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MORNING SERMON IS NO. 130 - JOB 42 v 8

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday evening 11 December 1921

JOB 42 v 2

"I know that Thou canst do everything and that
no thought can be withholden from Thee"

What we learn in the school of adversity we do know; what we acquire in the easy chair we may soon lose. What is burnt in us by the fire that baptises and teaches every child of God, we keep. It wont go. Job learned much in the school of adversity. He learned his own ruin and weakness and emptiness. He learned the uncertainty of this world's possessions; that if Satan could only get permission from God to touch all that Job had, Job could have no certainty of one single thing. We know it was so. He learned that everything that was done, excepting sin, was done by God; that not the Chaldeans, nor the Sabeans, nor the fire, nor the wind, could move without God. And things learned, as he learned them were well learned, and we, as many of us as fear God, can just say that, and no more. We have learned some things in affliction, and we know these things. An untried faith is an uncertain faith. An unproved thing is, to us, an uncertain thing. What a mercy to have proved anything of God, anything of self, anything of ruin in ourselves, anything of salvation brought to us by the Lord. The distinguishing mark between the church and the world is this, not that one - the church only - has all knowledge, and the world all ignorance (in respect of acquired knowledge, the world has a great deal more than the church has) but it is this, that the church is taught of God, put into the fire; has many things put into the fire, has many things burned up that she values, and has much more brought that she is taught to value more. She knows just what she learns in the fire and by the Holy Ghost. This was what Job had learnt, among other things - "I know that Thou canst do everything, and that no thought", of mine or of any creature, "can be withholden from Thee" or - I just drew your attention to it this morning, the

alternative reading in the margin - or, "no thought of Thine can be hindered", withholden, balked, turned aside. The thoughts of God's heart are toward all generations.

Now if the Lord will help me I shall speak a few things which are known assuredly by some of us which I myself hope I have learnt slowly and painfully, and in that way I shall try to prove out of the Word of God and, as it were, out of our own hearts, these things which I am to mention. There is nothing too hard for God. And let me begin with this, because it stands out, it is an outstanding thing in every child of God's heart, sooner or later. That God can do everything is proved to a child of God by this, that He loves sinners. If He can do that, what can He not do? If God can love a wretch, the Holy God can love a wretch, sinful, defiled, black, guilty, deceitful, murderous, and full of all manner of evil; if God can love such a person, and love him, as it were, out of hell into heaven, out of sin into holiness, out of injustice into righteousness, out of deformity into beauty, what can He not do? But does God love sinners? Do we know that He loves sinners? Some will say, of course we all know that because the Bible informs us of it, and the Bible, being true, it is proved that God loves sinners. Well, it is a good thing to know as much as that in a general way, but it is better to know it in another way, to have, as it were, an addition to that knowledge. It is good to know it in your own heart by the God of love coming to you and speaking to you in a time of love, and saying 'Live'. Coming to you when desolate, when miserable, cast down, empty, poor, tried and troubled about the path, and wondering about the end, and fearing you will never reach heaven; for God to come in such and such a time and speak and say "Fear not", and say I have loved thee, and blessed, and I will help, and lead, and guide, and comfort, that is a good way of knowing that God loves sinners.

But I would like to enter a little particularly into this great truth, that God loves sinners, in the following manner. It is proved first because He sent His only begotten Son into the world that sinners might live through Him. That the Eternal Son of God did not disdain to be a Man to make poor men the sons of God and pay the debt His brethren owed is the greatest proof of all proofs that may ever be adduced that God loves sinners. Holy Scripture is very emphatic on

