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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 19 October 1921

ISAIAH 61 v 3

"To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He might be glorified."

These are part of the blessed words of Christ. He opens the chapter thus: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me", and you will remember that when He entered upon His public ministry, He read this. He took the Book and read this blessed passage, and said that the Scripture that day which He read was fulfilled. "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me." And if ever we receive the Holy Ghost to do us good, we shall receive Him through the Lord Jesus. "Because the LORD hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He might be glorified." This is the infallible Preacher. He was with His Eternal Father in the Council of Peace, in the Covenant of Peace that was between them both. He was possessed of all the secrets which Divine grace purposed to bestow upon the elect. To effect this the Father sent Him and He came. The Son of God became incarnate, full of grace and truth. He was the "minister of the sanctuary, or the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man" (Hebrews 8 v 2). The Holy Spirit therefore has ministered for Christ's sake and glory, to all the elect from the beginning of time and this will go on until the last vessel of mercy is taken up to heaven, until there are no more people to quicken and call and teach.

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What a mercy to be under His instruction; to sit, as it is prophesied by Moses, to sit at His feet and receive His words; to receive them as the Thessalonians received them, "not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance." And what a mercy it is to answer to the description here given of the people to whom Christ was sent to preach. The LORD anointed Him "to preach good tidings to the meek." A meek person is a teachable one who is not conceited in himself; who is not like the man of whom Solomon speaks, that he is wiser in his own sight than seven men that can render a reason. A meek man is not that man. The meek man cries to the Lord: "What I see not teach Thou me." "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." Do you know this meek man? Does he live with you at times? Does he cry to God in your heart? Does he open his mouth wide and pant after God's testimonies, as did the Psalmist? It is a great thing to be a meek man. A meek man always seeks to sit on the stool at the feet of his Master. A meek man does not want to be his own teacher, knowing that he is ignorant, but he wants the infallible Teacher, the blessed Lord God, who became the Servant of His Father to do this great work. And what good tidings does He preach my friends to the meek person? Why, He tells him that He has loved him with an everlasting love, that there is a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness; that the Redeemer really did redeem him; that He did with infinite skill and pain and trouble and by death "bring in an everlasting righteousness" (Daniel 9 v 24) for him. He teaches him that the path of tribulation is the path to heaven, and that, although weak in himself, in the Lord he is strong. He teaches him to depend on sovereign grace and forsake his own arm, for he that trusteth in that is a poor creature and he is a fool. And He tells him that here he is to have sorrow; there is a heaven which will more than make amends for all; that, though he gets the presence of God occasionally, he will have eternal presence when he reaches home. He tells the meek sinner these things by little and little. It is, as it is written: "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him, but God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit." O may Christ preach to us. Happy people to whom Christ is made a Preacher, a good Minister. What He teaches you, you will know. Naturally when a person grasps an ascertained fact, he knows that. When you receive the word of Christ in power, in demonstration of the Spirit, what He says to you, you

know. There is a great deal in the Bible about which you may have to say, I do not know the meaning of it. Many things of which you may say, I suppose they mean such and such. I suppose they are intended for such and such ends, but the one word - and if it be but one, O it is a mercy to have that - the one word that this great, this infallible, this glorious Teacher speaks to your heart, that you will know. You will know the light that it brings, the peace that it speaks, the strength that it imparts, the prospects that it sets before you.

"He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted". The man with a broken heart in spirit is like a person with a broken leg. He is very weak and incapable of walking. And when you have got a broken heart, broken for sin, broken by divine chastisement, broken by the dealings of God with you, then you will want this binding. What a surgeon is Jesus Christ. He kindly knits a broken bone. Mercy knits and binds up a broken heart. Love does it, blood does it, righteousness does it, the Person of Christ does it. He was sent to do it.

"To proclaim liberty to the captives" held in prison. There are three prisons that may hold you. There is the prison of the law. This will hold you until Christ comes and opens the door. If you are in this prison, bless God you are not in hell, and if you have cried to Christ the great Liberator you will never sink into that dreadful abode of punishment and woe; and bless God, though you may be in prison, you are not in black despair. There is the prison of the law. It shuts a man up; it tells him that he cannot come forth until the uttermost farthing is paid, and the man says, I have nothing to pay with; what shall I do? The law says: "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" and the man says, I am cursed. And then the dear Saviour and Friend of sinners, the great One who is sent from heaven to open the prison, comes and opens the prison just as effectually and gloriously as He opened the grave of Lazarus, and opened Lazarus's eyes; yea, animated his body again with warm life and brought him forth.

There is a prison of felt guilt and when a sinner is shut up there, he says, I cannot come forth. The guilt of his depraved nature, the guilt of his actions, the guilt of his heart sins, this

guilt binds him and no man can deliver him but the Man Christ Jesus who is true Almighty God, and He brings a sinner forth by pardoning him; remitting punishment and taking away guilt and polluted rags and washing away all filthiness.

There is the prison of affliction and temptation, as when a sinner, a child of God, comes into trouble, some trouble that touches, cuts him, wounds him deeply; trouble that will sometimes take away his sleep; trouble which, being sanctified, brings him to much examination of himself. Lord, why art Thou contending with me? "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me" And Christ in time comes and tells him that He is rebuking him in this way because He loves him. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore and repent" and the sinner repents with all his heart, and is deeply ashamed of himself, and blesses God that he has been allowed to pray, taught to pray and that his prayers have been answered. So Christ does this, brings to you this word. "The opening of the prison to them that are bound. To proclaim the acceptable year" - or dispensation of time - "of the Lord" - with respect to His children - "and the day of vengeance of our God". When the Lord will take vengeance on their enemies; when death shall be killed, when the curse shall be taken away, when the frown of God shall be removed, then "the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God" is come. Then, "to comfort all that mourn" and "appoint unto them that mourn" this good; even "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness". A mourning person is a person who grieves, he grieves for something. And there are two things in particular that we grieve over if we are the Lord's people. One is that we are sinners. That will ever be a grief when grace is in exercise. We must carry this body of sin and death to the grave, and, as the Lord is pleased to teach us, it will be a grief to us that we are sinners. We possess it, we are full of it; it is incessant in its motions - blessed be God, if not victorious; if we are not permitted to be always having sin and grieving the Holy Spirit. But it will cause a mourning as long as we live as grace may be in exercise, that we are sinners, and not only that we are sinners, but that we do sin. Yes we do. You may walk through the streets of Brighton and never fear apprehension, never fear a charge being brought against you of this or that flagrant

crime, but you will not walk through one room of your house, when you are under the light and teaching of the Holy Ghost, and say you have not sinned; never. Our most grievous sins are our thoughts. "How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" asks the Lord. You may never say to anybody, never breathe by your own lips, those terrible words: "We are lords, we will come no more unto Thee" but you may act them; you may live them over a time. Shut up in prayer, with no spirit to call on God, you live these words and this, when you are convinced of it, will be a grief to you. You will be saying with the Apostle Paul, "When I would do good, evil is present with me" and "how to perform that which is good I find not" Now if this be so with us, what can comfort us? If I must carry this body of sin and death with me as long as I live; if this putrid corpse is tied on my back and I cannot get rid of it - no man can take it off my back - if it is to sicken me and weaken me, and threaten my life over and over again; what can comfort me? Can I ever be comforted as long as this is the case with me? O yes, you can. How? Well, the Apostle Paul said: "I thank God". I do it not, but sin that dwelleth in me. It is no more I - the Apostle Paul, quickened, born again, and had Christ revealed in me - it is no longer I; it is sin that dwelleth in me, and the struggle in which I am now engaged, and the difficulties by which I am surrounded, and the weakness that gives me many a fall, these things do but bring me more by them to need and hang about and cleave to the Lord Jesus. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord". Here is my victory. I am defeated; He gives me a victory. I am weak; He makes me strong. I am put to it sorely as to how to hold on, but He holds me up and I believe He will make me stand, even as He is able to do. That is comfort. That is comfort, as some know, sweet comfort. Ah the prospect of heaven, a foretaste of glory and bliss with God. A promise in your heart, a looking in of Christ upon you sometimes, a touch of His love, an inflowing of His mercy, a sweet word encouraging you, will be comfort, solid comfort, like a piece of heaven dropped down into your heart. "To comfort all that mourn. To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion". The church of the living God in earth is much made up of mourners and mourning is their character. O but what a mercy Christ said to His disciples: "Ye now therefore have sorrow but I will see you again". The world rejoices, you have sorrow; I will comfort you. There is a comfort of love; there is a fellowship of the Spirit, and the Lord's people when they get this comfort, and

this fellowship, have the fulfilment of this Scripture in their heart. "To comfort all that mourn". Blessed mourners they shall shortly rise to be with God. Hart says

Zion's mourners cease your fear
For lo the dying Lamb
Utterly forbids despair
To all who love His Name

"To give unto them beauty for ashes." It is needful that we should first look at the ashes. Ashes say, there has been a fire, and if we belong to the Lord there has been a fire, or there will be one. What do these ashes represent? They represent the ruin of human nature, and a very great ruin it is. One might, so to speak, be content by saying that, but let me try to just particularise for a moment. If a house is burnt down, the owner looks on it and he particularises. Perhaps there was one special room that he delighted in. He may say, O that beautiful ceiling, that cornice, the rich and beautiful colour of the decorations, now all burnt to ashes. He may say, O some pieces of furniture, I valued them, I admired them, they were costly; now they are a heap of ashes; and so on. And what of human nature? Look at it as it came from God's hand. Infidel critics tell us that we have come from something very much lower than we are now; we have risen. The Scriptures tell us we are fallen. Men tell us we may rise higher. The Scriptures say, we are ashes; that is all. What a beautiful noble creature was man, as he came from the hand of His Creator. Now look at him; look at his understanding; just death and ashes. He lost the natural understanding he had in innocency. Boston says it was a lamp of light; now it is darkness enough. If you, by grace, now have the true light - Christ in your heart "the light of life" - you will humbly acknowledge the truth of Paul's word to the Ephesians: "Ye were sometimes darkness". Take the will, that will that was content with God's will, to live in Eden where he had been placed. But the devil invaded man's innocency by provoking his will. What is it now? Burnt up, or it is full of rebellion, perverse, stubborn. O what a will we have got, what a will we have got. Poor sinner, do you believe the ashes represent the ruin of your will? I do. Take the affections; what are they? They are represented by this, ashes. There has been a fire; the fire of sin has burnt them,

destroyed their beauty, and now they lie cold and dead and nothing but that which is repulsive is in them. Set on things on the earth, set on idols. And men, though they know God in His works, desire not to retain the knowledge of Him, but say to Him: "Depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways". And here you have ashes, death, destruction. "The whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint." Nothing good in us, nothing good in us. You may improve your natural mind, you may inform your natural judgement, you may know many things, things about which you more or less are daily conversant with, and you are not guessing; you know them. You have grasped certain ascertained facts and your grasping them may be truly said to know them, but there you must stop. You wont say properly you have got to know God by the same sort of effort that you obtain information of any natural subject. No. And convinced of this ruin, there is trouble. Every one born of the Spirit and convinced of his sin, is in trouble. Trouble about his condition, trouble with respect to God. Trembling before God, trembling at His Word, fearing His majesty and His glory, and fearing lest He should one day come out as a lion to break all your bones; and here is trouble. What has the Lord appointed for this mourner? What is it the Lord is appointed to give in exchange for these ashes? Says the sinner, well I fear, I greatly fear, that He has appointed destruction for me, that my name is a sign of destruction, and you may well fear it. When you look at yourself, when you think of, and feel, the law of God within you, burning you up, you may well fear that. O, but says Christ, My Father anointed Me to come to you and give you beauty for ashes; ashes which proclaim your shame and your ruin. What a declaration this is; what beauty here. It is that which will make you acceptable to God. What is it? Perfect righteousness, perfect cleansing, a new nature. This is beauty. Take righteousness; this delivers a sinner, this removes his condition, changes it. This takes away the ashes; this brings him to be a new creature and to stand as a new creature, justified, cleansed from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses. And this produces a great change in him. Christ Himself is "the Lord our Righteousness". So the beauty is Christ. "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us", and that is Christ made known. Christ coming and dwelling in your hearts. Christ coming and being in you righteousness, and sanctification, and wisdom, and redemption. That is beauty. Men may deck themselves with all their

moralties, but they have no beauty if they have not this righteousness. Men may think they will know this and they have done that, but they have no beauty if they have not this righteousness. Sinner, this is what you must have if ever you stand before God as an accepted person. "Accepted in the beloved." Nothing else will do. And if, in your mourning, you have felt at times you have been drenched in ashes, this will afford you that happiness. If your conscience has been pierced through and through with conviction of your ruin, and you have felt again and again too much ashamed to lift up your face to God, this will change the whole face of things to you in your experience and you will say: "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength". This is the beauty, the beauty of the Lord. It is called glory: "Thy God thy glory". This is the covering of a sinner. "Behold O God our Shield and look upon the face of Thine Anointed". Says the Apostle Paul of this wondrous thing, God made Christ "to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." And what beauty does the infinite merit of Christ cover a sinner with. All that merit of His wonderful and absolute obedience, this imputed to a sinner becomes his beauty and his glory. As Adam's fall and transgression covered us with shame, so the obedience of Christ covers us, if we belong to Christ, with beauty. And this is appointed. Why then, you who are now sitting in ashes, and mourning, the Lord show you what there is for you and bring it to you. If now you say "Woe is me!". "Woe is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts", I say, may God show you what there is now in store for you and bring it to you. Beauty - and God is the judge of that. And there is beauty for the pilgrim in a peculiar thing. "How beautiful are thy feet with shoes O Prince's daughter". Yes, beauty of the shoes. What are the shoes? Iron and brass. What are these shoes? The shoes of the preparation of the gospel, the peace of God. Yes, and you thought you could never walk in an upright way. So ruined are you, and so destitute, you could never walk in an upright way. But when the gospel comes it just changes the whole thing and you can walk before the Lord in peace and equity, according to that promise. "I will strengthen them in the Lord and they shall walk up and down in His Name, saith the Lord." This is beauty; it is beauty divine; it is God's own beauty. "Thy beauty was perfect through My comeliness

which I put upon thee." That is his white raiment. Linen, clean, fine linen, as it is written in the Revelation, which is the righteousness of saints. And there is a beauty to give to them which is also very wonderful, namely the truth. Thou teacheth me truth in the inward parts said the Psalmist. "Thou desireth truth in the hidden part, and in the inward part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom." That is one of the ways in which God brings His children to the knowledge of Himself, and to a humble, thorough confession of their sins. Truth in your heart will be like a healthy constitution that will enable a man, to whom some ailment comes, to overcome it. A healthy, strong constitution does not readily yield to any ailment that comes. So, if you have truth in your heart, the truth of God, the truth of His grace and of His mercy, it will work so in its strength, in its holy nature, in its clean properties; it will so work in your heart that there will be honest confession and humble departure from known sins, and from the depravity of your nature. You will carry the sin in your nature as long as you live, but you wont carry it in your love, and in your affections, and in your will, and in your understanding, so as to say, I like this life. No, you will be saying, O how hateful it is to me to be a sinner. How hateful it is to me to depart, as I do, alas, from the living God, and turn to vain things from time to time. It is truth that makes men feel like that and speak like that. Truth in the inward part, wisdom in the inward part, this is beauty. Beauty divine, beauty that God loves, and praises. It is such beauty that, covering the child of God, brings the Lord's highest encomium. "Thou art all fair My love, there is no spot in thee". It is such beauty as fills Christ with satisfaction, for He sees in the sinner the travail of His soul and is satisfied. It is such beauty as will make the sinner from time to time happy in the Lord, for righteousness, and the atonement of Christ, and the Word of Christ, and the gospel of peace, will always, as revealed and made powerful within, make the subject of such great mercy, happy. "Beauty for ashes". Then "the oil of joy for mourning". There is to be a day, so to speak, when God will wipe all tears from all the faces of His people, but that is to be when a strong angel shall plant one foot upon the sea and the other upon the dry land, and proclaim that time shall be no more. You may say, can I ever rejoice here? Can I, who am such a sinner, and wandering so often can I rejoice? You wont if sin, a legal spirit, and a tempting devil have their way. They

will bind you, they will make you think that it is not right for any child of God to rejoice. They will make you think that the best course for you is to be always hanging your head down. It is a good thing to hang your head down, but it is a wonderful thing for Christ to lift your face up. It is a wonderful thing to get into that experience by the Holy Ghost that is expressed in the Psalms. "They looked unto Him and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed". It is meet to unite with Ezra. "O our God I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face unto Thee, for we are before Thee in our trespasses and we cannot stand before Thee because of this". But it is good when the Lord Jesus says to you, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink the sweet and be no more sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength". Then O what a sweet harmony there is in the soul. How you can rejoice and be ashamed, sing and be sorry, praise God and hate yourself, and mourn and shed the tear of grief over your sinfulness. How able you are then to walk in the ways of the Lord and sing, great is the glory of the Lord. The oil of joy is given. And this is the sweet anointing and teaching of the Holy Ghost. He comes, and with that glorious One Jesus Christ revealed in you by Him, He makes you sing. "They shall sing in the ways of the Lord." Yes, and with this prophet, and in this very chapter, you have it. "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." And one may say I do not think that will ever be my experience. Well, you are not wise to say so. If you are a mourner, you are not wise to conclude that. O, but I am full of evil. So you are. Who would contradict you that knows the truth and knows himself. But this is it, Christ is more than sin; Christ's grace will overcome that sorrow that you have. Christ's joy will make you joyful. He will make you glad with His Own gladness, even as He will cause you to triumph in the victory which He obtained for you and gives to you. The Holy Spirit brings Him and "Can the children of the bride chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?" (Matthew 9 v 15). And can you when the Lord Jesus is showing to you His beauties and persuading you of His love to you? Can you just turn your eyes always only to look upon yourself and say, but Lord, this sin; but Lord, this wandering; but Lord, this backsliding? You will not be less sorry for these things when He

