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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 19 May 1935

Jeremiah 14 v 9

"Leave us not"

Last Wednesday evening I attempted an explanation of these three verses 7, 8 and 9. "O Lord though our iniquities testify against us, do Thou it" that is, send rain, make an end of this sin procured dearth, "do Thou it for Thy Name's sake, for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against Thee. O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldst Thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldst Thou be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by Thy Name; leave us not."

A wonderful thing is here. They acknowledged their iniquities, confessing that their iniquities testified against them, testified in two courts. Firstly the court of God - Ah sinner, God has a book in which your iniquities are written; you may forget them; they are recorded in heaven, Secondly the court of conscience - You may have very painful and bitter remembrance given you; in God's mercy I hope you may; then you will say, they stand before me; they are written with a pen of iron, with the point of a diamond in my conscience. "Our backslidings are many; we have sinned against Thee". Then, having made this confession, they continued "O the hope of Israel," the then church of God, "the Saviour thereof in time of trouble". This hope is not the grace of good hope, but the object of hope, the Saviour who is the object of hope in time of trouble. Now here is a wonderful thing that guilty people in the church of God, convinced of their sins, should have faith given to them to expostulate with God, really to expostulate with Him - "Why shouldst Thou be as a stranger in the land, having neither property nor interest; as a wayfaring man on a journey who, needing a night's rest, takes refuge in a city, knows nothing about it, has no interest in it, and in the morning gets up and goes on his business. Lord, why shouldst Thou be like that here?"

Didst Thou not search out Israel, the land of promise to give to the people of Thy choice. Thou knewest that land that it was a land of good things, flowing with milk and honey. Why Lord shouldst Thou now be as one knowing nothing about it? Remember, sin will bring you into trouble if you are the people of God. Your sin will bring you into sorrow, it will occasion dearth. The Spirit may not, for a long time, be poured out upon you as floods upon the dry ground. A wayfaring man, tired with his journey, rests as a stranger. Lord, why art Thou thus to us? Have you faith? Can you thus speak to God? Can you expostulate with God? If you can, that faith will surely bring an answer. "Why shouldst Thou be as a man astonished, an astonished person, looking on destruction, on dearth, the famine, the consequent pestilence, and death on every hand? Lord, art Thou astonished at all this? Has not all this come because we have sinned against Thee? Do not hesitate, dear friends, if you are convinced of sin, to go to the throne of grace and confess it. Go to God's holy throne and tell Him how basely you have behaved, how cruelly to Him you have behaved. He may say to you "Have I been a land of darkness?" He may appeal to you "What iniquity have you found in Me?" He does appeal to people. "What iniquity?" Has God done anything wrong? Listen to His word, listen dear hearers to the holy Word of God. "What iniquity have you found in Me? Why did you leave Me?" The first step in backsliding and the worst of all steps is leaving God. You rise in the morning, you have businesses to look after, and instead of taking them to Him and asking Him to manage them and yourself in them, what do you do? You leave Him and, by your own wisdom, supposed, and that hellish independence of fallen human nature, you turn away from Him. What then? No Holy Spirit that day, unless it be to convince and call you back; no divine teaching that day. It may be the beginning of backsliding that lasts a long time. You do not know what thorns you are providing for your conscience, and perhaps for your dying pillow, by leaving God. If you are going to heaven and are a backslider, you will find this, you are providing thorns for your conscience, rebukes for your spirit, darkness for your steps, and a famine, not of bread perhaps, not of water, but of hearing God's Word in your heart. God is not astonished but the church expostulates with Him in this way. Then faith rises as it were still higher "Yet Thou O Lord" notwithstanding all this that has happened to us, "Thou art in the midst of us and we are called by Thy Name". How can it be said that

God is in the midst of a people to whom He has sent dearth, famine, pestilence, sword and death? This way; the covenant remains. The covenant which He will not break, remains. He is in the midst of the church to save her out of her miseries, pestilences, deaths and destructions. You have it in the Psalms, "He delivereth them from all their distresses". "He bringeth them unto their desired haven."

"We are called by Thy Name". Do not mistake this for the name of Christendom. That is a geographical term embracing certain nations. The Name here, by which the church is called, is the Name of a gracious God who says in this prophecy "Only acknowledge thine iniquities". Confession of sins, when sincere and acceptable to God, comes from the divine principle of grace. Remember that if you can. The principle of grace in the heart is the source of true confession of sin.

