

188

SB
296
1397-188
La P 812

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 15 July 1928

JAMES 1 v 25

"But whoso looketh into the perfect law
of liberty and continueth therein, he being
not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work
this man shall be blessed in his deed"

The perfect law of liberty is the gospel, the everlasting gospel, the glorious gospel of Christ. The gospel is the revelation of the love and mercy and wisdom and purposes of God to and in the Church. To look into it is to bend down, stoop, to look intently, anxiously, prayerfully, enquiringly. We, if under the teaching of the Spirit, shall enter into this. We shall know, we do know, what it is to be concerned about eternity; to be persuaded that we are sinners; that sinners, as such, have no ground of hope, no reason to expect a blessing. As polluted sinners, not able, not fit to approach God; as guilty persons, condemned and shut out of the presence of God. But the gospel opens a door of hope; reveals mercy and declares forgiveness. And on that ground the Spirit enables all regenerated persons to cry for forgiveness. When any of us have put into our hearts a prayer for forgiveness the grand reason of it is this, that God has forgiveness to bestow. And did we but realise that truth, it would be often an encouragement against the discouragements of felt sin and corruption. May I press it on your attention, that every prayer put into the heart of a sinner for forgiveness has this foundation for it, that God has forgiveness to bestow. David in his perplexity, as related in the 130 Psalm, in the entanglement of his sins, out of the depths of his sins, as felt, said this moved him, helped him to prayer - "But there is forgiveness with Thee". Sinner, if this is so, will it not, as you apprehend it, be an encouragement to go to the Lord for forgiveness?

To look into this perfect law of liberty is to look into a

perfect remedy, a perfect salvation, a perfect justification, a perfect sanctification, a perfect atonement. To look into it with bonded spirit, with crying, with petitions, with confessions, is indeed a very gospel-like spirit. It arises from the gospel; it aims at the gospel; it moves toward the gospel, this looking into the law of liberty. To continue in it is to hold on. It is to continue in faith though the object of faith be distant and, for the time, seems as if He would not listen to the prayer. And because some of us need a good deal of persuading we are very careful, anxious, and often ready to perish. I would take up this point again which I dwelt on briefly this morning - the continuing. It is a difficult thing, with sin in your nature, corruptions in your thoughts, guilt on your conscience, doubts in your mind, the devil of unbelief. With these things, and many temptations coming in the mind suited to the disposition and to the fear, it is difficult to hold on and to continue in prayer and supplication. But there are in the Scriptures such beautiful, striking encouragements that, as the Lord helps us to look at them, we may find great encouragement and strength.

Now the first case I would call your attention to is that of Noah. Noah had that given to him that is acknowledged by the Lord. Noah was a righteous man. The whole earth was corrupted and God was coming down in vengeance to destroy His own work of creation because of the sin of men. He speaks to Noah; He makes a covenant with him; He gives him instructions as to the building of the ark; the kind of wood, the dimensions, rooms and all necessary details He gave to Noah. And we are told in the chapter I read that "by faith, Noah being warned of God, moved with fear, built an ark to the saving of his house". Now think of two things, the time required to build the ark and the mockings of a corrupted world of unbelieving men, though he prophesied and preached, preached doubtless by word as well as by the building of the ark. There was a long delay and there were many discouragements, but he did it by faith. He looked not at the things which he saw; he heard not the words which he heard; he was not moved by the things about him. His faith had her eye on God and it was this that enabled him to hold on and to

continue to build the ark and to wait the great day when God opened the windows of heaven and commanded all the springs of the earth to send forth those streams that should rise above the highest of the mountains. Now sinner, you may be waiting and have been waiting a long time perhaps. You find many enemies in your hearts, blasphemies that your ears may never have heard any man utter, things which shake you and shock you and terrify you; unbelieving thoughts, infidel thoughts, and every kind of difficulty to drive you from the throne of grace, saying, it is no use, there is no good in it. Yea, the devil and your presumptuous heart may make use of the faithful decrees of God and say, now everything is settled, nothing left to chance, to contingency. If you pray, if you dont pray, it will be all the same. Therefore give up all this anxiety, let it alone. O but the fear of God will keep you from doing that. Now take this then, the continuing to look into the gospel. Is it so, do not you again and again find, that though there be these enemies, these discouragements, your minds go to the Scriptures, to the gospel. You look into the truth if haply you might find something there to suit you; go by prayer to the throne of God's heavenly grace to seek some touch, some help, some blessing, some word, some encouragement, some hearing of the Lord of your petitions. "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty". The eye of your faith, does it not look into the gospel, and have you not felt at times that you could say - If free grace; if it be what I hear it is; if it be great and free and full; if it be for sinners as such; if sinners are the people for whom the Lord shed His blood; sinners for whom He wrought out a righteousness; if grace be free as I hear it is, as I read it is, then perhaps I may obtain it. Continue; continue to look into this blessed, perfect law. No addition to be made to the gospel, not the addition of one suitable thought in your own mind to be added to the gospel, not the addition of one sigh or prayer to be added to the perfect gospel. Absolute the gospel is and to attempt to add to that is sin. Even the child of God in his legality may be guilty of this, but the Lord forgives.

Now the second thing for encouragement to which I would call

your attention is the covenant that God made with Noah, and to which He very graciously and pointedly refers in the prophet Isaiah - "This is as the waters of Noah unto Me that as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee". This is to the Gentile church. Sinner, this is to the Gentile church, who is to have more children than the married wife, the Jewish covenanted church. Now, says the Lord, I am faithful. This covenant has one Person in it who is called the Covenant. I have given Thee for a Covenant of the people for a light of the Gentiles. Think of this, a covenant that encourages an individual person, a sinner, to come and to continue looking for and hasting unto the coming of the Lord. God has given this great encouragement in His word to us to continue looking into the gospel, not a cursory glance as we pass along, but a stooping of heart, a sense of need and a true faith in the whole gospel. This, this is the continuing. Yea, and God has kept some of us continuing to look into it for many years; we shall never get to the end of it; never grasp all that it is; never be able to receive all its blessings in their fulness. But the things is, the mercy is, to continue in it; to hold on.

Now take Timothy, a young minister of Jesus Christ, who had to meet difficulties, and to whom the Apostle Paul, his father in the faith, said - "Continue thou in the things which thou hast heard and learnt, knowing of whom thou hast learned them." Said the Apostle to him again - Be a good soldier; endure hardness as a good soldier; fight the good fight. A fight means enemies, a battle; there is to be bloodshed; it is cry or die; it is a fight to hold fast to the gospel; it is a solemn conflict to hold fast to the Lord Jesus and here you will learn that Scripture that if you love your life to eternal life, you will lose and hate it. If a man will save his life he must lose it and losing his life is to hate the sins that trouble him, that rise up in him, that are like a flood sometimes, covering him. To leave, forsake and hate them in desire, in prayer and supplication and fight the good fight of faith. Cleaving to the Lord Jesus and crying to Him - "Save Lord or I perish"; that is

the fight; not coming face to face with your enemies and saying well now I have a sword and you shall die, but a weak creature crying "Lord save or I perish"; a sinner looking to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. Continuing therein; this is how God's people reach the end. They come to a perfect gospel; they are imperfect people; perfectly lost, perfectly condemned, perfectly ruined, perfectly weak, perfectly ignorant and they come to a gospel that meets the whole case, and, says the devil - it is not for you; and unbelief says - you will never get it, and fears sink the soul. Now says the Holy Ghost the man who looks into this gospel, who stoops in his spirit, who says, O if I knew that this gospel were for me; if I only knew that the Lord Jesus loved me and gave Himself for me; then I should be happy. Now he continues; though the devil says it is no use, he goes again and again; he rises early in the morning with the cry - "God be merciful to me a sinner". He goes with his sins - "Lord have mercy; forgive mine iniquity". He goes with his lusts and entreats the Lord to subdue them and to wash away the guilt of them. He goes with his death and entreats the Lord to quicken him. He rises at midnight and cries - "Save, for I hope in Thy word". He continues. What a mercy. One has said it is a miracle for a torch light to live in a tempestuous sea. It is a miracle for a sinner to live in and with his corruptions; to live with them in his heart, through the discouragements of them; to live though they often threaten to overcome him; yet to go on crying, "Lord, save". And I do not believe you will find any saint, however aged he may be, who is free from this conflict altogether. He may say "I know the Lord will bless me and take me home," but he has the conflict. Either it is the devil resisting him, his corruptions hindering him, and many and many a conflict he has with unbelief. But he continues to look into the law of liberty, the whole gospel that preaches and declares the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. O what a gospel it is. Sinner this will indeed meet your case as you are led by the Holy Spirit to look into it.

Now for a short time I will pass on to notice what follows. He, the man who is bending his spirit before God in prayer,

looking into the gospel, notwithstanding his conflicts, he, being not a forgetful hearer. This does not mean that you will never let a word slip. I am glad that it is recorded of the disciples that they remembered the words of Christ, which means that they had forgotten them. But it is one thing for a word, a truth, a doctrine, a promise, to slip your memory, and another thing to be a forgetful hearer in the dreadful sense that we have in the Scriptures where it is related of many that they went back and walked no more with Him. They might have said among themselves, as they were going away from Him, - as indeed they did - "Who can hear this; this is a hard saying; this is a mysterious doctrine. The teacher tells us that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood or have no life. Who can hear it". As they went away they discussed this mystery, this strange word, and yet they were forgetful hearers. They forgot the divinity of Him who spake. Now you take a child of God who has let many a thing slip. Many a word, many a truth has he let slip from his mind like, as the Apostle says in the Hebrews, a leaky vessel. But come to the grand doctrine of the Person of the Lord Jesus, the doctrine of His cross, the precious blood that He freely shed. Now here is a sinner, often painfully discouraged, weakened. If you follow him you will find that he, in his spirit, is going to the throne of God's heavenly grace, You will hear him praying one prayer - "God be merciful to me a sinner"; using one plea - "For Christ's sake". And that is rooted in his heart, that is fixed in his mind, in his memory. And he will find what Paul says to the Corinthians to be true, having related the doctrine of salvation, as revealed to him, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture and rose again the third day, according to the Scripture. He will find this that, by remembering that doctrine, he will be saved. It is able to save you, says Paul, if ye keep in memory what I have delivered unto you. Now sinner, though you forget many things, though you may say with Medley; sadly say it

My memory bad, but what is sad
Can folly still retain
does not this live in you; is not it a truth that affects your

heart and mind? Does it not guide you to the throne of God's heavenly grace? Do not you find that you really believe in your heart that Christ is the friend of sinners? Can you not bring your troubles, difficulties, sins, fears, tears and everything that you have troubling you to this great One, the Lord Jesus? "He, being not a forgetful hearer". Not a man who is able to boast and say - I know everything the Scripture teaches - but a man who says - Lord, I am a poor, weak, wicked person and often alas Thou art not in my thoughts. Often, alas, the world and various things come and interrupt the course of my thoughts and turn them away from Thyself, into the world. Notwithstanding I do hope I can say I believe that Christ is the friend of sinners, and, as a sinner, I come to Him and pray that I may prove He is the friend of sinners; a friend to me. "Not a forgetful hearer", but the opposite. He is a worker; he does something; "A doer of the work". And this may put some of you to it in a moment; "A doer of the work" and I do nothing. Well but let us see if God will teach us what is intended here. The Apostle says to the Philippians - "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure". To the Romans, the same Apostle says - "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men". Now here is this blessed kingdom, this perfect law of liberty. A sinner looks into it. He sees that it is absolute as a covenant; that in God it is an absolute gospel, a "covenant ordered in all things and sure". And he sees this in it, a gracious invitation. It falls on his mind; on a day it comes into his thoughts; he hears the gracious Saviour saying - "Ho everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." He hears the Saviour saying so graciously - "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". Now a natural man looks at this. He sees it is very, very beautiful, glances at it, and passes on and forgets all about it, the same as a man that has looked at his face in the glass and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. Now

another poor sinner looks at these words and these truths, and they look at him. In them he sees the glory of the Lord, the grace of Christ, the blood of the atonement; the precious Lord Jesus Himself. He gets a view of Him and of them and what do you find him doing? O you may find him saying - Lord these truths are more to me than all the world; more to me than life. If I only knew that they belonged to me, that I had an interest in them, there is nothing here that I can imagine would have any attraction for my soul. He prays, he labours, as if heaven depended on his praying and his labouring. A drowning man, he sees something, and he reaches after it, if only he may take hold of it. "Lord I believe, help Thou mine unbelief". What is he doing? He is a doer of this great work; he is really a doer; working out his own salvation with fear and trembling. And God is all the time working in him this very thing - "It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure". To will, is to pray; to will, is to call on God, to believe, to hope, to love, to fear; to be found in Christ. To do is to call on the blessed Name of God. He does the work. "But a doer of the work". Ah and this doing has been a sweating business with some of us by occasions. O the labour to enter into rest, the labour to get near to the fountain of the blood of Christ; to get near to and receive and put on the robe of righteousness. O the labour of the soul. Now God says this man, this labouring man, shall be blessed. Blessed in, not for, but blessed in his doing. He shall be blessed in his doing. Dear friends, that blessed word is in my mind that you have in the 5 chapter of Matthew - "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they" He says "shall be filled"; "they shall be filled". It is worth labouring for, worth waiting for. Perplexities, entanglements, unbelief, temptations, devils, and worlds will stand in between us and the promise, but it is worth waiting for. The church cannot be perfect without some of the people sitting here. "That they without us should not be made perfect". "They shall be filled", and they shall get what they go to the throne of grace for. Look at what is to be given to them to fill them - righteousness, which means perfect justification. Here are two states - a state of condemnation

under a just law; a state of justification by Jesus Christ. God justifieth the ungodly. "We conclude" says Paul in the Romans, "that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law". How is this empty, this hungry, person to be filled? This way - "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation.....". That is how it will come to you. "I bring near My righteousness". "Drop down". If the clouds be full of rain they empty themselves upon the earth, and when this blessed heaven, containing the righteousness of Christ, is commanded to open and let down into the heart of a poor praying, waiting soul, that is a rain. Drop down ye heavens and let the skies containing God's covenant blessings pour down their gracious, glorious contents unto sinners. They shall be satisfied with righteousness. That is how one shall say - "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength". The work of righteousness is peace. This is the "peace of God which passeth all understanding" and "keeps the heart and mind by Christ Jesus". Only people who know it can understand what the power of that peace is. Here is a trouble; here is a providence very painful; here is a difficulty through which you can see no way; here is a burden you feel unable to carry. Now the peace of God, when it comes by Jesus Christ being your righteousness will keep you from fainting, from falling, from despair, from rebellion, and everything else that would arise out of, or in consequence of, your troubles. The peace of God keeps the heart and mind by Jesus Christ. And one of the most wonderful things you can ever have in this world is to find the peace of God in your conscience when you have trouble, when you have affliction. When you can say that you "rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him" in a particular thing. When you can say - Now I have been enabled to commit my way and my troubles and my difficulties to Him, and here I lie and patiently wait. When you can even go with the Psalmist and say - "Lord" - it is a **great** word, I will quote it - "Lord my heart is not haughty nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child." I

just lie down in the holy will of God which He has revealed to me in His providence, for the will of God is often revealed in the providence of God. And now says the man of God, I am quiet; I can leave it; I can leave myself and my troubles and my difficulties with the Lord, because I feel His blessed peace in my soul. The effect of righteousness is quietness and peace and this knowledge shall be the stability of his time of affliction. Blessed is this fulness that the Lord gives to His people.

Another blessing I would name to you, namely the wonderful change that has taken place in the experience of the soul. "Made nigh" is the word. "Made nigh by the blood of Christ". We are pretty near our troubles; O they live in us and we live in them. But to be made near to God, O what a thing this is. A people near unto Him; this honour have all His saints. Near to Him in the Person of his Son, in the blood of the everlasting covenant. Ah, says one, I shall never get there. Well I will ask you a question. Who told you that?

Raise thy downcast eyes and see
Numbers do His throne surround
These were sinners once, like thee
But have full salvation found

Are you further off than the dying thief, than the publican, than Saul of Tarsus, than David in his dreadful sin? The blessed people in heaven are said to "have come out of great tribulation" and to have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb". It was a good hymn you started with this evening, the joyful sound of the gospel, a full gospel. And it says "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness".

"This man shall be blessed". God will bless him. Devils will curse him; sin would ruin him; God will bless him. And Balaam said he knew that whom the Lord blessed was blessed. And if God blesses you, blesses you with faith, with prayer, with glimpses of His mercy, with passing touches of His goodness; if

He blesses you by giving you to see Jesus Christ by faith; if He blesses you with the spirit of grace and of supplications, will He withhold the greater blessings? Will he withhold justification from your unjust soul? Will He withhold the blessing of sanctification from your polluted soul; withhold the blessing of strength from your weak soul; withhold the blessing of comfort from your disconsolate soul? May the Lord help us to believe. I wont keep you longer. I have said enough and if anything I have said should be lodged in your hearts, you have something to meditate upon. Now may the blessing of God attend us.

AMEN.