this point. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Poor sinner, do you wonder if this infinite love can reach such a wretch as you? Do you ask, again and again, can God love such a sinner? Do you look into your own heart and say, it is so full of evil, so surfeited with wickedness, that I do not see how God can love such a person. Well, you are not alone in that. While you were singing the second hymn that was just my own thought about myself - is it possible that one, so wicked, can be loved of God? But He does love sinners and the proof of proofs is that He came. The Father sent the Son, the Son freely came, the Spirit graciously, omnipotently, begat in the womb of the virgin that body that the Son of God took into union with His divine Person. We have never seen much of the glory of that Name, Emmanuel, O but it is a glorious Name. Glorious love brought the Son of God; glorious power formed that body which He was to take up. And the grace of God brought Him, the grace of God filled Him, the grace of God moved Him, the grace of God took Him to the cross, the grace of God brought Him from the grave, the grace of God took Him into heaven, and there He is interceding. O raise thy downcast eyes and see; there is nothing too hard for this God. Nothing. Confronted with a natural impossibility, when she was told that she should have a son, Sarah laughed, a laugh of incredulity. Said the Lord, Why did Sarah laugh? "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" And if you should have a sort of thought in your heart, although some may be blessed, I cannot be blessed, I am too wicked - "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" Jesus Christ came full of love, obeyed in love, lived in love, died in love, rose in love, ascended into heaven in love; in love intercedes there, and therefore He can do anything for sinners whom He takes in hand, anything that their case requires. So there is no impossibility here. Jesus Christ said, It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into heaven, and the disciples were amazed and they said: "Who then can be saved?" Said the Lord Jesus, With men this is impossible, but it is not so with God. "With God all things are possible." He can squeeze a sinner into the very small, narrow way and gate; only the sinner thinks when he is being pressed in, and stripped, and this taken off and that slain, and the other torn away, that he himself is about to be made an utter end of. "I know that Thou canst do everything." And if a man, a

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poor, and destitute, and wicked man, ever gets a sight of Christ crucified, that sight will teach him more than all men in the whole world could teach him. It will touch his heart, it will touch his conscience, it will raise up his spirit, it will bid him hope, it will stop despairing thoughts, it will bring him at last to say, I will venture to ask; if I perish in asking, I will perish. If Jesus Christ could remove the sin of the land of Israel, the church of God, in one day, is there anything He cannot do? But He did remove the sin of a land in one day. He did say: "It is finished". That was a great act. You think perhaps if He would forgive your sins it would be the greatest act of Christ that He ever did, but it would not be. Whether it is greater, to forgive one sinner, or to remove all the sins of all the election of grace at once, by one offering, in one day, leaving nothing behind, leaving no trace of the fall, no guilt, therefore no death.

Now we know this in this gracious way when, convinced of sin and from time to time brought to realise our utter ruin and guilt, we receive the forgiveness of sin. That is the point, the Lord can cleanse a guilty conscience. Look at that one point. Let us be, as we can through the grace of God, very particular about this, very particular about sin. If we are particular about sin we shall want to know if it can be removed from us. It can be, yes it can be. God can forgive sins. It did astonish the Pharisees, and stirred up their enmity, when the Lord Jesus said to one: "Thy sins are forgiven thee". But He said God had given that power. It was given to Him, Jesus Christ, to forgive sins. God had life in Himself and He had given His Son to have life in Himself, that He might give it to whomsoever He would, and that precious life is expressed into the soul by the act of forgiveness. The act of forgiveness is passively received by the forgiven sinner. It is an act of God on a guilty person, an act that is passed on a guilty person, and the person receiving it has nothing to do in it; he receives it passively, without any action of his. He has cried for it, prayed for it, hoped for it, looked for it, despaired of it, pressed after it, begged of God to give it to him perhaps for years, and then the day has come when the great act has been suddenly, to his surprise, passed on his conscience. He heard no audible voice, he saw no vision with his natural eye, but he heard the voice of Christ and saw the Lord Jesus