Then the text, an important word, "Leave us not"; a prayer, an earnest prayer, "Leave us not". I shall, as enabled, give you first of all some evidences of God's presence with people, with a church, with a minister, and with members who are godly in a congregation. We have this, first of all, in the Old Testament, the church in the wilderness. The Ark was prepared, the tables of testimony were placed in it; the tabernacle was made. And when all was finished, God said to Moses concerning the mercy seat "I will meet with you there". "I will commune with thee from off the mercy seat". Of Israel, He said, "I will dwell in the midst of thee". His presence was there. He was with Israel as long as she remained Israel and a nation, in various ways. He rose up early and sent His prophets to a disobedient people. He gave them judges. He gave them good kings and from time to time manifested His glorious presence in their midst. Asa was opposed by a multitude. "It is nothing with Thee" he said to God, "to help whether with many or with them that have no power: help us O Lord our God; for we rest on Thee and in Thy Name we go against this multitude." His son Jehoshaphat followed him in the way of faith, and when he was confronted by a huge army, he was spoken to by the prophet. And when he was assured that if they would be with God, He would be with them, Jehoshaphat set trumpeters to precede the army, to sing before the army. God was there. If you have faith, sometimes you will have that blessed faith. He came into the church in His

incarnation. O what a coming. The temple was glorified by His presence on the Day of Pentecost. He came down in a shower of blessing, about three thousand souls quickened and converted under one sermon. Darkness came over the nations; Popery, a horrible system. The Sonship of Christ was denied; Arius arose; Athanasius was raised up. God's presence has been with His people in gracious manifestations of His power, of His love, His faithfulness to His people. You get this in ministers when God anoints a man for some particular work, to call, it may be some people. He is with the minister for a time; the work is done; the ministry is removed. The glory of God leaves the place, but for a time He was there. In churches; He plants churches. In the seven churches of Asia; God was with them, really manifested His goodness, His love, and His power, but they forsook Him. His presence is with individuals. Here, come to yourselves. Has He not spoken to some of you? Have you not heard His mighty voice in your consciences? Have you not had a sight of sin in His own light? Not a natural sense of sin, as a man who lies naturally knows he has told lies, but as a man brought before God. A divine light shines in his heart and conscience and he gets a sight of sin that he can never describe. That must be known to be felt. A sight which, if alone for any time, would weaken the body. I do not believe that anybody could bear long a true sight of sin in God's own light, if unaccompanied, or quickly followed, by a sight of the atonement. God hates sin. He must hate it, because He is God. He punishes sin. He must punish it because He is God. Now look at that as you yourself are concerned, and have you not had some sight, some sense of the atonement, that the blood of Christ has cleansed you from your sins? In such things, God was with you; with you when He spoke promises on your hearts, when He wrought deliverances for you. Perhaps in some particular trial in providence, God's presence is known. It is not an idea, but it is a fact, a spiritual truth, understood by individual persons to whom that presence is given. Perhaps you say one day - "Lord be with me". He may say "I am with thee. Surely in blessing I will bless thee". You knew then God's presence. It is not to be explained; it is to be believed; it is believed by those to whom that presence is vouchsafed. Dear friends, divine truths are not given in holy Scripture to be argued, to be contraverted, but to be believed. Here, people blessed with His presence, know, in themselves they know. Guesses in religion are

fatal things. Knowledge of God is a saving thing. Says the Apostle John "We know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." In sickness, some have found Him. In special troubles in providence, some have found Him. He has been with them in waters and floods, in flames and in fires. "I am with thee". He proves to them that it is so. He is with them in His word. You may not get many special days in your life, but you get some nourishment often in your heart. The word nourishes your faith. You get nourished at the throne of grace; get nourished when you are enabled carefully and prayerfully to read the Holy Scripture, believing it to be the revelation that God has given of Himself to you. Well, only people who know the presence of God can understand His absence. I lay down that as a preposition. You cannot know the absence of God unless you have known His presence.

"Leave us not". Israel saw - O it was potent to her - what the absence of God meant; dearth, empty dry pits, children returning to their homes with empty pitchers and shame. Ploughmen shamed, cattle ashamed, lowing because there was no grass. God's absence. What is it spiritually? Just this, that He suspends His operations; He suspends the shining of the Sun of Righteousness as clouds hide our sun, and perhaps for days we do not get a direct beam from the sun, and we know it. So, when God suspends His operations, the heart becomes dry, barren, hard, fruitless. Then disease, unbelief, worldliness, prayerlessness, pestilence indeed come and people who have known the presence of God, coming to realise their terrible condition, cry "Leave us not". "Leave us not" first of all without communications of life. Creatures are dependent. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature". He is dependent. His spiritual life may seem often to himself to be just ebbing, dying, going out, and unless there be fresh communications he is a withered soul. Perhaps some of you here have to confess that you are in a withered condition. What about the Scriptures in that position to you? Unattractive. You read them of course. No voice in them; no life communicated by them to you. You are just a withered person with no beams of light. This Book is a dark Book to you; the throne of grace is covered with darkness; God hides Himself in a pavilion of darkness; His voice is not heard; He is

silent. The Psalmist said "Be not silent unto me, lest if Thou be silent unto me, I become like them that go down into the pit". You who have heard His voice can understand if you are backsliders, and if that is your condition now, what His silence means. There are no sweet times, no prayer, no power with God to prevail. A kind of lip confession - Lord I am in a bad state - and the confession seems to satisfy. You kneel, of course, but your heart does not kneel, your spirit does not worship. This means another evil, namely the prevalence of unbelief, that inveterate sin, unbelief. And there comes another enemy. You may be getting rather fearful as to what God may do with you to bring you back and then the enemy may come in and say, there is no help for you in God. O the evils that come from God's sending a dearth. Another thing may come to you. All your good evidences now are hidden from you. You cannot remember when you got anything good. You can remember certain circumstances but the good of them, God in them, you forget. Perhaps you said, when they came to you, I shall never forget these things, but now you have forgotten them, forgotten God. You have forgotten your evidences for they are only visible, comfortably visible, when God is with you. Then the prayer is very suitable, is it not, "Leave us not".

Again, "leave us not" to our enemies. If God gives a child of His over to his internal enemies, what will become of him? In a short time he will be as a dead person spiritually. Indwelling sin is that enemy of all enemies we should fear. Paul, to the Hebrews, says "Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God". That does not mean that there never will be an evil heart in you. Except it be on special occasions, it is always there. But take heed lest it prevail to make you leave God; left to your enemies. Look at that mighty nation, mighty only when God was with it. Bereft of prowess, of defence, what did their enemies do? Surrounded them. They took away the Ark of God. Your enemies may take everything away from you for the time being that you have prized and thanked Him for. "Leave us not".

"Leave us not" without the blessed, saving operations of the Holy Ghost. Let me name two or three things in which the operations are known and felt. First, in faith. I doubt not that these confessing Israelites in Jeremiah's day were blessed with a revival

in their hearts, and they were praying and expostulating by the power of faith in them. God has given faith a wonderful place in the plan of experimental salvation. I say experimental salvation because, apart altogether from the people as to any life or exercise, salvation was accomplished by Christ on the cross. But when you come to experimental salvation you come to mighty operations in the heart and one of these operations of the Spirit is faith rising strengthened. What does it do? It lays hold of God. Think of that point, look at it in relation to yourselves. Have you faith to lay hold of God? "Who among you will set the thorns and briars against Me in battle?" What convinced sinner does not do that? sets up his sins, his guilt, his wanderings, his backslidings? Ah can God forgive these? Now says God "Let him lay hold of My strength and make peace with Me and he shall make peace". That is an amazing operation, a wonderful exercise of a God given faith. Unless you know it, you cannot understand it; how faith, in the mighty power of God, goes to God in the face of reason and sins and conviction and guilt and mighty backslidings, and lays hold of the strength of the Redeemer. Ah here we get on another ground, the Redeemer, the Lord Jesus, that glorious Person who uttered words on the cross which will be sung in heaven as to their substance and their glory through eternity - "It is finished". When faith lays hold of that she lays hold of God. The Lord leave us not without that faith.

Leave us not to ever be absent from the throne of grace. Prayer is an amazing gift. "I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications". Nor is that alone. "And they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced". When you get these two things you are favoured. The throne of grace; who can say what fears, mourning, confessions, hopes and expectations are poured out at that blessed throne. For generations the blood of sacrifices was poured out by the altar and the horns of the altar were tipped with blood. Now, at the throne of grace, prayer, supplications, intercessions, confessions, laying hold of God's strength, these are all poured out before God at that blessed throne.

Leave us not to an independent spirit. The most miserable, the most wicked spirit existing is the spirit of independence. A proud

person - who really lives and moves and has his being in God - proudly thinking he can manage for himself and do without God. He says "I will go into this city and dwell there a year and buy and sell and get gain", and the fool says "I have much goods laid up for many years. Soul, eat and drink, take thy rest." What says God? "Thou fool". What good did this independence do for him? Now the Lord says to His people - believe in God, have faith in God; bring your wants to Me; cry to Me. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." Pour out your souls at My footstool; bring your weaknesses and your fears and your travail in this and that difficulty, bring them all to Me. He gives power to do it. O the power of prayer. Hezekiah was made to say, by Hart, regarding the Lord's sentence

Can prayer reverse the stern decree
And save a wretch condemned like me?
It may, at least I'll try

O poor sinner, try what prayer will do. If you have no other resources, bless God for that, and try what prayer will do. Go to a good God.

In the world of endless ruin
Let it never Lord be said
Here's a soul that perished, suing
For the boasted Saviour's aid

If you have a heart to pray, God has an ear to listen. And if He listens to your prayer, He has got a heart to answer and the fulness to supply.

Leave us not in the hour of temptation. "Because" said God to one church "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth." We do not know what is coming; we do not know what will be on the morrow. O but cleave to God and it will end well with you.

Leave us not when we come to our dying beds. If ever we shall

need God it will be then. We must needs die. How? Have you a good hope through grace? If God be not with us, woe to us. Better for us never to have been born than to die without God. It is a beautiful word in the Revelations - "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord". O how I covet that in these my last days. Blessed are the dead which die in Him. The martyr Stephen so died. He fell asleep. He sleeps in Jesus and all who sleep in Jesus God will bring with Him.

"Leave us not". Leave us not in those things. If we have God with us all must be well. If He forsake us, nothing can be well. Paul asks the important question "If God be for us who can be against us". What devil can hurt us? What evil can injure us? What providence can be against us? But O, if God be against us, who can be for us? If God be not your Friend, who can befriend you? If God be with you in grace, if He be with you in His Son, no evil can touch you. The 91 Psalm will stand on your side. Evil, pestilence, darkness, arrows of death, none of them shall enter to hurt and destroy you.

AMEN.