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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 22 January 1933

ISAIAH 51 v 14

"The captive exile hasteneth that he may be
loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor
that his bread should fail."

This chapter is full of encouragement for the Lord's afflicted people. They are followers after righteousness and He calls upon them, as such, to listen to Him. They are ready to condemn themselves, to cut themselves off. Now He says to them, Look to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged, to the rock whence ye are hewn; that is to say, you were not always seeking after righteousness. You were in the pit, part of the rock. I plucked you out of the pit; I cut you out of the rock, and by My Spirit and grace have made you seekers after righteousness; hearken to Me in this. There is a habit in the people of God to cut themselves off; on many grounds they are very apt to do this. Many grounds some of you who are seeking after righteousness may find in yourselves reason for dismay, for giving up, for despair. Says the Lord, hearken to Me My people. You listen to your fears, you listen to your sins, you heed what your consciences tell you, and you fall into self-condemnation. "My righteousness is near; My salvation is gone forth". This is greater than the sinner, greater than his sins, greater than his fears, and shall prove to himself to be so. Harken to God. Listen dear friends, who are tried, tempted, buffeted, fearful, ready at every turn to cut yourselves off and to give reasons which to you may seem strong and good why you should so behave. Says the Lord, hearken to Me, give ear to the gospel. "My righteousness is near" Gospel hope and legal fear are often near neighbours and the one must give way to the other. "The elder shall serve the younger". "Mine arms shall judge the people". Almighty God thus speaks. "Hearken unto Me ye that know righteousness" There are two ways in which the Lord's people know righteousness. The first is by the law. They know something of the righteousness, the eternal righteousness of God as He reveals it in their consciences by the law and the Spirit of God applying it.

There are some of you here who know this; some may be rebelling against it, but you will never succeed. If you brow beat your consciences you will find God more than a match for you. He may draw very near to you and speak solemnly and powerfully. "Who art thou that repliest against God?" If any of you here rebel against the very righteousness that you acknowledge to exist in Jehovah and God leaves you to that rebellion it will be a terrible day for you when you die. There is another righteousness that the people of God know and that is the righteousness of Christ and that they seek after, want to be clothed with it, and cannot be satisfied without it. Sometimes there is a peculiar energy in them, the energy of faith, and so they cry to God: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it which hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it that hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" Faith thus speaks to God. Faith in a captive thus speaks to God. The Psalmist spoke thus in other language. He said, "Be merciful unto me O God as Thou usest to do unto those that love Thy Name." (Ps. 119 v 132). Lord deal kindly with me as has been Thy custom in days and generations of old. When you find energy in your hearts to call on the Lord may you have power to follow it up

Pray if thou canst or canst not speak
But pray with faith in Jesus' Name

The Lord declares Himself to be that God who comforts His people. "I, even I, am He that comforteth you: Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?" (Is. 51 v 12). What is man? Anyone fearing another man so, is he himself right with God? That is the point. If you are made right with God the rest will come right one day. I have named to you before, this, and I will name it again; that is an often strong expression of a conscience tender in the fear of God that you will find in James Bourne. "If", says he, "I was accused of robbing the Royal Mail, I should say, O Lord, what is coming?" Conscious innocence of any accusation is not a ground to stand on before God with regard to eternity, and conscience might say to some of you, we are innocent of this, yet the same conscience would say,

Lord we deserve much from Thyself. If Thou dost accuse us of sin we are guilty, must close our mouth. You follow that; I have followed that, and I have admired it this morning. It is the language of a tender conscience saying though you be innocent here, you are guilty in a thousand other ways; but, says the Lord, I will comfort you. Though you are afraid of this and afraid of that, I will comfort you.

