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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 29 August 1920

ISAIAH 64 v 5

"Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh
righteousness, those that remember thee
in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have
sinned: in those is continuance, and we
shall be saved."

The greatest, the best, the sweetest circumstance that can come to a sinner is for God to meet him as this text declares. God cast us away once; He turned us out of Eden, for we were in our father Adam when he was expelled. God withdrew His face, His presence from man. In the time it repented God that He had made man, and that He had gathered a nation to Himself and made a covenant with that nation. Their behaviour was such, so abominable, their ingratitude so dreadful, their idolatries so numerous, and so persistent, that the Lord said He would cast them from His presence. He cast them out of the land of promise and they are still cast out, so that, if it should please God to turn His face to any of us and to meet us, as this text declares, I say again, it is the greatest and most wonderful and sweetest circumstance that can come to us, and if we seek Him we shall find Him. Then shall ye, He said, find Me, when ye search for Me with all your heart. And it seems evident that the church at this time, speaking by the prophet Isaiah, expresses her fervent wish for the presence of God. "Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of Thy holiness and of Thy glory". Let not the trouble we are in, the desolation that we are in, let not the ruin that is occasioned by the wild beast and the boar out of the wood, let not our broken down hedges and our trailing and bedraggled vines seem nothing to Thee. "Where is Thy zeal and Thy strength". Where is Thy promise not to cast off Thy people? "The sounding of Thy bowels and of Thy mercies toward me? are they restrained?" The desire was fervent. It is expressed again in this chapter: "O that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down." Is God's absence your trouble? If you had His presence would you be happy

although your circumstances might be full of distress? Is the touch of His hand what you want, the smile of His face, the whisper of His Spirit, a sense of pardon, of acceptance, of access, of nearness, of prevalence with Him? Is this what you earnestly desire? What can a living soul want more than this? "O that Thou wouldest rend the heavens". There was a threat uttered by God against His people that, in the event of disobedience, their heavens should become brass and their earth iron. No rain, no fruitfulness, and when they realised it, as Jeremiah tells us, when their nobles sent their little ones with their pitchers to the pits, and the little ones returned ashamed with empty pitchers, then they cried to the Lord. What a mercy it is to be sensible of the condition we are in. If it be evil, it is a mercy to see it and feel it. "Children that will not lie" is a character given to the saints by this prophet; so He was their Saviour. And what the presence of God would effect was evidently present to the mind of this praying people. "As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil" So, if Thou wouldest come down, Thou wouldest make Thy Name known and all would be well, for our adversaries would tremble at Thy presence. As when the melting fire causeth the waters to boil, so God's presence causes all the affections of the soul, the faith, the hope, the love, that God, the Holy Ghost, has created therein, it makes them all move. The water is not indifferent to the fire neither is a sinner, blessed with God's presence, left indifferent. There is an effect. Mighty, the great, wonderful effect. The fire makes the water boil, so God's presence in a sinner makes his heart to boil, his affections to cry. He cries mightily to His God. And the faith of this people went backward. Since the beginning, when Thou didst terrible things for us, when Thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at Thy presence. When God descended on Mount Sinai, the whole mountain shook and trembled and the people were afraid at the tokens of the Almighty's presence and God did wonderful things for them which they had not looked for. He brought them marvellously out of Egypt; He fed them miraculously in the wilderness; the flinty rock was smitten and yielded refreshing drink to them all through their journey and their shoes did not wax old, neither their garments, and they had not looked for all this, but God did it. How many things the Lord has done for some of us which we looked not for. When we trembled before Sinai, we did not look for His love. When we were guilty we did not look for His forgiveness,

did not expect it; feared greatly that He, who had power to kill the body and cast the soul into hell, would exercise that power on us in that two-fold way. But He did things we looked not for: "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside Thee, what He hath prepared for Him that waiteth for Him." And you remember that the Apostle Paul quotes this passage in the Corinthians and refers so directly to the things God had given to Christ for His people, refers it to the very Man Christ Jesus in whom all the wisdom of God is, and he says if the princes of this world had known that they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. And now this statement of the text. Thou who has done these things from eternity and put them into Christ, given eternal life and all blessings needful for heaven to Christ for the people of Thy choice, Thou regardest this people in their exercises and their motions. "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness." This wont cut the veriest sinner in this chapel, with doubts and fears, it wont cut him off, and I shall try, by the help of God to show how that the Lord's people are found by God sometimes rejoicing. They rejoice when they get a faith's view of Christ, and there is no saint here who has had such a view of Christ as I mention, who has not been sensible, for the moment, of a leaping up of his soul Godward and a thankfulness for such a way of escape from the wrath to come and such a Saviour for sinners; not one. I am sure every living soul here can say, sometimes has said, how sweet the Name of Jesus sounds in my ear and in my heart. Come, poor sinner, with all your fears and gloom and doubt, with all the bondage you feel in your spirit at times, and the grievous absence from God, cannot you, must not you, say there have been sweet moments when you have rejoiced as the hymn says - My thoughts rejoice at Jesus' Name. And God meets this sinner. But you say, the man whom God meets works righteousness, and I do not that. Perhaps you do not know in your judgment all that you do in your spirit. Spirit and judgment in God's people do not always run together. For instance, when they said to Christ, as John records it, "What shall we do that we might work the work of God", and the answer is this. "This is the work of God that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent". And this is that working of righteousness of which Peter speaks. I perceive, said he to Cornelius, that God is no respecter of persons, but he that worketh righteousness is accepted of Him, and this is the work of

righteousness which God is not unrighteous to forget. Every stretching out of your soul to Jesus Christ, every sweet feeling in your heart that Christ was acceptable to you, making you plead before the Lord for His sake for pardon and salvation; every view you have had of Christ which has made you say in spirit, He is my hope, my ground, my desire, my pleading before the Lord, and if ever I have any happiness it is because of Jesus Christ, I say that is working righteousness. The greatest sin in the world is unbelief and the greatest act of righteousness that any child of God ever does is believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, it is a great thing to work righteousness in this way and sometimes, when sin is most powerful, when fears are high and strong, when the tempter tells you that there is no hope for you in God, and no help, even then when you are enabled, in the midst of all that you are feeling and fearing, to name before God the Name of Christ, to mention His righteousness, and His only, I dare say this to you, and I do not believe anybody will prove out of the Scripture that I am wrong in saying it to you, this is working righteousness. At your worst you are at your best in one sense; at your lowest you begin to rise. And this expresses, for the most part, the life of God's people. It is a struggle, as says the Apostle: "Fight the good fight of faith". Christians are called, we see, not to sleep, nor play, but fight. This fight of faith, God notices, and He is not unrighteous to forget it. In one place He speaks of this act of faith as a kindness to Himself. "I remember thee" - and He remembers things we have forgotten - "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." I remember all the motions of your spirit, how you told Me that you could part with all things here if only I would bless you. You said you minded not any suffering if you might be blessed with the forgiveness of your sins, and you told Me you would go through anything for Me, and I regarded it and put it in My book of remembrance against this day to remind you of it. "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals". O sinner, what an amazing thing it is that that little grain of faith that you have, in its growth, in its motions, is a work of righteousness. "That worketh righteousness". And, says Paul, God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope which ye had to His Name. If you forget, the Lord will not. If you cast away the work of faith as

not being sincere, He wont cast it away. All the good works done by men in this world do not give God pleasure, but the motion of faith in a sinner's heart gives Him great satisfaction. In the sinner in whom that faith is and struggles, Jesus sees the travail of His soul and is satisfied. He sees an eye that will ravish Himself looking on Him; He sees a hand outstretched to touch Him and to bring healing virtue; He sees a spirit that gives credence to God above all the false things in this whole world and all the wickedness in your whole soul. O, my dearly beloved friends, it is a great thing to work God's work with full intent. And what is it? To believe on Him whom He hath sent. Let us resolutely strive to work God's work with full intent. And what is it to believe on Him whom He hath sent, to believe on His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus? Did you ever cast your immortal soul on Christ without persuasion of an interest, without a solid conviction of that? Did you ever say, here I am Lord, a ruined sinner. There is one open way and though I am not in it, I fain would be. There is one fountain, and though I am not plunged into it, I fain would be. There is one Mediator, and though I fear He will never condescend to take my name on His holy lips, yet I ask Him to do it. There is one Rock of Ages on which the church is built, and I would fain build there. I say, did you ever go like that in soul, Godward? Then cheer up

