

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 5 September 1920

Isaiah 55 verse 6

"Seek the Lord while He may be found; call
ye upon Him while He is near"

It need not excite surprise that God should permit a pure man to come near to Him, that He should hold communion with a pure man Adam unfallen. Though nature, all creatures, though men be infinitely beneath the greatness and the glory of God, there is no shame in creatureship, and there is no shame in a poor, that is to say, a frail creature, yet sinless, approaching God. And we can understand, by the same way of reasoning, that God can permit elect angels to gaze on His majesty and use them as His servants and convey to them His mind and give to them commandments. But when you come to a sinful man, to one utterly lost and depraved and filthy, and hear in the Scripture God speaking to such a man, saying, "Call upon Me, seek My face, promising in the very word itself, by the clearest implication, that the man shall not seek Him in vain, shall not call on Him for nothing, O this is, beyond all expression, wonderful. It is a wonder of everlasting love, of infinite condescension; it is a wonder for which, if we get to heaven, we shall never thank Him enough, and under the power of such mercy here with grateful contrition, with humble love, we praise Him. And really vital religion very much consists in praying. One who does not pray has no grace; one who has grace does pray. And though he may feel that he prays but little, he does pray and praying is seeking; seeking is praying. It has pleased God that there should be an intimacy between Himself and elect men redeemed and regenerated. It has pleased God that this intimacy decreed, should be enjoyed in a certain way, namely, in the Person of Christ, and that this intimacy should be fruitful is very wonderful and beautiful. If you speak to God freely through the Holy Ghost, He will speak very familiarly with you sometimes. If you are led to tell Him all your heart now and again, He will tell you some of His heart,

some of His thoughts. "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil to give you an expected end. It is good to enter into this intimacy; it is good to pray to a God you know and love and to hear that God speak to you, to call you His, to call you His son, and cause you to call Him your Father; good to have the greatness and the fulness and the mercy and the salvation of God set before your faith for you to draw from that fulness, and good, on the part of the Holy Spirit, to open that fulness and supply your needs out of it. And this is something of intimacy between a holy God and a sinner.

This exhortation is spoken to certain people; their character is in this chapter. "Ho everyone that thirsteth" The same people are spoken to in Matthew's gospel - Jesus speaks the word - "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness". The Psalmist expresses the same when he says - "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee O God". So intense was this thirst in him that in another Psalm he says "My soul thirsteth for God as a thirsty land". As nothing but rain will satisfy a thirsty land, and fill up the cracks and chaps and take the brownness from the grass, and the look of death from all things upon it, because of drought, so none but God will satisfy His children. Here then He says "Ho everyone that thirsteth". This thirst is very particular; it is one of grace, a sign of spiritual health; an evidence that you want something that the Lord alone can give you; something that the whole world, could you get it, would not satisfy. And to these people God says "Come ye to the waters" Christ declares Himself as having water to give. Ezekiel saw waters issuing from beneath the threshold of the house; he saw these waters running into dry places, into the sea and healing all that they touched. John saw also a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal; it ran in the city and through the city and on its banks the tree of life grew. These waters then are the everlasting love of God, the atonement of Christ, the graces of the Spirit; these waters come from the Trinity, and God who gives the thirst, pities the thirsty person. He corrects his legal ideas. His legal ideas are to bring money, and God says -

come without it, (and indeed, you have none) buy what I have to sell, without money and without price. No spiritual mind will ever imagine that infinite wealth can be bought with the tinsel of this world, or with the, so called, merit of a poor creature. Though he may do his best, his best is bad; so says God - come as you are, poor, penniless, come to this market, come where I have my wares and spread them out; come where the river runs and drink of the sweet waters of eternal life. Hearken diligently; you are distracted sometimes; hearken diligently unto Me. Eat ye that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness. This fatness is the blessed gospel, Jesus Christ Himself, who said "Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath everlasting life". He shall never die. To these people, these needy people, these people who often are influenced by wrong thoughts of how to come, by wanting to bring pennies; these people who are corrected of this and to whom the Lord condescends to give instruction and to whom He says "Hearken, turn from all the distracting things that you have in your minds and about you and hearken diligently, listen attentively, carefully, prayerfully, thoughtfully to Me. We listen to self often; we listen to Satan when we know it not; we listen to a legal heart; we listen to circumstances; we listen to the bareness of our own nature that says no good can come out of this; we listen to appearances and judge by them; we listen to our own distraction and discomfort and loss. Now says the Lord - Hearken to Me, sinner, hearken. Is it God you want? Hearken to Me. Is it Christ you want? Hearken to Me. Is it the Holy Ghost? Hearken to Me. Hearken to Me and not carelessly, diligently, as if in that voice is what you need. In that voice, if you hear it, is eternal life, eternal bliss, mercies for time, mercies for conscience, mercies for the heart, mercies for the spirit, mercies for the will, mercies for the feet, mercies for the eyes, mercies for the mouth; all mercies. Hearken diligently; when God speaks, He says something worth hearing; all know it who are led to hearken. There is a voice which often grievously distracts and wounds us; it arises from what I have named, our own bareness, and out of that comes a voice, so to speak, saying - you must not think God can look on you; you must

not expect Him to bless you; He may bless others, but not you. How can you expect it seeing you are so filthy, so guilty, so corrupt in your affections, so weak in your desires, so carnal in your mind, so dead in your spirit, so earthly minded. O, but He says, - Hearken diligently; for whom did the Saviour come? The lost. Think of what that is my friends, lost; lost in sin; lost by sin; lost in the law; lost by the law; And to such, God says, - Hearken diligently unto Me. And He directs the attention to Christ. "Behold I have given Him for a witness to the people". A witness is one who bears testimony of, and concerning, another. The witness that Christ bears of His Father is this, that He loves poor sinners; that He sent His Son to die for them. That is a witness. Says God, I have given My Son for this witness. He is to bear this testimony; He is to make known Myself; He is to be a representative of My mercy, of My love, as it is written in John's gospel - "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son". This is the witness; hearken diligently to this testimony. "God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." O what a testimony. I have given Him for a leader and a commander to the people to lead them out of the world, to lead them away from Sinai to Zion, to lead them up that hill, to climb which is difficult, and yet most blessed. "Let us go up to the mountain of the house of the Lord", and the leader is Jesus Christ. He leads weary sinners, weak sinners, base sinners, sinners who are ignorant and know not which way to take, He leads them. He lines the path with blood; He illuminates it with promises; He paves it with mercy. Rough as it is to flesh and blood, still it is a wonderful way, and the leader, the commander, is Jesus Christ, a commander who says, - Go forward. "Forward let the people go". Devil, let them go; Pharoah, let them go; oppressor, let them go; sea, rolling between them and the promised land, divide and let the people go. This is the commander. O it is a great thing to have your ear opened to listen to this Witness, to hear this Commander, the Lord Jesus.

Then He says - "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found". One of the most wonderful things that you can believe is this,

that God is seekable, that He is findable, that He is knowable. Think of what He is in Himself, beyond us, beyond our apprehension. "Who by searching can find out God"; the terrible majesty of God; the infinite Being of Jehovah, without beginning, without end; all wise, Almighty, omniscient, omnipresent, incapable of extension; He can never be more; He can never know more; He can never love more; He can never be more blissful, no, not when the angels and the assembled saints are around Him, every one of them, He will never be more in Himself; He is incapable of extension. We are not; we can grow; we can grow in knowledge ; we can grow in prudence and in wisdom and in skill and in some way in power, but not so, God. No extension is He capable of. And if we apprehend this incomprehensible Being, if we rightly apprehend His perfections, we shall see that it is not a trifle that He, being what He is, should also be seekable and findable and knowable. We can know one another a little, but "Who by searching can find out God" We can seem to be something which we are not; we can profess motives which are not existing in us. But here, while we are incomprehensible one to another in some particulars, here is Almighty God, absolutely incomprehensible in Himself, and yet He has condescended to come forth from the infinite depths of His own glory, His own light, His own eternity, and make Himself seekable to poor sinners. I think sometimes that my very heart has leaped at the thought that God is seekable. I remember the first time that the thought fell upon my mind and filled me with wonder, and it is still the same at times with me, a marvel, a wonder of grace, a wonder of an infinite stoop in God that He should render Himself seekable to sinners, because He does not need us, that is to say, He does not need us to make Himself blessed. He is glorious in Himself, and in His Trinity of Persons there is an infinitude of delight. Yet, says He - My delights are with the sons of men and I will go to them, I will speak to them, I will teach them.

Now, do we seek Him? Two or three words about this seeking. It is the soul's bent; it is the soul's desire; it is the utterance of a wish; it is the groan that cannot be uttered in words. It arises from a felt anxiety; it arises from the

teaching of the Holy Ghost, and there are many reasons that might be given as to why God should be sought unto by us, but I must be content if I am enabled to speak just a few things in the short time allowed me this evening. And my brethren, I speak to men who know a little of God; we never can know much. But seek the Lord for Himself; seek Him for Himself, for His own revealed excellencies, His revealed glory and beauty and blessedness; for His own ineffable love. Seek Him, for when He is found, He is found to be a sufficient portion. "The Lord is my portion saith my soul" the prophet declared. O it is great to seek God for Himself, and yet that may be a state of heart to which we hardly have attained, and if any of us have ever attained to it, it may have quickly passed away from us. Therefore, let us look, if I may say so, let us look lower; we are permitted to do it. I mentioned a man this morning who sought the Lord for something and he found Him in that very thing. I mean the publican; he sought for mercy and he found it; he went down to his house justified. The Psalmist sought it. Out of the pit he cried unto God. "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee". If Thou Lord shouldest mark iniquity O Lord, who shall stand, but there is mercy with Thee and this is the total sum. Is it not what you want poor sinner, to cover you? Are not the gaping wounds of your sin, the running sores of your convictions and the many things which you see in yourself to be wrong, are they not a reason why you should, according to this merciful invitation, seek the Lord? Seek Him for mercy. Mercy is the total sum; mercy will put you right; mercy will fit us for heaven; mercy will purify the conscience, melt the hardest heart, stick to the work it begins, never leave the sinner to lose hold of mercy; free mercy, full mercy, without price. Mercy in Christ's atonement, in Christ's righteousness, in Christ's intercession, in Christ's promise. Mercy, this is the total sum; it suits me; the older I get, the more I need it. Seek this; His Name is merciful, the Lord God. This was the Name, that great and grand and wondrous Name He proclaimed to Moses - "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, pardoning iniquity and transgression and sin." Does it suit you? O sinner, does it suit you? Then

lift up your head and seek this blessed One; seek the Lord, the merciful Lord while He may be found. Ah, mercy decides the case; mercy puts a sinner on the right side; mercy touches the hard heart; mercy comes also into circumstances. Mercy came to a troubled David; the Lord looked on his affliction when Absalom rose up against him. "If the Lord take pleasure in me" he said, "I shall see both it" that is the ark, "and His habitation". And how could God take pleasure in him on whose house He had sent a sword for sin? Only by mercy; mercy must come into your circumstances to make them acceptable to your will, and profitable to your soul. Mercy must come into your house to soften trouble, to make bearable the cross. Mercy must come to make you believe that good will come out of your evils, that profit will accrue to you out of your troubles, your sorrows. Seek the Lord for mercy; seek Him for mercy I say. Mercy in your house and merciful provision of daily bread; and we do not know how much we shall be called upon to need that in ways we have never yet needed it. No, I need not call your attention to the extremely serious and threatening condition of things in the land today, and what God is going to do with this wicked nation; whether heavier troubles and sorer judgments are to fall upon us, and whether He will give power to our enemies to bring grievous destruction, He alone knows fully. I am disposed, with great sadness, to think He is going to do so. May we then seek mercy. No man may be able to say, this is his own, or that, for long; then we shall need mercy. Seek it my friends, seek it. I say mercy will do everything. Mercy in the blood of Christ, in the righteousness of Christ; mercy in justification and in sanctification.

Seek the Lord for His power, seek Him for His power. The power of God will be exercised on men in two different ways; in awful judgment when, so to speak, the being of many will be broken on the wall of divine justice. O sinner may that never be your lot; it will be the lot of many. We are all hastening to eternity, and many are hastening to hell, and the power of God will be upon multitudes for their everlasting and most just destruction. But the power of God is upon many for good, and the Lord instructs some with strong hand, that they should not learn

the way of the heathen but that they should learn to fear Him, and to pray to Him and to seek refuge in Him. That is power. Ah if your heart is turned to God, a mighty hand has turned it; the Holy Spirit in His omnipotent grace has turned it. If your eyes are turned unto Him who alone can help you, the Spirit has turned them to Him. If you feel too weak to stand, and cry mightily to God to support you; if you feel too weak to manage your own affairs, and have faith to commit them to God, then I say, then I say, you will find there is power in this. The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. The kingdom of God is within you and it cometh not with observation, but stands in the mighty operations of the Eternal Spirit. Seek this power. How do you think you will stand without this power? I do not doubt that myriads of militant protestants will give up their protestantism, for there is no power behind it. But I do also believe firmly that myriads of weak creatures, who are afraid of the next step, afraid of evil tidings, afraid of indwelling sin, that filthy thing, of which they are repenting continually; such people, afraid too of temptations and of trying providences; such people will stand. Of the weak believer the Apostle Paul said - He shall stand. And why? God is able to make him stand. "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the throne of His glory". This is God. Seek the Lord's power, my friends.

Seek His word. Jeremiah found it; "Thy words were found and I did eat them, and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart". This book is inspired; may we never doubt it. Never give up inspiration; young people cleave to inspiration, cleave to inspiration. Read the inspired word; it will guide you naturally; it will fortify any moral feeling you may have; it will tell you your duty; it will help you. Read the Holy Scripture. Blessed be God for an inspired Bible. O that it may one day come again to be the Book of England. But I was to say this - some parts of this precious Book have been made what Christ speaks of in John's gospel - "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life". How animated has our faith been; how warmed has been our love; how brightened

has been our hope; how lengthened out has been our patience by some scriptures spoken to us with power. Seek guidance; seek the Lord to guide you, not when you have made your mind up to do something and then ask Him to guide you; that is hypocrisy and no worship; that wont be accepted of Him. But when you feel foolish and know not what course to take, seek guidance. "Show me the way wherein I should walk for I lift up my soul unto Thee". Seek fellowship with Him; seek intimacy. I wish we were not such strangers to Christ. One reason for our easy backsliding is this, that we are not more acquainted with the King in His beauty, and the land which is very far off. Of that I am sure; of that I have been persuaded many times in my own case. Seek intimacy; Jesus sometimes gets and holds the heart; O what a blessed thing it is. One day we trust we shall be where there is no more going out; meanwhile we have to struggle against sin, that monster in our nature, and against temptation; against trying providences; against a dark understanding; against a perverse will; and we want this way and if we can get it we will. O, but when it pleases the Eternal Spirit to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, and bring the man of God in his simplicity, to say, "Show me the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul unto Thee", it is good. Seek intimacy; seek guidance; seek the Lord while He may be found. And when is that? O, when you are in trouble. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble". When you are pinched with some want. "Open Thy mouth wide and I will fill it". When you are driven by some enemy. "I flee unto Thee to hide me". When you know not what to do. "I will cry unto God Most High, unto God that performeth all things for me". He is found in the floods of great waters; He is found to be a refuge in times of trouble; He is found to be a good God. One thing I am sure of, that some of His people here can say - all of them will say, but some can say now, He has been an exceedingly good and patient and condescending God to them. He has commanded deliverances for us. "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near." Seek Him in the means He gives you, first in secret. "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and shut thy door about thee and pray to thy Father in secret and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly." O, how many

foul faces have been washed and wiped and made to shine in secret prayer; what relief has been found there; what answers have been obtained there; what righteousness has been wrought, what promises have been obtained. Seek Him there my friends. If religion is only public, it is not worth much. Seek Him in His word. It is a good word this; God is in it. As soon as sin came into the world, then God came with grace, and promised grace, promised the Messiah, promised that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. And that promise was referred to by Paul in the Romans - "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly". Ah, many a poor weeping eye has looked into the word if haply it might light on some promise, and it has surely been so, and it is not more sure that Abraham's servant was guided by the Lord to take Rebecca for Isaac, than it is sure that if you are found in the Holy Scriptures, God will meet with you. Seek Him there dear friends. Seek Him in the ministry; if He gives a ministry it is for something. It is not just that the hours shall be spent in speaking but, if it please God, that He shall speak in His word. That is a beautiful passage in Haggai - "Then spake Haggai, the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message". It was not the letter then; the people prospered through the prophesying of Haggai and of Zechariah. May the Lord prosper His word. Seek Him in providence; seek Him in your troubles; you will find Him there. Floods, great waters, roaring seas, shaking mountains, moving earth, they wont keep God from you nor you from God. O if He comes in a cross He is welcome, and the cross is bearable, yea welcome. If He comes in bereavement, if He comes in a loss, O how good is the bereavement, how profitable is the loss. Seek the Lord while He may be found. He is found in affliction; He is found in the wilderness; He is found everywhere where His people are and where they seek Him. May the Lord teach us to seek, and make seekers of us, and keep us seekers, for the day will come when, if we seek Him, we shall say "I sought the Lord and He heard me." "Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me."

AMEN.