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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 20 September 1908

ISAIAH 41 V 17

"When the poor and needy seek water, and
there is none, and their tongue faileth for
thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I
the God of Israel will not forsake them"

The mercy of God shines in the Babylonian captivity foretold by this prophet, as it shines always to, and for, His people, and Calvin says that the prophet here in the 40 chapter, and in this, and onward, lays down a perpetual doctrine that is not to be restricted to any particular time. What a mercy for Gentile sinners, to whom the gospel is sent. They could not find water, but God promised to give it them. In speaking to you, as the Lord may help, from these words, I shall first speak of poverty, which is of two kinds. I now do not speak naturally, I mean respecting that external, painful, troublesome thing, poverty, but I speak of poverty as we understand it relating to the soul; and there is a two-fold poverty relating to the soul. The first is universal, it belongs to all people; it is sin - the loss of the righteousness, the uprightness in which we were created. It is the loss of will - "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life". It is the loss of light - We are children naturally of darkness, and of the night. It is the loss of life - "Dead in trespasses and sins". It is the loss of love - "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." It is the loss of power - "We were without strength". This is poverty of the deepest, and most painful, and terrible kind, but one of the worst parts of it is, that men who are under it, think they are not at all under it. "We are lords" - this is what naturally we say - "we will come no more unto Thee". "Who is Lord over us?" "We were not born of fornication", Abraham is our father. Who is the Lord that we should obey Him? What profit is there if we should pray unto Him? This is the language of men who are poor, of men who are cut off from the source of goodness, and who think themselves full of goodness, full of life, and all things desirable - morally speaking, they are good.

But this is not the poverty that is here meant because men who are under the power of that poverty do not want - therefore do not seek - water such as the Lord here speaks of. The other sort of poverty is what Christ has pronounced "blessed". "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". And this poverty is the apprehension of the state that sin has brought us into, the weakness we are reduced to, the debts we have accumulated, the guilt we are under, the fears we have exposed ourselves to. It is a trembling. Poverty. "Blessed are the poor in spirit". The Lord has spoken of this by the same prophet when He says that He looks to that man, and will dwell with him, that is of a humble and contrite spirit and that trembles at His word. Trembles sometimes when he looks at a promise lest he should not have an interest in it. Trembles when he thinks of the throne of grace, lest he should never find his way there. At the righteousness of Christ lest he should not have an interest in it, nor be clothed in it. Trembles at the blood of Christ lest he should not have the application of it to his soul. Trembles at the sweet promises of God in the gospel, lest they should all pass him by, and he get no mercy out of them. He trembles at God's word, not only the threatenings of it, but at all parts of it. This poor man is one who, under a sense of the separation that sin has made between God and his soul, is greatly depressed, and in the apprehension of what his sins deserve, is at times grievously afflicted. O, what will become of my soul, is his cry sometimes.

Also this poverty runs throughout the whole experience of the child of God. It is to him often the lack of Christ's presence, the lack of comfortable union, the emptiness of his heart, the emptiness of God, and God's word, the lack of strength to hold on, the lack of faith to believe the promise, of a steadfast spirit to keep the eye upon Christ - this is poverty. It is weakness in great temptation, ignorance with regard to God's will sometimes. The Lord's people are poor here. It is the lack of a broken heart, and a contrite spirit. The lack of apprehending Christ's Person and glory. Hence, that faith that is in a child of God fails from time to time, while he feels so full of sin. He is under the apprehension of great emptiness respecting Christ. Great death comes on his spirit, death on prayer, on hope, on faith, on love, on every grace; what he would have flourishing in his soul decays, and what he would have dead is lively

and strong, and he is a poor man. Now this is the poverty that a child of God experiences and it is expressed in this word "thirst", because thirst, where intense and unrelieved, is, I suppose, one of the greatest sufferings to which a person can be exposed. O, to be thirsty, and seek water to refresh and satiate thirst, and not find it, sets forth the affliction that people of God from time to time come into.