And so we come to the captive, the captive exile, a man not at home, caught, cast into a pit; none to deliver him as it would seem. Two things here; the captive exile, a man in a foreign land. We are all in a foreign land by the fall, alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us. God was our original home as our Creator. Eden was the place God put us in; a beautiful situation, a satisfying home; everything beautiful in itself and calculated to make us happy. We exiled ourselves and then God cast us out. If you are led to look into that word in Genesis - And the Lord drove them out; that is out of Eden; and lest man should put forth his hand and seek to return to that from which he was cast out, a flaming sword was put there, turning every way; that is wherever you turn, North, East, South, West, there is a sword, a divine sword, to keep you from entering that forfeited home. It is a great thing to be taught that we are aliens; no home; out of God. It is a narrow religion; it looks exceedingly harsh to fallen reason but it is glorifying to God that He should deal with rebels, that He should exile them; that He should have nothing to do with them in a way of friendliness. By the law He cannot. "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh". Now he is a captive, a man taken, carried and cast into a prison or, as here, into a pit, the ancient, loathsome, deadly pit - prison. That is what every child of God comes to experience. There is the pit of the law; when God deals with a man for his sins, he is in a pit; he cannot run away; cast into a prison and he is held there and he says he deserves to be there. He says I should never never complain, if I were kept right, as I feel I deserve to be there. That is my deserved but dread abode. The pit of the law; self-condemned; conscience-condemned; condemned by the Holy Scripture. Some of you may be here; I hope so. I wish all were here who are not at present; who never have been. Some have been and have been delivered.

Then there is the pit of corruption. He lives, as it were, in sin. He lives in a sense of being evil and only evil, and that continually. 'Tis very solemn; there he is, there he lives. Sin rises daily; his struggling against it is unavailing. His sins are rising continually and it is all corruption. He does not know what to do. It goes to bed with him, he dreams it, he wakes with it. Vain thoughts, proud thoughts, rebellious thoughts, hard and harsh thoughts of God. Very, very solemn; he is in the pit, in the pit of fear and dismay, and all but despair. Shall I ever be here? Conscience says you deserve to be. Shall I ever be here? Scripture comes convincing him of more and more sins, and he says this shuts me up. That Scripture condemns me; another Scripture shuts me up and God frowns upon me; and he is all but in despair. What does he do? Lie down, never move? No, God wont allow that; grace wont allow that. "The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed". And what is this hastening? It is the motion of faith in the soul standing and working in the power of the Holy Ghost. The divine teacher of the church gives glimpses of Jesus Christ, and these, O how they move the soul. Gives hints by Scriptures or without them, of the precious death of the Lord Jesus. O how these glimpses do draw the soul. Sometimes, as it were, a voice from heaven whispers an invitation. It reaches the pit, it reaches the sinner and O how he moves towards Him who speaks the invitation. This hastening is the motion of faith in a sinner's heart. It keeps him awake, it keeps him moving, it keeps him anxious, it keeps him hankering after God. O, he says, deliver me from going into the deeper pit of hell. And this motion of faith takes the form of prayer, as in the case of the dying thief. "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom". It utters the language of the publican: "God be merciful to me a sinner." It unites with the jailer: "What must I do to be saved?" You understand this, some of you do I am sure. The captive exile, he wants liberty; he wants to get home, to have God for his shelter, his habitation, and so he moves in prayer. Teach me O Lord. "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." "Pardon mine iniquity O Lord for it is great". "Be merciful unto me as Thou usest to do to those that love Thy Name". And he pleads the precious blood of Christ.

The blood of Christ, a precious blood,
Cleanseth from all sin, doubt it not,
And reconciles the soul to God
From every folly, every fault

He sees how the worst of men can be made saints. O that I might be one of them is his secret desire and earnest prayer. "Hide Thy face from my sin". "Blot out my transgressions. Wash me throughly from my sin. Cast me not away from Thy presence" eternally. O bring me to this; may I find God to be my refuge, my habitation. "When my heart is overwhelmed within me lead me to the Rock that is higher than I". So the gospel comes to the pit. The sinner says, I cannot reach it; it comes to him in these words and in the operations of the Holy Spirit. But he hasteneth that he may be loosed and that he should not die. Do you understand this? What says the quickened soul, exiled, and in a pit? Am I to die in this state? O it is a terrible thought piercing him; shall I die in this state? What do some of you feel at times? Anxious to be right, following after righteousness, do not you feel, if I do not get deliverance I must be in hell. If sin be not pardoned I must be banished from the presence of Jehovah and the glory of His power. So this poor exile cries to God to bring him out of the pit. "Be not silent to me lest if Thou be silent to me I become like them that go down into the pit". The thought of dying an unforgiven sinner is a terrible thought, and the fear of it is a sinking fear. Now what does the captive exile do? Why he seeks to be delivered. Gospel deliverance is what he hankers after. O that I might be pardoned, that God would deliver me from the law that cannot justify me. He seeks that: "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." And so before the eye of faith in this exiled soul the liberty of Christ is seen and he longs for it. He looks by faith to this liberty, this gracious law, and says, may I never die until I am forgiven. Sometimes the man is so earnest that he kneels before the Lord and says, Lord I wont get off my knees till I am forgiven. There he makes a mistake but the Lord is not angry with him. I remember saying it to the Lord one night when I got a sight of the blood of Christ; that I would never rise from my knees till the Lord forgave