crucified, and that great thing was done. Nobody can take it for granted who is convinced of the Spirit that he is a sinner. No poor sinner can take the forgiveness of his sins for granted. He must hear the Lord telling him; then he will be happy. "Thy sins are forgiven thee". "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot". This is the thing - "Forasmuch as ye know" "I know that Thou canst do everything". And there are some people here, even as there are some in heaven, who can say they know that. Solemnly it came to them, and the day, perhaps the hour, will never be forgotten when the happy, blessed feeling took possession of their souls; when God, in answer to thousands of prayers, came and dried their tears, relieved their fears, and bid them go in peace. O, when He came and said that wondrous thing - "I am thy salvation", it was done. Now my friends, this is the point. I am glad that we do know out of holy Scripture that God forgives sins. It is a great encouragement to read of it, a great instruction on the mind. It draws sometimes the soul out in very fervent desire for the experience. Do not belittle the knowledge that you have of holy Scripture. Do not think that your knowledge of the letter of truth is nothing. God can make it a great thing to you, a stay of your mind, a hope in your spirit, a light in your understanding, an attraction to your affections. He may let you sometimes see such beauty in the word "forgiveness", in the word "salvation", as that you will say I never can express what I have seen in such words. You may say, they leave me, the sight leaves me, the words leave me, and I am again desolate and destitute. Well, but go on. Read again, and again, and always, and pray, and pray, and make your requests known to God, and the day will come when He will say: "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt". And that is to be done over and over again, for we need a great deal of converting. Many times we have to be converted and forgiven.

I know that Thou canst soften a heart of stone, melt a heart of ice, remove an iceberg in a moment, and make my very heart boiling with warm, sweet meditations of God; boiling over with thoughts of Christ. Yes, He can do it my friends, He can do it. You may be quarrelling with God, you may be thinking it is hard that you should

be so tried; you may be wondering why the Lord permits such and such things to come to you, and your heart may gather much hardness under some dispensations. You may prove that Scripture to be true - "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous" You may be proving it now. O, but one look of love, one touch of omnipotent mercy would change the whole scene; might leave your trouble untouched, and yet change it into quite another thing. It would look to you to be absolutely different, not from change in it, but from the change in you; the blessed feeling of humility, brokenness, and sweet, grateful contrition. I know that Thou canst melt my heart, one may say to the Lord; Thou didst melt it on such an occasion; melt it again, do it again.

"I know that Thou canst do everything", that Thou canst even sanctify to me my affliction. Not a little thing that. O, to get good out of trouble is a mercy. Affliction does not leave a person as it finds him. It will either be a blessing or a curse. It will turn to a good account and be a means of enlarging and establishing the kingdom of God in the heart, or it may be a terrible means of bringing to pass that Scripture in Isaiah - "They shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry"; they shall look up and curse their king and their God. (Isaiah 2 v 21) But, says a child of God, Lord do grant that I may gather some good out of this, that it may be sanctified to me. Set my affections on divine things by means of it. Bring me to fear Thy Name more, cause me to pray more, to be more following after Thee. Cause me to answer to that Scripture: "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also". If we were judged many times in any single day by that Scripture and that alone, without any blood of Christ to cleanse us, what a case we should be in. How often should we be found with our heart fixed on some vanity? How oft should we be found with not a thought of God? But sometimes the great wonder is done. "There is nothing too hard for the Lord." He comes, and He has but to come and show Himself, and He gets the heart of a person at once, and when Christ has got a person's heart, He has got everything. What a wonder it is to feel now and again. If Christ has your heart, seeing He is in heaven your heart is there, and that Scripture becomes true in you: "Our conversation is in heaven". Not our talk - it does not mean that - our walk, hearts, thoughts, meditation; everything is in this direction, and in this place - "Our conversation is in

heaven from whence we look for the Saviour". Poor sinner, your wandering and gadding may discourage you. You may say sometimes, I do not wonder that I am afflicted. My wonder is that my affliction is so light. I am so foolish and always manifesting folly, and therefore always showing a need of the rod of correction that it may drive folly far from me. God can sanctify affliction, bring good out of evil, make straight paths for our feet by crooked dispensations, and set our affections on things above by the things which are below being made a trouble to us. It is hard to prove all the world to be empty; it is painful to prove yourself to be nothing but a sinner, to have nothing but an evil disposition, but such things do bring these points out in experience. "I know that Thou canst do everything". Thou canst save me from myself and can sanctify to me my deepest distress.