Now in the next place what is it that this thirsty person, this poor and needy person, does? He seeks water; it is necessary that he should get it or he must die. Therefore he does that which everybody in natural trouble does; he seeks relief. This sets forth the life of prayer that the people of God have to live. This shows us that way the Lord's people have to go. The way that He has ordained they should go, the way that by faith they do go, is seeking Him. If you can live without seeking God, it shows you are dead while you live. If you do not know what it is, more or less to live a life of faith, therefore prayer, you are at the present dead in trespasses and sins. To seek water is to seek Christ, to seek His presence, His love, His goodness, His righteousness, His precious blood. It is to seek new quickenings, new drawings, new discoveries of His glory, new manifestations of your interest in Him. To seek water is to seek the Father's goodness, to seek to have the Holy Ghost dwelling in you. It is to seek indeed to be a Christian. To be a Christian is to be in union with the Lamb of God, to be one with Christ. It is to seek to have the glory of God so discovered to you by the Holy Spirit that the very image of that glory may be impressed upon your heart. It is feeling so dissatisfied with the whole of this world, and more than all else with your own miserable self, that you shall be in your heart enabled to go out of self into Christ, and have brought to you by the Spirit of Christ, such supplies out of that exhaustless store, that illimitable ocean of goodness, such supplies of love, of grace, of pity, of pardon, of refreshment, of strength, and such renewals of union, that you may be like a person who has suffered from thirst and been burnt up with fever, when he gets refreshment, when he is allowed to drink water freely. Ah, and the Lord is pleased to set people on this search, and to direct them in it too, because He says, I will pour upon them the Spirit of grace, and I will lead them with weeping and with supplications, and cause them to walk in a straight way

wherein there is no stumbling, and there they shall drink of the river of pleasures. "When the poor and needy seek water". Now this search then calls for our attention. They seek it. Seeking it is praying for it, as you may find from the latter part of the word - I the Lord will hear them, I will hear their seeking. He knows when the heart panteth after the waterbrooks. He knows that it is so, as one says - "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee O God". And also, as in another Psalm, where the Psalmist speaks, saying - O God my flesh crieth out for Thee, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God. All in earth, all places here below are like an arid desert, death itself to a living soul. Now in this seeking there are these things - you mark, if you are a seeker after living water - you do these. You have your eye from time to time on that blessed fullness God has decreed to be in Jesus Christ. He who can get satisfaction out of Christ, does not know the nature of Christ yet, and has not the Spirit of Christ yet. If you can rest on anything, in anything, draw satisfaction from anything, short of Christ, at present you are short, solemnly short. Now here one says, "My heart is fixed, O God my heart is fixed". That is what every living soul can more or less say. Berridge in his own way expresses it when he says

I seek, and hope to find,
A portion for my soul,
To heal a feverish mind
And make a bankrupt whole
A cup of blessing for the poor
That's full, and free, and flowing o'er

Now what has God put in Christ? what has Christ as risen from the dead? and what has He now as being in heaven for His people? He has these things - full, free pardon, free, great justification, holiness to sanctify, bread to satisfy, wine to cheer, light to instruct, strength to support, and a heaven of rest, and needy men must needs seek these blessings. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled". "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". Jesus lifted up His eyes on His poor disciples and privately said to them - "Blessed be ye poor". O, poor people - I use that word in a spiritual

sense - there is wealth, there is wealth. O thirsty people, there is water. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." It is seeking then that the people of God are engaged in from time to time, and His word exhorts them - "Pray without ceasing". "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" "Seek the Lord and His strength, seek the Lord evermore." "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." For this, just this, and nothing else without it, a soul thirsting for God, indeed prays; seeking Him, unable to do without Him. That is a most miserable religion you can think of that leaves a man satisfied without revelations of God upon the soul. That is a most blessed religion you could imagine that keeps a man lively by hunger and by thirst, that causes him to say, from time to time, O God, early will I seek Thee. My soul thirsteth for Thee in a thirsty land. "When the poor and needy seek water". Well my friends, how many of you can say that you do seek it? Depend upon it you are in a bad case, you who cannot say honestly that you seek water - seek it, not in broken cisterns, but in the living God. If you cannot say you seek His favour and His presence you are in a most terrible condition. Blessed are the people who do seek the Lord because He is findable, and He will discover Himself saying, "Behold Me, behold Me." But here is a condition of things these people come into; they do not find it, there is none, that is, to their sense. This is one of the hardest parts of a Christian experience, to be seeking God and not getting discoveries of Him. To be seeking new quickenings, openings of mercy, applications of the atonement, manifestations of Christ, close, more intimate union with Him, and not get the thing sought. "There is none". Sometimes we do not seek it in the right place; sometimes we seek it without knowing it, or thinking that we seek it there, we seek it in self. "Trust to self or something base instead of trusting sovereign grace". This is a truth, there is nothing so deceitful as the human heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" Here were these people in captivity; they could not find the water which they wanted. The water that a godly captive wanted was to be had where the Name of the Lord was placed. So God thus points out the lack of discovery of God