me. I had to wait a good while before He did, but He was not displeased. You may make a mistake in time, but God wont be angry with you for pleading the blood of Christ. Plead it O captive and, as your fears of dying before you are forgiven are strong, they will make your cries strong. Do forgive me; pardon me O Lord. O let me not go on in sin, let me not sink under the burden of dead works on my conscience. What a solemn thought it may sometimes be in some of you, even though it may seem to you but a fugitive thought, but it is solemn; shall I die without God's religion; shall I die without Christ's righteousness; shall I die without the Holy Spirit to be my teacher, my God, my Saviour? "The captive exile hasteneth". This does not contradict the Scripture that says: "He that believeth shall not make haste" No, this captive does not make haste to get rid of sin by himself, but he hastens to God for forgiveness and for salvation. Now, says the Lord, hearken to Me; listen poor sinner. Harken, if your fears and distractions will allow you; hearken to the Lord. My righteousness is near; My salvation is not far off. This is God's blessed gospel and the captive exile hasteneth.

And again, "Nor that his bread should fail". Famishing is before him; a famine that would slowly take his life is before him. What do you feel if God is silent to you? If He does not speak by the Scriptures, if He does not touch you by His Spirit, if you get no nourishment from the gospel; what do you feel? Comfortable? No, you say, shall I die like this, in this state? Then you cry with the Psalmist: "Be not silent to me lest if Thou be silent to me I become like them that go down into the pit". And you can see all around you going down into the pit. Your associates, your friends, your neighbours, members of your family worldly; all of them in the world and you say, am I one of them? Shall I die as they are dying? Be not silent Lord; do speak to me. Speak pardon and peace to my conscience. Bring me into a saving acquaintance with the Lord Jesus. Give me union with Him. Grant that I may not die of famine. Death by famine must be terrible naturally and a man of God, one born again, fears that the bread of life will never be given to him. They said of old to Christ "Lord, evermore give us this bread". What is this bread? "I am the bread of life". This you must eat or die in your sins. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you". Very solemn, and a man of God fearing this

does just what a captive does. O he cries, Lord do not let me die of famine. Give me, of Thy mercy, the bread of life; even reveal in me Jesus Christ, and cause me to eat His flesh, that is, receive Him by faith and by faith live on Him. And thus it is that the people of God come to know omnipotence in Christ. Says the Lord, but I am the Lord thy God that divided the sea whose waves roared; the Lord of Hosts is His Name. Can He not bring you out of the pit? Cannot He, who does divide the sea, open the doors of your pit? Cannot He, who brings His people from the North and the South and the West and the East, saying, bring My sons from far and My daughters from the ends of the earth; listen, cannot He bring the exile, the captive, out of his pit? Loose him; yes, loose him. Take his bonds from him; take the bonds of the law from his conscience by the atonement. Take the chains of his sin from him by conquering grace. Take the hardness of his heart from him by the love of God in Christ Jesus. Loose him from his grave clothes and let him go. Let him be a free man, even Christ's freed man. He shall not die in the pit. There is a life, a divine life, that is felt sometimes overcoming all sin. It is true, and every captive lives to know it, to feel it; a life from God that overcomes all sin. Faith receives Jesus Christ, lays hold on eternal life whereunto he is called, and his bread does not fail. No, the day will come when some of you will say with Jeremiah: "Thy words were found and I did eat them and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" O you will be rich then. A man of God with one gospel word in his heart is rich to all the intents of bliss. He is rich for the gospel never is exhausted; it never will be. Now captives, now poor exiles, listen to this if you can. The pit you are in is terrible to you, I know; your exiled condition is grievous to you, I know. Your fears are heavy lest you should die in the pit, lest you should die without the Bread of Life. Well, what is the motion of your souls? Can you say there is no moving after God? What about that night when, in your room, you were seeking God, and you felt some earnestness in it and you were drawn after Him and felt you could not live without Him, and were willing to be on His side with all reproaches. Remember how you have received and heard and wait on God. "The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail."