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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday Morning 12 December 1920

JOB 11 v 7

"Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou
find out the Almighty unto perfection?"

This question will ever be a nonpluss to the proud reason of fallen man. That is to say, whoever starts to find out God, to search into His nature, and to discover His reasons for His doings, will find himself, at the end of his labour, no more than a fool. It is a very mortifying thing. Men who can reach to great heights in their researches into natural subjects and penetrate into the very bowels of those subjects, do not like to be baulked in any pursuit they may enter upon. But when one tries to tread upon forbidden ground, to look into that which is not seen, to investigate the Being of God, he enters upon a terrible thing and, if grace prevent not, will find himself just lost. And the reason that no man can find out God is this - God is infinite. That should be sufficient to quiet all the questions and all the reasonings of poor mortal man. We are but of yesterday and know nothing. Our foundation is in the dust. You may by your telescope see the sun, moon and stars, but you cannot reach God. If He is to be known, He shall be known by self revelation. You never know more of God than He reveals of Himself. He offends us much because He wont give us any account of His matters; but why should He? Why should the infinite One be judged by man, who is but of yesterday and knows nothing? O proud reasoner, you must come into the dust. Infinitude can never be measured. We are finite. We have limitations. Our reach may be very long, but it terminates somewhere. Our penetration may be very keen, but there is a limit. There is a darkness that will limit it. Of God we read that He is the only Potentate, King of kings, Lord of lords; that He only has immortality; that He dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see. Bow down sinner. Canst thou by searching find out the nature of God? There are some names He has made known in the Scripture, by which His nature is spoken of. "I AM THAT I AM", the eternal God. Here we have no limit. These are

absolute Names. He has in kindness taken on Himself relative Names, but He has Names incommunicable, not relative, relating to no creature. The eternal God, "I AM THAT I AM". Can you reach this? Uncaused - we have no proper ideas of this - a Being uncaused, without beginning. Subsisting - as we know by revelation; not otherwise can we possibly know it - subsisting in three Persons, whose Names are descriptive of their mutual relationship: Father, Son and Holy Ghost. This is revealed in the Scripture. "There are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost, and these Three are One." May we never attempt to go beyond that. It is an awful deep, an unsearchable deep. Light it is to which we cannot approach. Here is a God whom no man hath seen nor can see. May this lesson be well written upon our hearts, deeply impressed by the eternal Spirit. But though we cannot search out God as to His nature, His Being, nor as to His subsistence - we only know them by the words God Himself has been pleased to use - yet He has given us two Books in which He has kindly written some things concerning Himself, and even these we do not like to be limited by. Reason will have this to say and that to say about Him, in the very things He has revealed concerning Himself. True it is that except we be converted and become as little children we shall never enter into the kingdom of God. Remember it my dear friends. You must be made little children. As children who have no questions to ask, who implicitly receive what is said to them and what is given to them, so must the Lord's people be converted and so receive the very Word and kingdom of the living God.

The two Books are first, the Book of creation. What may be known of God He has written, what may be received of Him as a God of creation, He has written there. Invisible things of Him are indelibly impressed upon His great work of creation. He is a willful infidel, a practical atheist, who does not see God in the work of creation, that is, the power of God, the wisdom of God, the greatness of God. Blindness has happened to men in this respect and the Apostle Paul tells us who is the true scientist in the 11 Hebrews. Through faith, he says, we understand that the worlds were made, framed by God, so that things which are seen by us, were not made of things which do appear, for in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Then He said "Let there be" and it was so. Then He made man, made man

perfect, gave him an understanding, the penetration of which we can perhaps now have no conception of, because we are blind, dark. We are darkness itself, through sin. But faith living in the heart of a child of God makes him understand science in a way that no man destitute of faith can understand it. Very wise, he may be, very industrious in his investigations he may be, but he won't have the wisdom that a child of God that has faith possesses. O my friends you look at creation, you young people look at God's work in creation, and as you see that mighty work may your hearts bend and kneel and worship Him you recognise as your Maker. He said "Let us make man" and that was the beginning of the human race. If it had continued in the perfection in which it was made, what a different world there would be.

The second Book that God has given is this Book, the Holy Scripture. Whatever may be known of God's character, of His dealings of His purposes, of the ultimate end of things, the Bible informs us, and one of the greatest proofs of the blindness which has happened to men is this, that, with this Book written in such plain and beautiful characters, he does not understand it. This very Book is not understood by man, yet God has written it. It was given, as we are told, by inspiration of God. Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

And there are three things I would name to you as revealed in the Scriptures, things which are also revealed by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of some people.

First, this, the awful, blessed sovereignty of God. Now you may bring your justice, that is to say, your ideas of justice, to this great subject, of what you imagine to be unjust in man and what might be indeed unjust in man you would say would be unjust in God. Greater folly never was than that. You are guilty, in thinking that, of the sin that God reproves in the Psalms "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself". God does not see with eyes of flesh. It is asked in this Book - "Hast thou eyes of flesh?" (Job 10 v 4) He does not see with eyes of flesh. We do. Our eyes, therefore, only see very little. Divine sovereignty is not to be judged by man's notions. We have some ideas of human sovereignty, but to begin with

that is no rule at all, for all human sovereignty is in some way deputed, given. God has His own by right. No man gives him anything, much less is his sovereignty given to Him. It is His. He is the Potter; man is the clay. He is the Ruler; man is the ruled. O, but free will! It is just as free as this - No man ever did nor ever will act with an absolute freedom of will. He just acts as circumstances appear to him. Two ways may be apparently open to a man and he will think about them and try as well as possible to reckon upon what the effect of moving in that direction will be, and what the effect of moving in another direction will be, and, as the balance is in his mind, so will he act. There is some extraneous influence brought to bear upon his mind and his judgment, and so his will is affected, moved. There is nothing of this applicable to God. He sees the end from the beginning. The beginning is decreed by Him and the end is decreed by Him and all the movements toward the end from the beginning of the things, that we call contingencies, are also ordained. With Him are no accidents, unforeseen events. The greatest transaction that ever was, since the creation, was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and that was ordained. "Delivered", was He, the devoted Lamb of God, "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" to be crucified. Divine sovereignty is written on all God's works, and written in lines of light divine in this infallible Book. O the happiness of being brought to submit unfeignedly to this. You search to find a reason for it; you will find the reason for it if you can become God. He who can comprehend God is God. Your apprehension, if it be true, is the apprehension of a vital faith enlightening your understanding and giving you to feel the power of truth on your will and exercising itself on your affections and bringing you to say - "The Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God". Let Him rule. His pleasure is justice; His decree is justice; His Being is justice; His Being is goodness; His Being is love. His Being is light. I think I do not speak lightly these words to you. I believe that in some very humble measure, I may say, God has made me understand that it becomes me, a creature, to tremble at His majesty. Remember this O man, that you are but of yesterday, that you know nothing, that your foundation is in the dust, that there are limitations to you, to your understanding, and to your freedom, and to all the things of which you may be very proud. There are limitations to all. But there are no limitations to God; no limitations to His sovereignty. No. No ideas

that we have of justice can limit His sovereignty. No ideas of what is right, of what is wrong, in us and to us, can limit this sovereignty. He says "I AM". He says that shall be; He says that shall not be, and it is right.

The second thing that God has revealed in the Scriptures is His infinite hatred of sin. He must punish sin. He would not be God if He could connive at sin. If He could let sin pass unpunished He would not be God. He must punish it. This truth would make us tremble if we feared Him. It would make us wonder if we feared Him. It would carry our minds to eternity if we feared Him. It would make us ask, where shall we spend eternity? What will He do to us, who cannot but hate sin? He hates it of the necessity of His nature which is goodness. He is a good God; therefore He hates and must punish sin. Sin is contrary to His commandment; therefore He must punish it. It is contrary to His revealed will; therefore He must punish it. It is contrary to His holiness; therefore He must punish it by banishing the sinner from the glory of His presence. Men are ignorant of this. We are all by nature totally ignorant of it. If we do our best, what can be said against us? We have never, when we speak thus, been measured by divine rule, only by our own rule. God's rule is His law in His dealings with sin and sinners. His rule is His commandment. His commandment is - "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind and thy neighbour as thyself." And He says "Cursed is the man that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them". This is God's revealed will that a man shall be holy. He is commanded to be by the law under which he is created, the law which was written in his heart. He is commanded to be perfect. You are; I am. Men would not talk about making a new world if they believed this. They would pray to God to renew their hearts. "Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within me." That would be the prayer of every man taught of God.