to the soul, the lack of communications from Him; and if there is anything more discouraging than another, it is I believe, for a man to pray and not get answers. Even if you say, as sometimes you may, you have no spirit to pray, that is hardly as discouraging as sometimes to say you pray, you pray, you pray, you cry as hard as you can, and there comes no answer, no discoveries of God to your soul. "When the poor and needy seek water and there is none", find none. Have you sought, are you seeking, God, poor sinner, and does He not for the time make discoveries to you of Himself which would be as cold water to a thirsty soul? What is the effect of finding no water? The tongue fails for thirst. This figure of speech expresses the extremity of suffering, it expresses the extremity of a creature's soul, the fears of his heart. The heavy sense he has of not being heard makes way for all kinds of suspicions and thoughts that God has no regard for the soul. The tongue failing for thirst is like the speech failing, like the life ebbing out, and marking him for death, for temptation, for the enemy, for suggestions - suggestions against God's kindness, against your own interest. It leaves room for every sort of fear and evil to come in upon the soul. It is a heavy thing to seek, and not find, to be thirsty and get no water. I suppose if a person's life is nearly burnt out by fever, the greatest suffering will be thirst. And surely we can say, some of us know it, I do, that to seek the Lord and not find Him, not get Him, not have answers, not see Christ's glory, not hear His voice, not get union with Him, not be satisfied that He loves the soul, and that you have an interest in His great salvation, O this makes up the keenest suffering, the most painful experience that a child of God can have in this life. Now what does the Lord say when there is this extremity? "I the Lord will hear". They have been crying, they have been stretching out themselves, they are now fainting, their tongue fails for thirst, prayer fails because they are discouraged, hope fails; because there is no vision, faith fails - As when there is no wood the fire goes out, so when there is no vision the people perish. Says the Lord I will hear him" when He seeth that their own strength is gone. My dear friends, the dryness of earth and the deadness of our souls, and the emptiness of all pitchers give the Lord that great opportunity which He takes kind advantage of, as here He says, "I the Lord will hear" I wont leave this poor creature, he is nearly gone, I have got water for him, I will open rivers in high places, I will

hear. It is a great surprise sometimes to people that God has heard their prayers; cannot help praying, yet they are surprised He has heard them; cannot keep away from the throne of grace, yet when He opens the door and takes them into His presence, grants them an audience, and their requests, and more than they asked, they are greatly surprised. "I the Lord, the God of Israel will not forsake them". Why, have not you thought He had? Have not you thought He would have nothing to do with you, that your prayers were not regarded by Him? Have not you concluded that, by reason of His not answering, your prayers were an offence to Him? That they were not right prayers, not dictated by the Spirit, and therefore not presented by, and through, Jesus Christ? Yet all the while it was thus with you, He was about you. Now He says I will give it, this is the effect of the word - they shall not die of thirst, their failing tongue shall be refreshed, though it now be burnt and parched in their mouth that they cannot speak, I will open rivers. Now this sending of water means this, a discovery of Christ to the soul, that discovery is never too late. O, said Mary to the Lord, supposing He was the gardener - They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him; if you know tell me, let me get at Him. Then when her heart was thus sore and troubled, He spoke and discovered Himself to her in the word "Mary". Now when He says I will hear, He means I will discover water to them. When Hagar was about to perish, and could not endure to see Ishmael die for thirst, then the Lord showed to her a well of water. When poor people are in this evil case, Jesus Christ gives it. "I the Lord will hear them". Now are you thirsting for pardon that is free, that is full, that is flowing o'er? All it needs is, not that you should be less thirsty for it, or less needing it, but that the Lord should bring it, that is all - I, the Lord, will pardon whom I reserve. I, the Lord, will comfort. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

This is a great thing and it warrants thirsty people to look out for Christ's coming; and Christ's coming first and Christ's coming afterwards whenever He comes is that satisfaction that the soul wants that is here expressed. O, rivers open in high places. My dear friends, all we need is the Lord to come to us and that will satisfy

us. Now there are two sorts of people in the church of God, and they are both in this chapter; one sort is this - people who can say; "I know that because I have experienced it, and if I could get it again I should have all the water that I wanted, that I have been seeking. The other sort you will find to be made up of people who say that they do thirst, but that do not know what it is to drink. They can say they do want forgiveness, but have not had it yet. They want to be justified, but have never had a revelation of Christ's righteousness to them. They want to know union with Christ, but have never found Him formed in their hearts the hope of glory. Now this word is, so far as God opens it and applies it, to both these people. "I, the Lord will hear" the man who has never known an answer to his satisfaction, I will hear him, and will pardon, and let the forgiveness of sins out to him. O this water for refreshment is very great, and very sweet. Now the greatest of mercies that can come to us is a real discovery of the person of Christ, because the Father has been pleased that in Him all fullness should dwell. You will not have a bigger blessing on earth than a discovery of Christ to your soul, for, according to the condition you feel yourself in, so will the discovery fit that condition. If you feel separated from God, and thirsty for union, that discovery of Christ will give you union. If you feel dead, and thirsty for life, that discovery will be life to you. If you feel as untoward, and as monstrous as sin can make you, as unlike God as you can be, being in the image of sin, and death, that discovery will put all things right, put you into the very shape and image of Jesus Christ - "Predestinated to be conformed to the image of His dear Son" - and you will find it done. If you feel so far from God as that you do not get a glimpse of Him at all, a discovery of Christ will be such a revelation of God's well-pleased face, that immediately you will be at His feet, and there you will be worshipping with love in your soul, and devotion; as one says, "Establish Thy word unto Thy servant who is devoted to Thy fear" Now this is true liberty, this is the liberty of God's dear Son into which people are predestinated, and into which they are brought by this revelation of Jesus Christ. Then when you are in this liberty, what can bind you to the earth? If anything will loosen a man's love of the world, it is a revelation of Christ. Now you may put a man into trouble, he loves the world for all that, he loves himself for all that. "Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart

from him" says Solomon. But put a worldly man, one who is intensely worldly, into these blessings, God filling him with them, so that he is as if he were right in them, breathing their sweetness, feeling their power, understanding the greatness of them in a measure; that man's lusts, sins, cords of iniquity and chains dissolve in a moment. "I will open rivers". There is plenty there, you will see plenty of water, plenty of goodness, and grace, in the Lord Jesus - Rivers in high places. "I, the Lord will hear them", I wont forsake them. I have promised, I have passed My word, that Babylon shall yet yield them up. They shall go to their own land. God has passed His Word in the perpetuity of the gospel, that His people shall find all satisfaction, all goodness, in the Lord Jesus, flowing to them as rivers. Ah, one may say, if you only knew the obstacles that are in my case, you would think my fears are reasonable fears. Yes, my friends, just as it would be reasonable for the small pebble on the hill to suppose that it would have any influence on the flowing stream that might rush down when the thunder storm fell - just as reasonable. Just as reasonable for the earth that is held in the frost and darkness of winter if it should say, I shall never yield fruit any more, I am completely inapt, deathly. I shall never give any sap again to the trees, or greenness to the grass, or life and sweetness to the land, whereas all that the earth wants is for the sun to come and shine again in his strength. Well now, that is just what the soul wants. I would like, if the Lord would help me, to express the freeness of the gospel. All that a sinner wants is, not that he should get a little bit better in himself, or have anything more towards God in his hand, but that Christ should shine, and drop showers of heavenly love, come again in His pardons, come and renew the spirit of his mind. "I, the Lord will hear him". Ah, may the Lord keep you from listening to what the devil says; you have been so long perhaps, some of you, without satisfaction, that the devil, if he cannot make you really doubt the past, will cause in you suspicions and questions about what the Lord may have been provoked to do with you in the future; that even if you do get at last to heaven, you must not expect a blessing any more on earth. He held me there once for a long time. One little knows under such a temptation how one limits the Holy One of Israel. Why, my friends, God's love is great. This is what He says to His people He loved - "I knew thee, that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the

womb", yet "for My Name's sake will I defer Mine anger" yea for Mine Own sake. (Isaiah 48 v 8/9) Again He says, "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth and smote him" and he did not do the thing, but went on frowardly in the ways of his own heart. What then? O, says Satan, the man will be left. No, says the Lord, there is one remedy which I will apply to him. "I will restore comforts to him and to his mourners." This is what the Lord does when He hears. I, the Lord will hear him, I the God of Israel will not forsake him, I will give him what he seeks, I will give him water. He shall know how freely it comes, it shall flow down into his heart. Therefore we have ground to hope in God, we have reason to set out faces steadfastly to seek Him, and we have warrant to go to Him and put before Him, put Him in remembrance of these promises which He has made to His people, some of which, in parts at least, He has graciously dropped in some of our hearts. I will hear, what? Not your sins, no. I have chastened you for your sins, but I will hear your cry of thirst, I am looking upon your failing, fainting, helpless, all but hopeless, condition; I will hear, I will open rivers of water. For God to open rivers for thirsty people is for Him to be Himself there. "The Lord will be to us a place of broad rivers". God, into whom the prophet Ezekiel went; it was into God's goodness he stepped in up to his ankles; it was God's love he got into up to his knees; it was into God's love that he found himself swimming one day. The glorious God is the place of broad rivers, the place, that is to say, of infinite satisfaction, the place where goodness reigns, where justification reigns, where pardon is given out, and where the Lord says, Ye shall receive of My hand double for all your sins. May the good Lord grant the poor and needy the sweet realisation of this promise - "When the poor and needy seek water and there is none" They sought it but have not found it; we shall never be able to boast of having discovered things. "And there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst" - they come to extreme suffering - then I will discover it, I will hear them, I will answer them, I will say, "Behold Me, behold Me". Here is the water, here is the love, here is the goodness, here is the grace, here is the heaven you have been seeking.

AMEN.