

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham at Galeed Chapel, Brighton

on Sunday morning 3 April 1921

ISAIAH 43 v 10

“Ye are my witnesses saith the Lord and My servant whom I have chosen, that ye may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed neither shall there be after Me”.

Everyone who has faith given to him by the Holy Ghost has tribulation. The trial of faith is more precious than the trial of gold though it be tried by fire. The trial of faith brings many lessons and many discoveries to the subject of it. It shows them their wickedness, their weakness, their aptness to slide, backslide and turn away from God. It shows them their need of the throne of grace and of God Himself to save them. It brings great trembling of heart for, in the trial of faith, God may appear to be against people. His rebukes are solemn, His word is weighty, His light penetrates and the majesty and glory of the dealings are such as to strike awe into the heart. We learn what it is to be weak, empty, unable to be of good and capable of evil only; and we learn too that faith must stand in the power of God and that the clearest experience of the past is not sufficient for the present trial. You may look at the past and find some encouragement but you will find necessity for fresh discovery of God's goodness and love and mercy.

A trial proves things. Before any new laid line is permitted to be used for traffic there are tests put to it and before you can believe that your faith is good and will honour God it will have some tests. The trial of faith is a great mercy and Christ prays that the faith of His people shall not fail. Peter's faith, as to its actings, failed but as to its root it lived and triumphed. When things have been proved then they are known to be what they were asserted to be. When your faith has been proved then the Lord may say to you in some gracious teaching – “now I know that thou fearest Me” and when you have proved God, He has proved you, and then you can be a witness for Him. He has many witnesses in pews as well as a few in pulpits.

Ahimaaz was not a witness – he wanted to be but he was not on that occasion for he had no message, he had no commission and he had no particulars, he only saw a crowd and heard a noise. If you know God only in that way you are no witness for Him, but if you have had a trial of faith, been brought through and had some discoveries of God to you, then you can be a witness. Israel was a witness. They saw great wonders of God in Egypt; they saw His mighty works wrought upon Pharaoh and his people. Their faith was tried when they believed Moses and God who had sent him, but then matters got worse with them and they were sore indeed in

their spirits and wished that Moses had not gone to them with what appeared false tidings; but they came through and came into the wilderness and having been brought through the Red Sea they could and did sing unto Him who had triumphed gloriously who had caused their enemies to sink as lead in the mighty waters. They were God's witnesses, they had seen the false gods in Egypt and that they could do nothing. They had seen a few imitations of God's work by the magicians but there were some things that God did which extorted from the magicians themselves the confession that this was the finger of God. They saw God in the wilderness in the manna which He rained for them from heaven every morning and the sweet water that flowed from the smitten rock to allay their thirst, and the cloudy pillar – they saw God in all these things and then they saw Him on Mount Sinai. They heard His voice; they saw the light flash and were frightened by the thunder. They proved God in that their shoes and clothes were preserved and did not wear out and God proved them by these things that they might know what was in their hearts whether they would keep His commandments or no. And the answer was always 'No' but yet they were His witnesses.

Now let us, as we may be helped, see whether any of us are properly, in the sense that I have just laid before you, witnesses for God. Whether we are in a trial of faith and have proved not only our own weakness and wickedness and intense untowardness, but also God. It is a great thing to be able to lay your hand upon your heart and say here light and life have been and are and I know thereby that I am a sinner, and you can bear witness that the scripture is true respecting human depravity, and that it is not one word too strong in speaking of our wickedness – "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can know it." It was an end that God had in view in trying Israel to prove them that they might know what was in their heart. It is easy enough to talk about sin but it is very different to feel it. "To see sin smarts but slightly, to own with lip confession is easier still, but O to feel cuts deep beyond expression." If God will take us to heaven He will make us know something of the hell that we deserve and of the hell of sin that is in our nature.

Men may white wash each other but God, when he will save a sinner, shows him his blackness, Then they can say here in this book is God's description of sin; and in my heart is the experience of that description and I can bear testimony to the truth of God's word when the Lord looked down from heaven and beheld the sons of men and made inquisition, to see if there were any that did understand and that did seek God. This was the result - there is none that doeth good; there is none that understandeth, no not one. Well are you witnesses for God as to this painful thing? I should be a bad minister, I am a poor one I know, but I should be a bad one if I were to keep back this part of the testimony that you must bear to God. He is quite true in what He says

about you and every word that He utters against sin is true, not generally in churches, not generally in families, but in you – “Thou art the man” God will say it to you if He will save you. A man must feel the fire from which God snatches him and taste the wrath from which he is delivered. We must see the rags that He tears from us and feel the wickedness from which Christ will save by His blood and by His Spirit. They must know this and faith is in the matter - faith that believes every word of God; faith that does not deny any indictment in the Lord Jesus; faith that says it is too true. Ye are my witnesses of this particular thing.

Well dear friends, if the Lord is gracious to us this will be one thing that He will exercise us in – not in the practice of sin but in the discovery of it to us. Grace saves from the practice of sin and discovers the being of sin in our hearts. Do you turn your ears from it? It is a sad sign if you do. Do you wish that it was not talked about so much here? It is a sad thing if you do. Your faith will believe God and tremble at His majesty and wonder at it at times that He bears with and spares you, and will justify Him in every severe word He utters against sin and sinners and will confess that you are indeed deserving hell and that alone. But this is not all; Ephraim was for a time a cake unturned and you will feel like that if you have faith and feel for a time nothing but sin. You may feel for a time burnt to a cinder on one side yea all through perhaps but, O, God is good and will not leave you there. How kind it is of Him to tell us that we are lost that we may ask Him to save us; how kind of Him to tell us that we deserve hell that He may snatch us from it. This is a truth in the gospel first of all that there is a Saviour Jesus Christ. Faith in you will be looking after Him, will refuse all names but His name, all remedies but His remedy, all refuges but Himself. True faith feels after Christ, for He gives faith and there is a sort of inkling in the most tried faith that Christ is all that is needed, before you get a distinct testimony to that truth. There will be in your Christ given faith some inkling after Him, some want of Him, and some prayer to Him. “Lord” said the dying thief “remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.”

Faith will have Christ. It knows no name in which to hide but Christ. It is tried by temptation; it is tried by the enemy who says you need not pray to Him, He won't notice you, but this faith will never give in. ‘It lives and labours under load, though damped it never dies’ and it is an overcoming faith. “Who is he that overcometh but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.” As long as we live we shall be repenting and believing in Christ; repenting that we are so wicked; and believing in Him who is the Saviour. Faith hangs about Him, hankers after Him. Faith can have no vent but Christ, no refreshing drink but Christ, no mercy but from Him, no forgiveness but from Him, no justification but in Him; so faith labours to get at Him and when He comes then you can say ‘I know.’

Guesswork for eternity is terrible; certainty for eternity is sweet. If you guess about Christ, if you think you believe in Him without having a testimony of and from Him your faith is but an imagination; but, if with ruin in your hand, with guilt on your conscience and fears in your heart and trembling at the majesty of God you get some inkling of Christ, some look from Him, some testimony about Him from the Holy Spirit then you will say 'I know'.

When Christ appeared to the man who had been born blind and had been cast out of the temple He asked him "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" his reply was "Who is He Lord that I might believe?" Not a bad question that. You say, that was alright of course then, but we have the Bible. Do you know Christ from merely reading the Bible? No! If you really know Him it must be by revelation. I do like the word of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians, although it was a reproof to them, it is a beautiful word "O foolish Galatians before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you." He was crucified without Jerusalem's gate but there in that city of Galatia before the hearers of the apostles, before that very people, Jesus Christ was so manifested as that it was as if He had been crucified in their street. Dear friends you cannot get to know Christ any other way. The knowledge of Christ is not a matter of human acquisition but of heavenly manifestation. O happy the sinner that knows Jesus Christ and the riches of His grace. If the dying thief had lived a little while we can imagine him saying 'now I know that this man crucified at my side is God'. If he could have spoken O how he would have shouted the name and the worth and the beauty and the glory of the Lord Jesus. 'He has come to me opened my eyes spoken comfortably to me the worst of men now suffering for my sins.' O sinner that is the way to know Him.

Isaiah got to know the Lord in a wondrous way. In the year that King Uzziah died. A good King removed and therefore a time of trouble for the prophet and all the well-wishers of Israel, when blackness would appear to hang over the nation for it was often the case that a wicked King succeeded a good one; men's hearts might have failed already wondering who next will sit upon the throne and how would he be? In that year, in the gloom and midst of these fears the Prophet says "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up." That is the way to know God by seeing Him by faith; not in the same way and manner as the Prophet saw Him, but the same God in another manner and by faith, precious faith, that you must see God. God in Christ and then you will say now I know that the Lord saveth His anointed. How? He has saved me. He has done me good. I a sinner went to Him by faith, looked to Him, prayed to Him and He has heard my prayer and saved my soul.

You can bear witness; and then if all the Socinians in the world and all the critics were to come to you and say that Jesus Christ was just a mere man born in the ordinary way of generation; He taught well but he spoke according to the prejudice of the day and the ignorance of the people; your soul would rise up in holy revolt against the statement and you would say "I have seen Him, I have seen Him by faith and His beauties I can never describe, His graciousness melted my heart, His mercy broke me all to pieces, His goodness enriched me and His favour was better than life. I know Him!"

Ye are my witnesses. God has never left Himself without a witness, He has witnesses in the creation for the invisible things are now from the beginning being understood by the things that were framed so that we are without excuse; and in providence as Paul says he has not left us without witness in that He gave us fruitful seasons filling out hearts with food and gladness. Oh dear friends to be enabled to say with the apostle John "and we know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true and we are in Him that is true even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal Life." May the Lord grant us to know Christ in this way for then we shall know Him to be the Rose of Sharon, the Lily of the valleys. Then we shall know Him to be the Apple tree among the trees of the wood excellent above all others, "so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight and His fruit was sweet to my taste." It is wonderful to know Christ like that. His person infinitely good, infinitely full, His heart full of love, His blood full of power, His righteousness full of justification, His mercy full of comfort and sweetness and His arm almighty. O what a Christ! O if I could but preach Him properly to you,

Do you want a foundation? A tried faith will come to a tried foundation, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone and your tried faith, that has proved other things to be as sand, mud and mire will find in Him that Rock of which we read "This is my foundation, I have laid it for a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone." "On this Rock I will build my church." So we must be witnesses in this way by things that we have proved. Go to John again where he says "That which we have seen with our eyes, which our hands have handled of the word of Life declare we unto you." Now in another manner and measure each child of God with true faith in exercise will come to say just that in God's time that what the scriptures declare we know it to be true because we have tasted and proved.