I know that Thou canst restore my soul. That remarkable word I was reading just now is a proof of this, and it was a strange thing, apparently, for God to tell Jeremiah to buy a field when all was to be sent into captivity, and to be under, for a long time, a foreign rule, but so God will have things. He will give gracious promises and then put them into an earthen vessel for many days unfulfilled, and unfulfilled promises are painful promises often; begun matters are painful matters very often. Says the Lord, they say this land is desolate, this city is desolate, strangers are in it, and our houses are reviled. O, but says the Lord, I will bring the captivity again, I will bring them from all the countries where I have driven them, driven them for their sins, and they shall come again and build houses, and buy fields; and all this mercy is free, freely promised. Do you know what it is to be in captivity? What it is to have provoked the Lord to anger? What a solemn thing it is. Do you know what it is to look on a promise given to you before this sad time, and now you look on it, sealed though it was, and an open evidence to you though it was then, now you look on it as if it cannot be fulfilled. Says the Lord, I will bring you again, I will restore you the years that the cankerworm, and the palmerworm, and the locust have eaten. We say, when a tree is barked, it is dead, or it will die. Says the Lord, they have barked My vineyards, but I will restore everything. "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" If anyone had said to Job in his trouble, with all his poverty, and when he was scraping himself with a

potsherd because he was covered over with loathsome boils, Job, your flesh will be as fresh as a child's and in the place of seven thousand you will have fourteen thousand; in place of 500 yoke of oxen and 500 she asses, you will have a thousand of each, and God will give you seven sons and three daughters, what would he have said? But it came to pass. God gave him twice as much. Ah and Zion is to have double: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." What a wonderful God is the God of all grace.

Now I wish the Lord may help His people to hold these things. "I know that Thou canst do everything". Do you know that He can restore a fallen soul? Some of us can say, yes we do. Well, and if one should say how do you know it? we should say in two ways we know it. First because the Scripture declares that He is able, that He makes all things new, that He has promised to restore the years in which the enemies in their power damaged the church, that He has promised to restore her waste places and her desolate heritages; and we know it, blessed be His Name, secondly because He has fulfilled the promise in us. O backsliding is terrible. Converting mercy is doubly sweet to the converted. I know this, and, blessed be God, others also know it. "I know that Thou canst do everything". Now He can graciously make you believe this, and understand it in your own experience.

Let us look, in the next place - for I want to make just a few observations here - at the word: "No thought can be withholden from Thee," and I shall take it in the two ways that we have in the text and in the margin. First, no thought of anybody's heart can be withholden from God. Now you who have no fear of God in your heart, you have many thoughts, vain thoughts lodge in you, independent thoughts. Young people particularly look forward. They think that days better will come than they are now having. They look forward to this and to that. They anticipate this good and that good, yet they do not pray. Now you have these vain thoughts. You may not express them; I can tell you of them because I have had them myself. One knows the heart of a young man because one had it. Now I say this, God knows those thoughts. Perhaps one here may be saying I shall be glad when I get

away from my home and have something of my own, get away from parental restraint, get away from the word which brings me home earlier in the evening, get away from all that. You may not say it but there it is, and God sees it. You are told by your parents to do something but you do not want to do it. You have to do it but you dislike it and you think, probably bitterly, unkindly of parental authority, and are apt, perhaps, in your heart, if no other way, to speak irreverently of your parents. You might not express those thoughts; they are just the same as if you had expressed them. Actions of the heart God notices and He says, I will punish you for your thoughts; I will punish you for your thoughts. He says to Israel: "How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" He takes thought as action because thought is an action. It is the act of the mind, and the law reaches the mind. O you young people, you little know the eye that is on your hearts; you little think of what God sees; that He sees every motion of your mind, every thought and every imagination of every thought before it takes the definite shape and form of a thought. Its formation, God sees. Cannot withhold it; you may shut it up from your friends, but you cannot enclose it as in a secret chamber from the eye of God, and He will bring you into judgement for it, either here, or hereafter.