Hail ye happy mourners
Ye shall of life be winners
By Jesus' blood, the righteous God
Now reconciles poor sinners

It is said that God meets this person, and I would make in this point three observations. First He meets him in the Spirit of grace and supplications. He meets him in the blessed gift and work of the Holy Ghost. All true religion is the gift of the Holy Ghost. All motions Godward are from Himself.

He all the motion gives
By springs of fear and love

Every lifting up of the heart, every divine sigh, every spiritual groan, every heavenly motion of your affections, all the looks that

you cast on Christ of longing and the appetite you feel for Him, the Holy Ghost is the author of. And sometimes, there is a peculiar mercy, something special in this meeting. When God, the Spirit, meets this lame sinner He helps his infirmities. He comes alongside of him, as the word is in the Romans, and helps his infirmities and notice this, it is worthy of your attention; notice it my friends, when you find some especial operation, some sweet moving, a change wrought. Instead of coldness, warmth; instead of silence, speaking to God; instead of a shut up feeling, a feeling of free confession and humble petition; instead of that ice, very warm love. The Holy Spirit has met the sinner and is doing this. All that blessed favour of soul, all that holy panting after Christ and after union with Him, all that the blessed Spirit is the immediate author of. God meets His children by giving them the Holy Spirit. It expresses a move, a change. It expresses the coming of God to the sinner, whereby Christ is brought home, near. And the near views of Christ are very sweet views. Sometimes you can say perhaps, I see Him at a distance, but I do not feel any moving of my heart as I should like to feel toward Him; He is so far away. I seem to see Him, to see what He is, what He can do, what He possesses. I seem to see all that, but it is far away and I am outside of it. It is a picture that attracts my eye, but it has no warm effect on my heart. Then when the Spirit meets you, you say, this is quite different. I see Him, but it is near and there is an influence from the sight. It comes into my heart like a living stream of influence. It makes me love Him, makes me want to possess Him. I would fain cast the arms of my faith about Him. I would fain walk in the Apostle Paul's word: "Lay hold of eternal life whereunto thou art also called". I see now in Him what I saw at a distance without effect. I see now in Him that that touches my every feeling. It tells me not to despair; it tells me to hope; it calls my soul's affections to Him; it brings me to His dear footstool; it makes Him the chiefest among ten thousand to me and the altogether lovely. The Holy Ghost is in this; mark it dear friends. O, I should like this every day; I should like this every day. The warmth that can never be properly expressed, the attraction to the Lord Jesus Christ, the blessed moving of the Spirit of God. He came on Christ as a dove, and as a dove of peace He comes to a sinner and meets him and, as there is no place of rest out of the Ark, the sinner longs to fly to that Ark and be at rest. Led, nay carried on the wings of the Spirit to the Ark, that

rest might be found. He gives faith in exercise; He gives prayer, particular prayer that moves, prayer that prevails, power over the angel; prayer that you find you could not raise it in your heart so neither can you leave it off. The case is urgent. You say, do as Thou hast said. Yea, there is a singular liberty given by the Holy Spirit in prayer at a time when He meets this believing soul; a singular power, a pleading of the promise, a making mention of Christ's righteousness and of His only; a putting the Lord in mind of what He has said. Do as Thou hast said. Well, do you know what that means - I believe some of you do - the coming of the Holy Ghost?

Secondly, God meets this believing, this working soul - working righteousness by believing in Jesus Christ - in and by the word. As we are begotten by the word of truth to be a kind of first fruits of His creatures, so God uses the word, drops it upon the heart, fills the memory with it, affects the understanding by it, takes hold of the will by it, moulds the soul by it. Ah, it is a great thing for the word to meet you. When you are saying, woe is me, for the word to meet you and say: "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings". When you say that when you pray He shutteth out your prayer, for the word to come and say: "Whosoever shall call on the Name of the Lord shall be saved". When you are thinking your vile sins are too much and too black to be forgiven, for the word to fall in and say to you: "All manner of sin and blasphemy against the Son of Man shall be forgiven" and "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin". And when you think you have lost your way, for the word to come and say: "This is the way, walk ye in it". This is the way to heaven, the way of faith, the way of prayer. And when you feel your heart so full of impurities that you cannot imagine God looking on you with anything but infinite hatred, for the word of faith to come and purify your heart, for God does purify the hearts of His people by the word which works faith. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word". Sometimes the word, as you read it, sometimes the word without your reading it, sometimes the word as it is preached, falls into your heart, and you say, this is the word of the Lord. This is the very scripture, the very gospel of the blessed God. God meets with His people by the word, speaks to them. It is not a letter then; it is not the mere form then; it is spirit and life. As Christ says, "the words that I speak

unto you, they are spirit and they are life," and you can bear testimony and set to your seal that God is true in that particular. Yes, you can put your hand on some passages and say, God spoke to me, I believe, by them. By them He raised my heart to Himself. By them He promised all that I need. By them He told me that sin should not have dominion over me. By them He said that He would bruise Satan under my feet shortly. He told me that where He is there should I, His poor servant, be. O happy sinner, who can lay hold of some Scriptures, and say these were spoken, these have influenced my soul. These have drawn me Godward, these have been as His very voice within my heart and I have believed. And when you did that, it was counted to you for righteousness. The Lord meets His people in the gospel, that glorious gospel of the blessed God, that brings, that is, good news from a far country; that tells of Christ, that lifts Him up, and makes Him exceedingly high, so that there is none like Him, and the soul can say, when having had a view of Christ in the word, what the church said of Him is true: "He is altogether lovely". Ah, and fain would the soul then exclaim: This is my friend, and this is my beloved. O blessed be God that He has ever met with any of us in the gospel. And here I would say He meets them approvingly, and this is astonishing. "I looked", one writes, and we sing sometimes:

I looked for hell, He brought me heaven

I looked for a rod; He met me at the cross. I looked for a curse and He met me in Christ and gave me a blessing, that blessing of the Lord which maketh rich and with which He addeth no sorrow.

Thirdly, God meets this person, these people, in His providence. Providence and grace sometimes unite most beautifully; they meet, so as that they unite to the soul's good; they conduce to the growth of the sinner in grace. We have some illustrations of this truth in the Scripture. We have, in the case of Abraham's servant, who said: "I, being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." He had gone in the right way; prayer had been going from his heart. And you remember that beautiful case; when he had come into the land to which he was sent by Abraham, he came to the well where the maidens came to draw water and there he prayed. And while he was yet speaking, Rebekah came, in distinct and direct answer to

