity - "The carnal mind is enmity against God for it is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be". Our faculties are depraved, the understanding is darkened and our will is depraved, for we like not to retain the knowledge of God. Hence men are given up to do things which are not convenient. We are said to be blind; we are said to be children of wrath even as others; and God, the great and only proper Object of all worship, the only one worthy of supreme love, is declared to be our enemy in the law. To the man who says he will add drunkenness to thirst, God says I will be against you. And the enmity of our minds against this great God, if unsubdued and unforgiven, will procure to us the punishment of sin throughout eternity, and of all of the things that may be deprecated, fled from, prayed against, that is the one thing. O, if God fights against us, what will become of us? And if His wrath burns against us to the lowest hell - although He will be most righteous in it - we shall be most miserable under it. We are withering creatures, as if you take a plant out of the ground and fling it aside it would die, so sin took us and pulled us out of the ground of goodness and holiness and flung us aside, cut us off from the fountain of goodness, and we are poor withered, withering creatures; there is no goodness in us. It is reported in the Scriptures as if, on one occasion, God sought for goodness among men. He looked among them to see if there were any that did understand, that did do good. Think of it, so scarce and rare is goodness, so altogether absent is it, that when God's enquiring gaze looks among men, it results in this. He says, there is none that doeth good, no not one. They are altogether gone out of the way. And, having gone out of the way, what does man do? He runs swiftly in the way of evil; their feet are swift to shed blood. And ceasing to worship and praise God, what does man's tongue find to engage itself in? Their tongue speaketh against the heavens, speaking against God. So we wither, and so we die. "All flesh is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth" The best of moral goodness that like a beautiful flower is outstanding and is admired and amongst men to be admired, this, this fades. It is not counted righteousness by God. It is profitable to

man but it is not counted righteousness. The man who has a flower of morality amongst men does not thereby attain to the law of righteousness. He may seek it but he seeks it wrongly, not by faith but by works, and all that flower fades. Listen sinner, O, if God would give you grace so that your ears might tingle at the terrible sound - you, at your best estate are vanity and a lie. So says the Word of God. Every man at his best estate is vanity and a lie. And if the grass withers, if the flower fades away, that is, if all men must wither and die, what becomes of them? Man dieth; man wasteth away; yea he giveth up the ghost; he is no more; and where is he? This is the question; where is he? His goodness among men has perished; he is no more. The place that knew him once knows him no more. Where is he? The question has, according to the Scripture, two answers and it divides men into two classes. It takes one class and says, these died in their sins; these died transgressors; died in their enmity; died with unforgiven sin loading their end; died without divine life and without an Intercessor, without a Saviour, without a God; breakers of the covenant of God made in Eden. And where are these? Hell is no myth, my friends. Men have banished it from their religion very largely, but they have not banished it out of existence; they have not banished it from the Scriptures; never will; never will. Think and tremble, sinner; God make you think of it. When you die, if you die with unforgiven sin on you, banishment from God, but not annihilation of being, will be yours. You will never cease to be, but you will cease to be happy; you will cease to be comfortable. Here you were happy, as you thought; here you felt comfortable if you were prospered. Here you lived without God and were content to be without Him, but in eternity you live, but you live only as dying. A worm will be in you that will never die and a fire will burn that will never be quenched. The anguish of a lost soul, the terrors of the mind, the burning of the conscience, the gloom, and blackness, and darkness and punishment, who can express? And the second answer relates to those who are in the second part of the text: But the Word of our God shall stand for ever. These are in this word; this word expresses a covenant of grace; it expresses the Lord Jesus, and what He has done for His people. It expresses His righteousness and the shedding of His blood and the bringing in of an everlasting righteousness. It expresses justification and sanctification and heaven, so that when men die in the Lord, in justification, in holiness, without which no

man shall see the Lord, these go away into everlasting blessedness. These are that company of which John tells us; the Lamb, being in the midst of them, they are led by Him to living fountains of waters that they may thirst no more, and God wipes all tears from their eyes. These die; the same lot befalls all as to this mortality; the righteous and the wicked in this respect have one event happening to them; here is no respecter of persons. Death comes and he respects no person, either righteous or wicked. Just as the mower comes into the field and takes his scythe and mows the whole of the field, so death comes and mows in this world without respect to anything that one man has, that another man has not. I have seen, so to speak, the scythe in this chapel, and it has mowed down a chapel full of people in the years I have been here and soon the scythe will mow down us, all of us. Now let us, as the Lord may help us, turn to the other subject of the text. "But the word of our God shall stand for ever".