The third thing that God has revealed is this, that He who hates sin has determined to forgive sin, the sins of many. And that, not by an arbitrary act of His sovereign will, but in perfect accordance with His law. "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." And this brings

to light one wondrous truth, that He sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. And the sweetest of all declarations concerning God in the Scriptures is the declaration that Christ made of His Father. When He sings His Father's praise in the Church, He declares that Name of His Father to His brethren. "I have declared unto them Thy Name and will declare it." Yes, Christ came to declare His Father's will, to open His Father's heart, to make known His Father's love and mercy. And the Father did this in a way that is most remarkable and that is confounding to human reason. He did it in this way. He gathered the sins of His people, took them all from them, and laid them on His Son. The Scriptures reveal this. The Scriptures show us that Christ came to be a substitute, a vicarious Person. Not to make an effort to save men, but to actually save them and ultimately bring them to glory. The Captain of their salvation was made perfect through suffering and He will bring these many sons unto glory. O but who could find this out if it had not been revealed? Whoever could know this without revelation. Two revelations here I would name. One, I may open, the Scriptures, and the other is the revelation made by the Spirit in each heart of God's children. Now Christ came, O wondrous coming was His!. There was no room for Him in the inn, but the declaration, the song of the angels we have - "Glory to God in the Highest, on earth peace, goodwill toward men." Who could have imagined the love of God to His enemies, the purpose of God to make vile creatures holy, to remove from them absolutely their sins and their sinfulness, and to bring them to glory, fitted by His Son, by His precious blood, by His divine righteousness, to stand in the presence of infinite purity and to praise God through eternity. God has revealed these things concerning Himself. Jesus Christ died and by that death He finished the work which His Father gave Him to do. The work was not an effort, it was an accomplished thing. "It is finished". Finished transgression, finished the work given to Him to finish, of saving His people, buying His Church with His blood. As says the Apostle Paul "Feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood". He did it. If the Scriptures be true of Christ - of course we are told they are not correct in many particulars nowadays; we are not fallen, we are told, therefore there can be no redemption; but never mind, we pass by that as a heresy that God will visit - they do inform us that Christ purchased the Church with His own blood. Not fair, says one, to withhold a chance from everybody.

Let the Scriptures speak. God made man upright but they have sought out many inventions. Now what does sinful man deserve at the hand of God? To whom does the Almighty owe anything that is good? To whom, in this chapel, does God owe anything that is good? Did He not put us under a good law? Did He not make us without sin? We have sinned, we have broken His law. What does He then owe to us but justice which is what He owes to Himself? Then said He, in the exercise of His infinite mercy, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will harden whom I will harden", and all shall be to the praise of My glory. God has revealed these things. Can you bow to them? I remember how I fought against these things when a young man. When I first heard of them, I fought them most bitterly. May the Lord keep you from sinning against Him as I did. May He keep your lips from uttering the things against Him that my lips uttered. But O, if you are speaking so, if you have spoken so, or if you might speak so, may He grant you what He gave me. Two mollifying graces He gave to me, faith and repentance. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" O it will be a great mercy if you are trying to find out what God is, if He should give you faith to say - I will try no more; as He gave Job grace to say - "I have uttered that I understood not". "I will say no more". Are you to judge Him you cannot see, who dwelleth in the light to which you cannot approach? Will you judge that nature of which you have no true conception, which is infinitely above your comprehension? Will you judge those ways which have reasons in God Himself, reasons which He may never utter to you?, "for He giveth not account of any of His matters". The great thing is to be converted and be made as a little child to receive what God reveals. To believe that He cannot do but what is just. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And shall He be required by us to give to us some account of this and of that? Is He not Lord in His own house, His own world, His own heaven, and Lord over His own creation and creatures? No injustice can dwell with Him. No unkindness can dwell with Him. Nothing unwise can be done by Him. He makes no mistakes. Having said these things I will briefly, as enabled, make one or two reflections. The first is this. It is a very great mercy to have faith in God, faith that will credit everything which is good to Him. Faith that will receive no evil report of Him. Faith that will say I have no understanding in this but I believe it because God has done it. I believe it; it is right. I believe it is just. This will bring us if