Ye are my witnesses. You are witnesses of divine love; we read of it thus "Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee." You may have read of it and heard of it all your lives more or less but if you have not heard of it in one place as yet

you do not know it. What place is that? In your heart! in your heart. Paul says to the Romans "Hope maketh not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." Well what a wonderful thing for a man, wicked, guilty, unbelieving and full of infidelity to have in his heart the precious, eternal, distinguishing love of God so that he says "Lord, why me? Millions are passed by why am I loved?" Then you can understand what Rutherford said "I did not love Him, but He would love me and I could not refuse to be loved." Yet I do wonder that He could allow so black a sinner to kiss so fair a face. You will enter into it spiritually when you know the personal eternal love of God. Ye are my witnesses and you can say well I know what its softening power is; I know its sweetness; I know it melts a stony heart; how it raises a downcast sinner and how it sets the sinners' fears on things above. O how it endears Christ, how it brings God and the sinner together. You may say I cannot describe it and if you could attempt it would say "O that it now were shed abroad in this poor stony heart."

Ye are my witnesses. All the sorcerers of Egypt and of the present day, all the arminians, papists and critics may say many things about God but the thing is this to have Him in your heart, in His love, that will make you a witness and you will say I want none of those things I only want to know God more and more and be more like Him; to be nearer to Him and more often hear His voice, oftener feel His love and know by the persuasion of the Spirit that I have an interest there from time to time.

You are witnesses to omnipotence. How can that be? Well, you will agree that it was omnipotence that brought Christ from the dead. God raised Him by the exceeding greatness of His power. That is the Spirit's word by Paul to the Ephesians and if you have been raised to a living hope; if you have prayed a believing prayer; if you have had the testimony of God in your soul bringing you out of the dust and setting you in Christ; if the word has been made effectual in your heart at any time delivering you from all your guilty fears what was all that? Just what Paul calls the power of God in His resurrection – that same power which God the Father wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, He wrought in you making you believers. The same mighty power that brought Jesus from the dead. Can you hang on God? It is a mighty power that brings you to that. Can you trust Him even though He may appear to be slaying you? That is the effect of the resurrection of Christ. The same power that brought Christ from the dead has brought that living faith and trust in your soul. Ye are My Witnesses saith the Lord of His omnipotence and then also of His sufficiency. Who doubts it? If you are tried you will doubt it. If you have no faith you may never doubt it. True faith is always assailed – imaginary faith is not. Why, you could pack your garden with artificial flowers and you could say you have no fear of flies coming. Of course not! But if you have got living flowers then there is a living enemy

and if you have living faith there is a living enemy of unbelief. Moses had a strong faith and yet he limited the Lord when he said "If all the cattle and all the fishes of the sea and all the birds of the air were brought together would they suffice for a month?" "O" said the Lord in a gentle instructive rebuke "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" He is full my friends; as He said too Abraham "I am the almighty God walk before Me and be thou perfect." I am the sufficient God, the All-sufficient God. I will bring you through the rivers and they shall not overflow thee, When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned nether shall the flame kindle upon thee for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel thy Saviour. I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee, I brought thee out of Egypt what can I not do?

"Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it" saith the Lord. Gold and silver and cattle upon a thousand hills; men's hearts are all in the hand of God. All grace is in Christ, all mercy and all love are in in Christ; all power, all riches and wisdom and understanding are in Christ. What can you need that He does not have to give and when you are tried, when a world is proved to you to be empty, has not a crumb for your soul been enough so that you say I do not want the creature. O blessed be God for His mercy. It is a great honour that a worm of the earth, as God calls Jacob, should be thus favoured and be enabled to say "Now I know that God is, for He hath appeared to me. I know that Christ is a Saviour because he hath appeared unto me and saved me. I know His blood can cleanse the blackest soul and wash away each stain for He has mercifully done that for me. Well it is a great thing in this evil day that there should be a few people here who know what it is to bear witness to God for Him. Ye are my witnesses I have chosen you that ye may know and believe Him and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed neither shall there be after Me and faith says I do not want another. He is the everlasting, the eternal God and He is thy refuge.

Well may the Lord look upon us and grant that whatever the trial of faith may be to which we are put, whatever tribulation Christ may send, according to His word of promise we may have a testimony a witness for Himself and say that we know He is as good as His word. He is better than we can understand, greater than we can realise and sweeter than we can bear to taste.

May the Lord do us good.

Amen