Take the thoughts of a child of God. They are of two sorts; the wicked have only one sort. The child of God has two sorts of thoughts, two sets shall I say; one as bad as anyone else's, as bad as any young man's thoughts here, a man without the fear of God. A child of God has the same vanity, the same vain, hard, and wicked depraved nature; so he has that set of thoughts. He wishes himself free from this trouble, he wishes himself free from that trial. He wishes that he had liberty here, he wishes he possessed that which he does not possess, and he would gladly get rid of something that he cannot get rid of. He has many vain thoughts. Some thoughts are hard thoughts of God, vain thoughts. Some thoughts are rebellious thoughts. You can fill in for yourselves, you who know these thoughts. These thoughts are before God, and he is ashamed of them. But then he has other thoughts; he has other thoughts; one is this - O that I knew God for myself more than I do. O that Christ would come to me and take possession of my heart. O that His blood were on my conscience, speaking peace. O that His Spirit dwelt in my heart, that I might, by

the Spirit, hanker after Christ, press after Him, and have Him in my arms, the arms of my faith. O that I were godly, humble, tender, spiritually-minded, prayerful. O that I lived to the praise and glory of God. He thinks that, wishes it. The very inmost thought of his heart is, O that I were near the Lord, that I could live near Him, and live to His praise and glory. Another thought is, O that I had union, sweet, sweetly felt union with Christ, that I might be near to Him, and so I might go on. And these thoughts are all exposed, yes, both sets, before the Lord. Were you ever glad that God knows your heart? I have sometimes just felt that, very glad that my heart is exposed to God, glad He sees the wickedness of which I am ashamed, and glad He sees the desires which have been created by Himself. It is great to have a religion that brings you near to God in your spirit, to deal with Him. That religion will carry you well through, though you may be very troubled very often. These things are before the Lord. The wicked thoughts mercifully He does two things with. First He forgives them, then He subdues them. He brings every thought into captivity unto the obedience of Christ. And the gracious thoughts, the desires, the prayers, what of these? O, He says, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt". What a mercy all these thoughts are before Him.

Take the alternative reading in the margin that "no thought of Thine can be hindered". The thoughts of God's heart are to all generations. "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil to give you an expected end." You are in captivity. Jerusalem is in the hand of her enemy; your houses, they are open to him, and you are at this distance. "I know the thoughts that I think toward you." I will bring you again, I have promised it and I will do it. I will bring you again, nothing can hinder. But the way is rough, says one. Yes, Ezra found that. Ezra had an offer of a safeguard, of a convoy. No, said he, God is on the side of all who are with Him, He will take care of us. Then he came into trouble. Difficulties, dangers, awaited him, confronted him, and then what did he do? Did he say, I wish I had that convoy after all? No. He remembered his declining, he remembered that he said he would not have it, and then he said, now we will fast. So he proclaimed a fast by the River Ahava that he might, with his people, seek a way of God for themselves and their little ones. "And He was

intreated of us". That was far better than a company of soldiers, was it not? Well, this is what the Lord said, this is My thought to give you an expected end, blessed be His Name. And though the way is rough and very dangerous, yet, as it is promised in Jeremiah, so it may be in all cases - I will bring them with weeping and with supplications will I lead them and they shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd. (Jeremiah 31 verses 9 and 12). No thought can be withholden or hindered. The thoughts of His heart are firm, and they are comfortable thoughts which issue in comfortable words. They are great thoughts, thoughts in counsel. "Great in counsel" (Jeremiah 32 v 19). And if the enemy stands up he can do nothing, he can do nothing. He stood up against Joshua. He could do nothing, for there was God who said: "The Lord rebuke thee O Satan; even the Lord which hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." (Zechariah 3 v 2). If the devil stirs up Manasseh to make the streets of Jerusalem to run down with blood, and to offer sacrifices to idols, and cause children to pass through the fire, the thought of God to Manasseh was good; so He caught him in the thicket, He laid affliction on him, He taught him to pray, and answered the prayer.

Determined to save, He watched o'er my path
When Satan's blind slave, I sported with death
And can He have taught me to trust in His Name
And thus far have brought me to put me to shame?

Poor children of God have a great Friend, a never failing Friend, a good and gracious Friend, a wise, omnipotent Friend, and He says, to trust the Lord endeavour. "Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." "He is of one mind and who can turn Him?"

May the Lord give us to believe in Him and to believe this word, and to know it experimentally, that He can do everything, and that no thought, of either man, or devil, can be withholden from Him, and all the schemes, and plots of enemies to the church, all the foolish and God-despising thoughts of men, He knows, and will overturn, and all the godly thoughts of poor sinners panting after Him are before Him. May we believe it, and know it, and experience it, that we may be for

HIS praise and glory.