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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday Morning 3 June

ISAIAH 66 v 1 and 2

"Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? and where is the place of My rest? For all those things hath Mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word".

God is set before us in His own Word in these solemn words first, as the Creator of all things. Heaven is His throne; He made it, and it is His especial residence. Earth is His footstool, to do with it as He will; to rule it, to stand on it, to stamp some of it in His anger; make His sovereignty and His just anger known. But some people in it are attractive to Him. He thinks more of them than all else. He is attracted to them. There is something in them that holy angels have not, have no need of. Something in them more beautiful than all the beauties of creation. Something that a Pharisee would think He knew nothing about. Something which all who have it value above gold and silver. "To this man will I" - the Creator of heaven and earth, seated on one as My throne, and treating the other as My footstool - "to this man will I look". He that, in a crowd, in this congregation, is poor and trembles at My Word. It would be a wonderful congregation, this little congregation, if each member of it answered to this word "poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembled at God's Word." You do not all do it; I wish you did. You cannot each one of you go into His presence and say, this is just my case. I am poor, I am contrite, I do tremble at Thy Word. I wish it might be so with each of you. A stout heart, a rich person, a confident person, for the time being God passes, as it were, takes no notice of, but the opposite He looks at intently, affectionately, condescendingly, and says, in another place in this prophecy "He will dwell with them", and they want Him there; feel drawing enough

sometimes to ask Him to come and take up His condescending and merciful and loving and wise and honourable abode, for it is an honour; He reckons it so to Himself. The greatness of God, the eternity of God, is apprehended by faith, but the people of God realise they have to believe, and they do believe, that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him. The flippancy of man, fallen man, with respect to God is an offence to Him. Indeed it can only be an offence to a gracious person who comes into contact with it. But solemnity, solemnity of heart, arising from some apprehension of the awful, eternal, glorious, wise, Being of God, you will find again and again will beget an awe of His majesty, a trembling. Do not be too familiar, and yet, when you apprehend Him in Christ, you will find you cannot be too familiar. And with that gracious, that permitted, indeed that right familiarity, there will always be reverence.

"Heaven is My throne". He is approachable, though He be so high. Yes, though seated on His natural, glorious, and also gracious throne, He says to the poor "Come unto Me". He says to the contrite, "I will heal thy backslidings". He says to the trembling sinner, "Fear not I have redeemed thee, thou art Mine". I wish every child of God might feel increasingly the awfulness of God's Being. We are too ignorant of that for our good. There is a majesty in God, a terribleness, and awfulness, which it were good for us more and more to apprehend. It would not repel us; it would not keep us from worshipping Him, rightly apprehended, but it would keep us from rushing madly, thoughtlessly, presumptuously, upon the thick bosses of His buckler.

"Earth is My footstool", not to despise it but to do with it as it pleaseth Him. God will never despise the work of His own hands. He has made all things. "All these things hath Mine hand made", the things which are here said to be His footstool, so beneath Him, beneath His nature, His majesty, His glory. It is a great thing to believe in God, and to believe in His works of creation. The infidelity of the nation and of all men arises from enmity against God. Every infidel is an infidel through the principle of enmity as it is in the Epistle to the Romans, they like not to retain God in

their knowledge. What a terrible thing infidelity is. Here is His footstool, and of this, the Apostle Paul says that God's eternity, His eternal power and Godhead, are visible in every work of creation. The evolutionist will one day have his mouth closed. He opens it now from Bishop down to the lowest. He opens his mouth now against God, but one day his mouth will be closed in confusion by an awful punishment. You young people, look at God's footstool, at the mountains and the valleys and all the things that God's hand has made. Just look at this footstool and if you look at it rightly you will see the eternal power and Godhead. And yet, though so wonderful and so glorious, this throne and this footstool, God does not rest there, but He said "Where is the house that ye build unto Me" This chapter and other parts of this prophecy speak of the ending of the Jewish dispensation, the temple that Solomon built, and temples that, if filled, are as nothing to Him. The heaven of heavens cannot contain Him. "How much less" said Solomon "this house which I have builded?". "Where is the house that ye build unto Me?" The ending of that dispensation was a great event. The Jews will have it to be continued, but when their eyes are opened, as they will be one day, they will see the impossibility of this Word. He that killeth an ox in sacrifice to Him is as if he slew a man. He that offereth a bullock as if he offered swine's blood. Yea, with all this terrible unbelief of that nation, they have chosen their own ways and they are so delighted in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions. We are not guilty of these things, but we may be guilty of idolatry in other things, and the same judgments therefore will come upon us if it is so indeed.

Now let us look at this wise, good and gracious word. "But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at My word". First I shall try to set this man before you so that you may be able, by God's mercy, to judge whether you are that man, and secondly notice what God said He will do with respect to that man. "I will look to him". The poor man, a man who, in his own sense of the thing, says, honestly says, "I am poor because I have no righteousness, poor because I am naturally dead in trespasses and in sins, poor because I cannot overcome one sin or lust in my nature, poor because I cannot believe in the face of difficulties, of myself, and poor because I am extremely ignorant, ignorant of God, extremely

ignorant of Him. He is great, holy, and I have scarcely ever felt His presence. I am poor because I have not that hatred of sin that would become me. Do you know this poor man? It is poverty. There is no poverty like death, no poverty like no righteousness, no poverty to equal unbelief, no poverty to compare with distance from God, unlikeness to Him. This is poverty, and there is nothing in God's footstool, in all the things that He has made, and nothing in man that can do away with any part or particle of this poverty. Here it is. But this belongs to all men, and therefore something must be added to this poverty in order to bring a poor man under this gracious Word - I will look to him. And what is to be added is this - "Blessed are the poor in spirit". Now a man may be without righteousness and not be poor in spirit. He may be without life and only dead in trespasses and sins. Therefore this poverty must be looked at. A man poor in spirit is a man who judgeth himself to be so, a man who, judging himself to be so, is chastened of the Lord in that judgment. If we would judge ourselves we are chastened of the Lord. Self-judgment, when it brings a man to say - "I am poor. My heart, my spirit, my conscience, my affections, my understanding are all very poor, very empty of God and he is sorry, then he mourns. "Blessed are they that mourn". Poverty of spirit and mourning will always go together. Blessed is the man then who, before God and as in His presence, in His sight, judges himself to be poor. He is poor in spirit. You wont find him strutting about in religion. You wont find him pretending to be somebody. You wont find him reaching after the highest place. You will find him to be tender in his spirit, cautious in his movements, and anxious to be right, desiring to walk before God in righteousness and true holiness all the days of his life. This poverty God respects. Though the Lord be high yet hath He respect unto the poor, the lowly, the lowly and meek man. "The meek will He guide in judgment". The meek there is a teachable man, a man who is willing to be taught. Not the fool, who is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason. He is a teachable man and that teachable spirit that is in him takes him before the Lord many a time - "That which I see not teach Thou me". Guide me in judgment and do not let me receive things for right which are wrong. He is a teachable man.

A contrite spirit then arises from three things, first a felt

evil of sin, sin in the heart, in the nature, deep seated; to the person who has it, unfathomable, but known in some measure. He sees his sinfulness, the malignity of sin. He perceives, he feels the power of sin. He feels the subtlety of sin. He feels the unceasing efforts of sin to be master. He feels it is not a light thing to be a sinner. When a man has contrition, O it is a dreadful thing to be a sinner. Sin in his thoughts, in his looks, in his wishes, in his nature, in his desire, in his reading the Bible, attending the services of God's house; the sin of wandering away from Him. One goes to his farm, another has married a wife. Sin everywhere. A proud look, a high thought of himself, he sees this and it is a solemn thing, and the man says "I am a sinner". He feels that he is.

And the second thing in contrition is the goodness of God. It is produced largely by that and the more you perceive the goodness of God, the more contrite you are. His goodness leads to repentance and this leads him to say that - as Hart expresses it - repentance is not "such a dismal thing as 'tis by some men named. A sinner may repent and sing, rejoice and be ashamed." The goodness of God makes you wonder that He has spared such a wretch, that even your sin-forfeited life should be continued, that you should have daily bread, that you should have health in any measure, breath without pain, that you should have Christian friends, patient indulgent friends. God's goodness in these things will lead a person, a child of God, sometimes to say, I wonder that He can be so kind to me. I wonder that He does not cut me off in my foolishness, in my sinfulness.

And the other ingredient is this, a real hope in the mercy of God, a hope in Christ crucified, a door of faith set before you, the mercy and the wisdom and the goodness and the love and the power of God revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The glorious gospel coming at times with sweet beams into your heart enabling you to rise up in a real hope that this good God may be your Saviour. And if any man has these three things in his heart I dare say this, with all the strength I have, he answers to this word "contrite". He is a contrite man. He would be other than he is; he would be different from what he is; he would live another life than he does if he could. He would pray without ceasing; he would believe without doubting; he would love; he would commit all his ways to God. He would commit every

circumstance, every friend, husband, wife, child, business, providence, everything he, by faith, would commit into the hands of a good God. He is a contrite man.

And thirdly, he trembles at God's Word. A very different, a blessedly different religion this, from the bold presumption of the great mass of professors today. King Josiah had one day brought to him the book of the law that had been lost, and he had it read to him. And in the reading it was discovered to him the condition he and his nation were in. Why, we have all sinned, we have broken this word. And Josiah rent his garments; he trembled at the Word of God. That, in the spirit of it, is what every person realises to whom the Word of God is sent. God sent out a word and it lighted upon Jacob. This is one thing. "The entrance of Thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple". When the light of God's Word falls upon a sinner, the sinner sees it. When it falls upon some lust that lust is seen in the turpitude of it. When a foolish thought is indulged, that thought is perceived. When the rebellious mind of a child of God rises up against some adverse providence then the man sees this rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. What a sight, to see that dreadful thought of yours that says God would not have done this or that; He would not have allowed that; to see that in the light of God's Word as witchcraft. Witchcraft was an interference with God's prerogative. Rebellion is a fighting against the exercise of that prerogative. So, with covetousness, if the light of God's word comes on that, O what a hateful thing you will see it to be. Your worldliness, what a wicked thing it is; you see it to be. As the Apostle says - "The friendship of the world is enmity with God." Now any Scripture coming against your sins, lighting on them and, as it were, illuminating them, giving you to see them in their real nature, will make you tremble. "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee? (Ezekiel 22 v 14). Man's heart is stout when God is silent. But when God speaks, the word spoken discovering evil, makes him tremble. He trembles at threatened judgment; he fears it is coming. He trembles at chastening. Chastisement, not always at the beginning of it, seems to begin from love, but the love may, for the time, be out of sight, and the chastening seriously felt, and the man trembles. When God's dealing with you comes to your own soul and some sins are brought to

light, then you tremble as to what he will do with you. "My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee and I am afraid of Thy judgments." And Job says - "God maketh my heart soft and the Almighty troubleth me." And I apprehend the softness, that it is produced by fear when the Spirit of judgment and of burning is realised in the soul who trembles at the Word of God. And it is a balance and he is put into it, and he realises that he is short weight. It is a standard and he is put to it. He sees he does not reach it and he trembles because he knows the Word of God will be manifest in His faithfulness. O it is solemn to have any Scripture in your heart saying - "you know in that particular that you are wrong", very solemn. Yet a good man would not be without this. He may tremble also - and I would say this with caution and reverence - as he sees the glory of the gospel. Why should he? Because it is so great, so glorious, so immense. Did you ever look at a promise and tremble in this way - that is a great promise but I do not know that I am interested in it. Did you ever gaze, did you ever gaze on the infinite merit of the Lord Jesus, and say in your soul - that is enough, but I am afraid He did not shed His blood for me. Did you ever read of the people of God being near to Him, and tremble at your own distance from Him? Did you ever perceive that God has promised to teach His people, and that they are made wise unto salvation, and then turn your eyes to your great ignorance of that, and tremble lest you should never come near to Him. Many, many things in God's Word will make a person who feels outside of these things tremble. Mercies may make a man tremble because he is so far short of them.

Now let us look in the next place at this kind word. "To this man will I look". This does not respect the natural omnipotence of God. He looks at all things. Can any man hide from me, says the Lord. Can any man get into a place where I shall not see him? His eyes behold the evil and the good. He withdraweth not His eyes from kings. There is nothing in creation that He does not see. Yet in the Scripture, God's looking is spoken of in particular things. When He would destroy Sodom it is as if He would say, and did say, I will go and see if the report I hear is true and see if it is as reported. This is natural to Him, but certain looks are particular to Him and this is "To this man will I look". Well, it is written in the book of Job, and I read it this morning "He looketh upon men". Very solemn for you and for me to be here this morning under God's particular gaze. He

looketh upon men with an enquiry as it were. Who in this congregation can say I have sinned and perverted that which was right and it profited me not? He looketh upon men, upon their hearts, their poverty, their trembling, their contrition. He looks upon them. He looks favourably on them, kindly, graciously, and with loving intention. He looks approvingly on them. Sometimes the approval is a reproof. He turned and looked upon Peter and Peter went out and wept bitterly. It was Christ's kind look that made him go out, convinced of what he had done, and weep bitterly, tears of sacred, solemn, painful, repentance. The look may be in a word. He may drop a kind word on your spirit and say to you "Fear not". O what a wonder that is when a sinner is fearing death because he deserves it; desertion because he deserves it; the judgment of God because he deserves it and instead of that the Lord says "Fear not I have redeemed thee, thou art Mine." When a man is looking on his sins, the thick cloud of his transgressions, and the cloud of his sins and the Lord says to him "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions and as a cloud thy sins. Return unto Me for I have redeemed thee". That Word in Joel has something of this in it where we read (Joel 2 v 14) Now let us turn to the Lord. "Who knoweth if He will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him?" Now this is the way in which God looks on a man who is poor and contrite and who trembles at His Word.

Now there is a particular way in respect of this look of God on men and that is in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. In one beautiful, sorrowful Psalm, (80 v 17) where desolation is discovered and bemoaned, faith was raised up to say this to God - "Let Thy hand be upon the Man of Thy right-hand, upon the Son of Man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself. So will not we go back from Thee: quicken us, and we will call upon Thy Name". If God looks on you like that, you will enter into the Scripture in another Psalm (84 v 9) "Behold O God our Shield and look upon the face of Thine anointed". Dear friends, the Psalmist's language will suit you, as many of you as are contrite. "If Thou Lord shouldest mark iniquities O Lord who shall stand?" If He should come and make strict enquiry into our iniquities, if He should make a strict search as to what we have been hiding, the leaven we have put away in one corner. And when faith gets a sight of that blessed Man Jesus Christ and the infinite merit of His death, then she is bold enough to say "Look upon Thine anointed". " Behold our

Shield". Faith gets behind - reaches the Person and the work - faith gets behind Him, as it were, and entreats that God would deal kindly with him in that way. It is a look of love; it is a look of life. God approves of His creation, but He loves His Church. He loved her enough to die for her and so He sends out beams of His love and words of His love and they light upon these redeemed people. It is a look of forgiveness when you expect a frown and get a smile. When you fear; He says "Come nearer to Me". When you think He will speak angrily, He kisses you. He forgives sin; forgiveness on forgiveness. If you take forgiveness in the doctrine of it it is infinite. Take it in the power of it, it just dissolves the soul. It makes a sinner happy, it fills his conscience with peace, and his affections with love. It is a word that cleanses the sinner from the things which he mourns. "Ye are clean through the Word that I have spoken unto you". Christ's gracious Word to a sinner draws his affections. It is a Word of power, a look that conveys strength to his soul, a look that encourages faith, draws out love, and brightens hope, that enables a sinner to say to his own soul, "Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise Him".

"To this man will I look". Now my friends, do you know this man? Have you seen his face? Have you felt his heart beating with contrition and trembling? Can you say he has walked with you? It is a great thing to know this poor man, this contrite man, this trembling man. Religion without poverty of spirit, without contrition, without trembling at God's Word, is a very poor religion and God will never own it, never own it. O the stout heart of a sinner God will break terribly one day, but a poor man who says "Lord, I am afraid of Thy judgments because I deserve them; the contrite man who says "I would repent if I could, and be sorry every day for my sins", trembles lest God should come out against him, that man attracts the Lord. God, who dwells in eternity, says "But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit". What for? To revive the heart of the contrite ones, to revive their spirit. I will not contend for ever. Think of it. I will not contend for ever lest the soul which I have made should faint and the spirit fail before Me. So He leaves off contention and what does He do instead? He looks on this poor trembling man and says "I will restore comforts unto him and to his mourners". God surprises His people sometimes. Suddenly He

comes. "Or ever I was aware my soul was made in me like the chariots of Aminadib". The soul, as it were, being surprised by love, a sweet love visit, a look, flies away by faith to the dear Redeemer. In this dear friends the gospel shines, Jesus is glorified. His righteousness is bountiful; His continuance is efficacious; and His peace pacifies the conscience. Now then we are worms compared with God. What are we but worms. Yea, says this great One, I will come to the man, I will dwell with Him, I will speak favourably to his heart and though, in my judgment, I have drawn him into the wilderness, there, in the very place of desolation, I will speak favourably to him, and there he shall have his vineyards. I tell you mourners, poor people, and contrite people that tremble at God's Word, I tell you this, God has a great surprise - O that you might get it now - when He says Fear not, I have redeemed thee, thou art Mine". I came to save the lost, I came to save the lost. I came to bless the poor, I came to justify the ungodly. I came to gather these with righteousness. I came to cleanse them with My blood. I came to speak favourably, and at last take them to heaven. Will that do for you? Will this gospel do for you? I wish I could preach this better. May the Lord give it you and give it me in still greater sweetness, power and glory for His great Name's sake.

AMEN.