comes, but He will turn your sorrow into joy and fill you with joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Ghost. And the "oil of joy" is such a softening, mollifying joy. It is not a hard, heavy joy that carries a person above trouble, and above sin and everything else? It is a joy that so mollifies your spirit and so softens your heart that you can only say, Lord do keep me the rest of my days. Do not let me trust myself; take hold of me and hold me up and I shall be safe. "The oil of joy for mourning". Well it will come to you who are mourning according to Christ's word. Until it does come you would not believe it even if a thousand people of God told it you, and I did so. You could resist all their testimony unless the Lord were in that testimony to you. But when the Lord comes, when the Spirit comes and pours in this oil, it is then, as the church said, speaking in another word: "Because of the savour of Thy good ointments Thy Name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love Thee." (S of S 1 v 3). And His wine was so sweet that it took away their sorrow and brought a spiritual exhilaration to them.

"And the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness". Praise, so prevailing in your heart that it is just like a garment covering your body. Praise covers you. And I think you have one of the most beautiful evidences, or illustrations, of this in the 103 Psalm, where the Psalmist blesses the Lord and calls upon his soul and all that is within him to do it and not to forget His benefits. Then he recounts those benefits, the healing of all his diseases, the forgiving of his sins and the renewing of his strength; the casting away of his sins from him as far as the east is from the west, and the pity of the Lord, like a father's pity. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." Now when such mercies come to a sinner as are here set out, then he has on him the garment of praise. It is good to give thanks and it is comely and pleasant and the Lord takes particular notice of it, and is very pleased with it as He said: "Whosoever offereth praise glorifieth Me and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God". And you will remember that the Apostle Paul in telling the Lord's people to be careful for nothing but in everything to make known their requests unto God, puts this in that word: "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God". And O my dear brethren, what have

we to thank Him for? Why did He pass by myriads of sinners and take hold of us? and why did He quicken us? Why did He bring us into trouble about our sins and our souls? Why did He put in us the Spirit of grace and supplications, and why did He ever show to us the beauties of His face and speak comfortable words to our hearts when we were in trouble? Why did He ever say to us: "Fear not, I have redeemed thee, thou art Mine". "In everything" - in all your petitions, in all your troubles, in all your errands to the throne of God's heavenly grace, in all your lookings to Christ to help you in, and bring you out of, your troubles in His own time; in all your things, when you are going to the Lord, forget not to take this - "In everything, by prayer and supplications, with thanksgiving". "The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness". You have been hanging your head down, been feeling perhaps you will never lift it up again. You are afraid perhaps that God will put you to shame on every hand, afraid that He will cover you with confusion and that, even though you have a hope of going to heaven, you can scarcely expect comfort in this life for such a sinner are you. But He says, No, put on this garment; wear thanksgiving. Praise and bless and adore and magnify your God; God in Christ. "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift" and thanks be to the Father for His eternal love manifested in that gift. Thanks be to the Son for coming Himself and thanks be to the Holy Spirit for mercifully dealing with us.

"That they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He might be glorified." The figure is changed, but the tree is the same. Trees of righteousness planted by the Lord, partaking of the fatness of that blessed root, that good root, the Lord Jesus. "I am the Vine". "Trees of righteousness". As it is written: "Ye are God's husbandry that ye may bring forth fruit unto God" "Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me" and "herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit". "Ye are God's husbandry", cut out of the wild olive and grafted into the good olive, to partake of the fatness of that good root, that wonderful root. O my friends, when we bear any gracious fruit it is the root that is to be praised, not the branch. Christ is to be thanked - the Father is - when we bear fruit. "Trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He might be glorified"

in His love, and in His mercy, and in His justifying righteousness, and in His cleansing blood and in His preserving grace and power, and in His kind providence whereby often He carries out some divine purpose of mercy, preventing us. Preventing us this way and that way, and bringing us to His dear footstool. May the Lord open to us all this mercy and bring us to know what this beautiful Scripture means, that we may praise and glorify Him.

AMEN.