his prayer. God met him in His holy and all wise providence. And you will find it so throughout. When Saul of Tarsus was a praying man, then the providence of God had an Ananias to send to him. Go, said God to Ananias and enquire for Saul, for behold he prayeth. The providence of God is not indifferent to a praying man. When the time had come for the Lord to deliver Israel out of Egypt, then His providence raised up Moses, and though Moses was far off - he had been 40 years learning his nothingness - yet, said God, now arise, thy brother is coming out to meet thee. God working in the backside of the desert in Moses and working in Egypt on the mind of Aaron, and brings these two together; the providence of God met then, and a sweet meeting it was. In the providence of God with you, I am sure, as you may have been enabled to observe, you have found the Lord meeting with you ; meeting your desires, your petitions, your exercises; meeting you in your fears. Thinking often, with great fear, that He would be against you in this or in that, He has met with you and in some most merciful and wonderful way given you to perceive in His dealings with your heart and in His dealings in providence, He was on your side. "Thou meetest him". And, although alone, and absolutely considered, no providence can be said to reveal the eternal love of God to a sinner, yet, in conjunction with the work of grace and in answer to prayer, providences are wonderful helps, handmaidens of God's gracious purpose to bring to pass the thoughts of His heart, and he is a wise man who is able to observe. "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." Now you note these three points, and may the Lord help you in all your future days to watch and see if you get these three things. The Holy Ghost meeting you at different times, teaching and helping and leading you, for "As many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God". If you find the word used in your heart, if it is made effectual, living; if it speaks to you as a man speaks to a friend, with some distinctness; if it tells you of God's mercy, God's heart, God's wisdom, God's power, and points out to you that all these attributes are in the Man Christ Jesus, true almighty God, and if, in conjunction with these two, the Lord should meet you in providence, either to empty you or fill you, to afflict you or to deliver you, to rebuke or to comfort you, you mark those three things. And, as you have wisdom to do it, I believe the day will come when you will say, with the Apostle Paul, in another case, when he saw the man in the

vision of Macedonia, and heard him saying "Come over into Macedonia and help us" and putting that together with the forbidding of the Lord that he should go here and there whither he had assayed to go, he said, we gathered assuredly that God has ordained us to go into Macedonia. And you may say, sometimes, this work of the Spirit, the effect of that word of the Scripture, and the leading of that providence make me gather and conclude in my soul that God has a favour to me and I would not cast it away, but be enabled to hold fast, as Paul says: "Cast not away therefore your confidence which hath great recompense of reward".

"Those that remember Thee in Thy ways", those poor creatures who want God and who are like those of whom Malachi speaks: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another and the Lord hearkened and heard and a book of remembrance was written for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His Name". One day some of us, we hope and believe, will see there was vastly more grace in our thinking of Christ than we were enabled to believe at the time we entertained thoughts of Christ; great thoughts, warm thoughts, loving thoughts, desiring thoughts, making us say, "O when wilt Thou come unto Me". Lord, wilt Thou ever bless me? Put prayers up my friends; they wont be lost; they cannot be lost. Put your tears out, as it were, for God to gather them up into His bottle; they cannot be lost. God will meet with you one day and say: "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt". Those that remember God. Sometimes you remember Him in a way of trouble. "I remembered God and was troubled". I remembered how basely I had behaved to Him; I remember also how solemn His judgments are on His children; how He taketh vengeance on their inventions though He forgives their iniquity, and I am troubled. And sometimes we remember Him in a way of sweet encouragement. I remember Thee from the land of Jordan and the hill Mizar. I remember when I was blessed, when I first had a hope. I remember that answer to prayer and that view God gave me of Christ. I remember when I had a special season in hearing, a special time in reading a chapter or a Psalm. I remember Thee O God in these Thy ways. His ways are in Zion, in the blessed street of transparent glass, in that street where the tree of life is, and the river of water of life is. I remember Thee in Thy goings.

"Behold Thou art wroth for we have sinned". We have sinned against God, and how has He manifested His wrath? In rebuke. As it is written: They vexed and grieved His Holy Spirit; therefore He was turned to be their enemy. "In those", in the ways of God "is continuance". Grace continues, love continues, mercy continues, the infinite merit of Christ continues and "therefore we shall be saved". A sweet conclusion - We, though much troubled, though cast down, though the heavens seem to be brass and the earth iron, and though, at the present, we cannot prevail on the Lord to come to us and bless us, as we want Him to do, yet, because His ways of love and grace are the same, because He changes not, because He is of one mind in love, of one mind in purpose, because He has put all grace in His dearly beloved Son and because "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son cleanseth us from all sin", "in those is continuance and we", poor unworthy sinners, "shall be saved". We shall get safe at last, we shall see Him face to face and never, never sin, and from the rivers of His grace, drink endless pleasures in. God grant that He may be real to us and work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

AMEN.