we have this blessed grace, to bow in unfeigned submission to this great God. You may bring a powerful intellect to bear on the Scriptures, and make innumerable mistakes and land yourselves in the greatest perplexities and ultimately in perdition if grace do not intervene. O proud reasoner, you must come down! and all your reasonings shall be called folly, even by yourself. You shall call them folly if you have grace, sinner. It is a great mercy to have faith. Says the Apostle Paul "all men have not faith". Therefore all men do not submit to this great One.

Secondly it is a great blessing to be enabled to pray, to pray the prayer of faith. What we know not now, what Christ does, what He permits to be done, the varying perplexities with which we are exercised, the afflictions we cannot understand, the crooked things that we see in providence which altogether bring us to confusion of mind as we try to understand them, one day God, according to the measure He has purposed, will open and explain; make plain to us. If we reach glory then we shall see as we are seen and know as we are known. Now we know in part. Children, we think as children, we speak as children. Then we shall be men and understand as men. Remember then, O perplexed soul, if you can - pray. Prayer will do wonders for you. Prayer will bring you near to Him who is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. It will bring you to fall before His feet flat. It will bring you the willingness to be ignorant of things of which God will keep you in ignorance. It will bring you to submit to His holy will and to His divine righteousness. Pray, poor sinner. Do you need guidance, you cannot understand your own way. A man's goings are of the Lord. How then can a man understand his own way? Wait on Him. He will be waited on; He will be waited for.

Another reflection I would make is this, that it is an unspeakable mercy to be led to realise that we are sinners and that we need the pardon which is with the Lord. "With Him is plenteous redemption". With Him is mercy. No mistakes that you have made, no sins that you have committed, no errors in which you have walked and may now be walking, no impatience of your mind, of your intellect, no rebellion of your will, but what can be forgiven and cleansed from you by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is good to feel that you are a sinner. It is good to believe that God can forgive

sins. It is good to believe that there is a heaven prepared for sinners, that the election of grace shall obtain the blessing and it is good to have your heart set upon it, to be seeking the favour of God which is better than life. O do not attempt to find out God and do not try to find out things which He keeps from you. Try to find out this, whether the Son of God loved you and gave Himself for you. Whether that precious fountain opened for sin and uncleanness may be applied to you. Whether the Holy Spirit will give to you the sweet sense of being forgiven so that you may perceive there is ready for you a mansion. This is the grand thing to be searching into, the death of Christ and your own interest therein. The precious blood that cleanseth from all sin, and to seek that it may cleanse you. The justifying robe of Christ's righteousness, and to be seeking that it may be made over to you, put on you, worn by you. The wondrous thing also is that whereas it is revealed that Christ does dwell in the heart of some by faith, for you to be seeking that He may come into your heart and dwell there by faith, for what else will do you good. You might be very learned in theology and be a lost person, but you may be very ignorant of all theology, as to technical terms and so on, yet have Christ in your heart and then you will be a learned person in the truest sense of the word. You will have learned more of God in five minutes of Christ's presence with you than you could learn in 50 years of hard and close study without the teaching and revealing light of the eternal Spirit. And the result of all is this to me at this moment, that human nature in its fallen condition, is just helpless, ignorant, blind, darkness itself with respect to God. That very far it may go in all natural matters, natural knowledge and science and so on. It stops there. It cannot go into other regions. Sin has blinded us and killed us. But there is a Holy Ghost who brings a new nature and gives it to sinners and leads them to pray, gives them faith to believe and look to God and wait for Him. Faith to follow Him in His ways without seeking to understand them. Faith that brings them in their afflictions to submit as unreservedly as David submitted in his particular affliction that befell him, when suffering from the unnatural rebellion and uprising of his son Absalom. His friends took out of the city to him the Ark of God. He said to them carry it back, take it back, let that be in its right, its ordained place whatever becomes of me. If the Lord take pleasure in me he will bring me again and I shall see both it and His habitation.

And this is the point, "But if He thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto Him." May the Lord bless us with such a spirit.

AMEN.