This is the word that the Apostle Peter speaks of. Quoting this very text in his first epistle he says "And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you". So I have not gone beyond the Scripture when I said that the word expresses the covenant of grace; it expresses the Lord Jesus and justification and sanctification and redemption and heaven. In the Scriptures you find the Holy Ghost speaking as if there were but two men in the world. The first, Adam, who ruined his future race. The second Man the Lord from heaven, of whom the first Adam was a figure, who stands for His people, who communicates to them of Himself, so that they are redeemed from their original condition, that is, their condition in the fall, and from their union with Adam. They are delivered and have another being and state communicated to them, everlasting life, and the state of justification; and this is the word of the Lord. This covenant was made with Christ. In this prophecy the Lord speaks to His Son and says "This is My covenant with them My Spirit that is upon Thee and My words which I have put in Thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever." (Isaiah 59 v 21) That is the covenant and this affords consolation and the willingness of God to afford consolation to His children is set forth in this covenant most beautifully in the Hebrews. Wherein

God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise, the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus....."This is the word of the Lord. Strong consolation has has a strong foundation, even the promise and the oath of God in the covenant of grace. And one thing in the consolation is this - God opens it to some - namely that this covenant does not take into account, so as to bring it into a reckoning, the sin and the unworthiness of all in this covenant. No, for He provided, when He gave His only begotten Son to be the Head of the Church, He provided that the whole of her sin should be removed by the death of Christ. Christ has sanctified the people with His Own blood. "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" And beloved friends this affords strong consolation to those who have strong trouble about sin, strong trouble about themselves, about their untowardness, intense untowardness, and about those evils which they cannot get rid of, which they do not allow. O, it is a great thing to see in the blessed covenant of God's grace that none of their sins shall ever be mentioned to them because the Lord hath received satisfaction for them in the death of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. And a part of the consolation is this, that the people who are unstable in themselves; fickle, fickle as the ever changing wind; so changing that sometimes they can scarcely think themselves the same people one day that they were a previous day, yet this instability is not brought up against them, for He stands, who is the Rock of Ages, for them. Our instability is painful, as felt by us; it is guilty as it turns us away from God; it is distressing; it is very great. I have just said, and I repeat it, that the people of God may sometimes ask themselves seriously, in a sense, the question - Are we the same people today we were a few days ago? Then we were lively; we sought God; we felt we could not do without Him; we found the throne of grace to be the most attractive place to us; we found a tenderness of conscience, a warmth of affection and a suppleness in our will; a fervent desire, a panting after Jesus Christ. Today, we are just as if dead. And this instability, we are apt, if not preserved from it, to take as an evidence that the best feelings we ever had could only

have been natural and the things we thought came from God, we think did not come from Him, and that He will deal with us as we deal with Him. In a sense - very solemn to the experience of God's people - that is true. If we walk frowardly toward God He will walk frowardly toward us. "With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful. With the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward" and every chastened child of God knows that painfully. But in another sense it is not true, for, having chastened His people solemnly, as recorded in Ezekiel, He turns to them with double love and comforts them and says that they shall lay their hand on their mouth; they shall never open their mouth again for shame when He is pacified toward them for all the things that they have done. And so this abiding word of the covenant of grace comes in; it stands for ever. "God is of one mind and who can turn Him, and what His soul desireth even that He doeth". O, think of this, you who fear God and are full of trouble because of your instability: "He is not a man that He should lie". "God that cannot lie" is the character given to Him by the Apostle Paul in his letter to Titus. God, that cannot lie, promised eternal life before the world began. O fickle soul, may the Spirit turn thee hither, turn thy spirit to this word that shall stand for ever. He who rolls the stars along spoke all the promises, and the promises are said to be yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Our gospel was not yea and nay, but yea and amen; yea, yea. And this is the gospel, says Paul, which we have preached, that the promises are in Christ Jesus yea and amen to the glory of God by us. O what a mercy to be inside a promise.

Now take it in a few particulars which, may the Lord help me properly to express to you. Take it in respect of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this has a bearing on the experience of the people of God. They are fading; they are always changing; they are never the same for long together before God in their experiences; they are not stable. And then, as to their human nature, as it now is, they are passing away; they are like a weaver's shuttle in their mortal lives, flying in at one end and out of the other immediately. Their days are as a swift ship, as a shadow that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away. There is no perfection here; every change is an imperfection, a sort of death. But neither imperfection nor death can stand before the Lord with acceptance, so He has a Man to stand before Him, the Man Christ Jesus, who knows no

change. The same yesterday, and today, and for ever, is Jesus Christ. You say you have no religion, Christ has plenty of grace; you say you are proud and imperious, Christ is meek and lowly in heart; you say you have no righteousness, this is the Name whereby He shall be called, the Lord our righteousness. You get pollution by sin, He has holiness and imparts that sanctification to His saints; He is made sanctification to them. You get very dead in your feelings, dead in your approaches to God, dead as to your desires, dead as to your submission to the will of God, dead in regard to all that is lovely and godly and pleasant. "I give unto My sheep eternal life and they shall never perish" is His word. So there is a Man there in heaven who never changes. He died unto sin once but now He liveth unto God. He rose from the dead with another life, so to speak. That is He left sin and death and law, with its penalty and its curse, behind Him. Yea, when He said "It is finished" He had conquered all; He had taken the handwriting of ordinances that was against us and contrary to us out of the way, nailing it to His cross. And He triumphed over all enemies, making a show of them openly, and when He ascended into heaven He led captivity captive and received gifts for men, yea for the rebellious also. Behold an unchangeable Man and therefore an unchangeable Priest and therefore, again, one who is able to save all them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him seeing that He ever liveth to make intercession for them. Ah, but you say, there is worse in me than all that. I am not only unstable, but I am insincere; I feel hypocrisy in my nature and I feel as if I would readily act it sometimes, although by disposition I shrink from it. If you turn to the Psalms you will find this unchangeable Man, the God-Man Christ Jesus, speaking thus. "Thy law is within My heart". Perfection was there, absolute, and now, O, my friends, all hypocrisy, all the turpitude, all the wickedness, all the guilt, of a man's nature and spirit and life, the blood of Jesus can cleanse him from. And this endures for ever - The word of our God shall stand for ever, and produce in all to whom it is given godliness, repentance, peace, and the joy of God's salvation. You will draw waters at times, by faith, from the wells of salvation. What an amazing mercy it is for fickle people, changeable creatures, dying creatures, to have an unchangeable Man, an unchangeable Priest - "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever". O, but I am very dark, and so you may be. But what says this blessed One - "I am come a light into the

world that whosoever believeth in Me should not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." A man may be dark and yet be walking in the light. It is the light, the sweet light of truth, that shows him his darkness, that shows him his danger, that makes him afraid of moving lest he should move in a wrong direction; afraid of a step lest he should take a step to provoke God and damage his own conscience. It is the light of life. "Whatsoever maketh manifest is light". And then, how this may bear on your experience. Do you ever expect to get understanding from yourself? Do you expect at any time, by any means of your own, to get some understanding and some light out of yourself? If you do, God will take you in hand for it and let you so stumble in your feelings and your experience till at last you shall come to this - "In Thy light shall we see light". You will get no light elsewhere my friends, and this word shall stand for ever. With Thee, O Lord, you will say, is the fountain of light and I come to Thee for enlightenment. Shine upon My soul and make Thy way to shine before my face, that I may know the way wherein I should walk. Here we are brought, under the teaching of the Spirit, out of self to Christ; as one prays in our hymn

Out of self to Jesus lead

and this is done often by very painful means, but means which shall redound to God's glory and the growth in grace of all His children. The word of our God in the Person of Jesus shall stand. I have given Him for a covenant of the people, a leader and commander to the people. God has set Him forth to be our propitiation and He makes Him wisdom, and sanctification, and righteousness, and redemption to all his children. Why, beloved friends, the highest wisdom we can attain to when we are in darkness, and mourning and feeling our folly, is to go out of self, by faith, to the Lord Jesus - Ah it is great wisdom. That is, we walk by faith; walk in a darksome path by faith and not by sight.

Could we see where all were right
Where were room for credence
But by faith and not by sight
Christians yield obedience

Hang about this unchangeable Man, Immanuel, God with us. Look to Him
O my dear friends who would live the life of God and the life of faith.
All you need and all you can wish you must find and shall find in Him,
as He, by His good Spirit, shall lead you.

The word of our God shall stand for ever. All flesh is grass;
all our life, our circumstances, our hopes, our desires, our fears,
our confidence, our supplies, and all things, they are just as grass;
waving today; pass the field tomorrow, it is lying down flat, mowed,
and the flowers that beautified the field, they have also
withered, and so it will be with us soon. Yea, we shall carry this
mowing with us. God mows us continually in some way, but then here is
His mercy, here is the wonder, and here is the consolation - The Word
of our God - a good God, a great God, a great Saviour, an unchangeable
Man, Immanuel, Almighty God - the word of our God in the covenant in
Jesus Christ shall stand for ever.

AMEN.