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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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JOHN 17 v 3

"And this is life eternal, that they
might know Thee the only true God, and
Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent"

The Lord Jesus, having given, as it were, the farewell instructions that His people needed and still need and will need while time shall last, turns to His Father, addresses His Father, addresses Him in the language of prayer, of holy confidence, manifesting the gracious solicitude of His heart for His disciples. He lifted up His eyes to heaven; He knew that His hour was come; He knew His Father. And now, having to leave His disciples He commits them to the care of His Father. "As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him". Universal power, universal providence, the Lord Jesus possesses and for this great purpose to gather out of a dead world people who are dead in trespasses and sins and give to them eternal life, and this is according to the eternal purpose of God for, as the Apostle Paul teaches in the Ephesians "He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will". Now if God, in His providence, has guided our feet, when we had no knowledge of Him and no care for Him, in order that, at the appointed hour, this great blessing should come into our souls, namely eternal life; that He should give to us; that He, who has power over all flesh given to Him - given to Him in His Mediatorial capacity, not as He is God, for that He has naturally and without gift, but in His Mediatorial capacity having this great power - if He has exercised it in our souls, then we owe endless thanks and praises to Him. The text sets before us some mighty things. The first to which I will draw your attention is knowledge. The knowledge of God is the essence of true religion. Nobody knows sin properly until He knows God. The measure of the knowledge of God is the measure of the knowledge of sin. "Whatsoever doth make manifest is light" and light does not come from self. We are darkness as Paul says - "Ye were sometimes darkness but are now light in the Lord."

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Knowledge is a persuasion of what is true on sufficient evidence. This knowledge of God comes by faith and faith is the evidence of things. By faith, the possessor of it, beholds unseen things and finds them to be a substance in him. If then we have true knowledge of God on adequate evidence given to us by the Holy Spirit, then we know, we do not think, speculate or guess, but we know, there is a God in heaven, in whom we live and move and have our being, and that from that God we have deeply revolted, and before Him we are sinners. And let me repeat it, the measure of our knowledge of God is the measure of our knowledge of sin. It is easy enough to speculate about sin; it is different to know it and very painful. This is the secret of true conviction, of solemn trembling at the majesty and holiness and justice of God and this brings trouble to all to whom this knowledge is given. Nobody can have trouble about sin of a proper nature until he has some knowledge of God and it behoves us, who make a profession of God, to very narrowly look into this great matter, whether at any time, in any measure, God met with us, crossed our path, came athwart our pleasures and darted light into our understanding and fixed some knowledge of Himself in our consciences whereby we became acquainted with Him. If ever God met with you, perhaps not in a striking and sudden way, but in such a way and in such a measure as to convince you that He is in heaven, that you have sinned against Him by violating His holy law, you are, in that measure, convinced of the justice of the awful sentence of the law which you have broken. O my friends, may I say it again, knowledge is of the essence of religion, whence feelings come, fears arise, trembling is felt. Why do men handle God's Name as they do? Why are they so blatantly irreverent? They know Him not. Paul, speaking of the polite Greek and the stumbled Jew, said that the princes of this world knew Him not. And speaking of the Jew particularly in that one verse he said, had they known Him they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. You would never think lightly of God if you knew Him; you would tremble at Him. Therefore see if you have knowledge. "This is life eternal that they might know Thee, the only true God".

That they might know the character of God. His character is dear to people who know Him, and that is why every believer in the land this day is indignant and grieved at the open infidelity, the evolutionism, and the utterance of - if there is a God. You cannot

but grieve if you meet these things with some knowledge of God in your heart and what is worse to you will be this that you grieve because you are full of sin. God's character, we all of us have, in our nature, defamed. But if we have this new spiritual life we maintain in our consciences the beauty and the glory of that character. Why do you tremble at His majesty? Because you know Him to be infinite. Why do you tremble when you think of Him as a just God? Because you have provoked His justice. Why do you fear His threatening? Because you deserve it, to have it fulfilled in you and you know it. Think of God's character, just think of what He is. Holy, holy, holy; almighty. Who would not fear Thee, O King of nations? People who never tremble at the majesty of God miss one thing among many; the comfort of the gospel, for He speaks most kindly of men who tremble at His Word. You will regard His justice and conscience, where life is, is, if I may say so, the guardian of God's honour in the soul, and that conscience would never, if it had to choose, choose to be saved at the expense of divine justice. Holiness too men know as being in God when they know God; it is Himself. Holy, holy, holy. And the knowledge of that keeps the person who possesses it from rushing presumptuously upon the thick bosses of His buckler. It is a solemn thing to offend God and to be an unholy person. The knowledge of His power. It is a solemn thing to contemplate naked omnipotence; that the arm that holds the world up you have provoked by your sin to inflict a stroke that would break you to pieces. It is life to know these things. Not comfortable life to the person at this stage, but it is life. A great thing to know this point. If you have not attained to anything more than this at the present do not think that your case is hopeless, and do not so hanker after comfort as after knowing whether this God, whom you know so far, can, with honour to His law, glory to His majesty, save such a person. It is a great enquiry, and I think you would find most of the Lord's people had more or less a distinct feeling about this. The question was very great, and very, very much impressed upon the spirit, can this God, of whom I now have such thoughts, whose justice I have such reason to fear, and admire and adore and yet tremble and flee from it if possible, can this God save me consistently with His attributes, His perfections. If you look at yourself you will always be saying, of course He cannot. If you look at your sins, you will say these always will stand in my way. They have fitted me and are always fitting me for perdition. If you look

at God's perfections as they shine upon you and make you greatly fear, you will say, these I can never reconcile with my salvation, with happiness. And so a person becomes, as the Apostle Paul says, shut up unto the faith that is revealed in him sooner or later. He is shut up to that Scripture, whether he may perceive it or not, "He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". And here, I venture to say, here shine the perfections of God and they are seen to harmonise with the happiness of a sinner. And the discovery of this is one of the greatest discoveries that the Holy Ghost makes in the heart of a convinced sinner, that God can consistently save a breaker of His law, can consistently put his sins away, and even more than that, the Scripture which I have often named to you, He can and He does esteem it to be an honour to Himself to forgive sins. Of all the wonders that may strike your eye and come to your heart, this will be one of the greatest, that God should esteem it an honour to forgive your sins. It is a great revelation, an amazing discovery, to a sinner. I hope I shall never forget how that it was revealed to me that God could be honoured and would honour in forgiving sin, my sins.

Then this brings us to the gospel. Do not always be talking about the gospel if you do not know the law. The one goes before the other in experience as you will find it goes first in the Scriptures. First the law, written in the heart of Adam, written in the heart of every Gentile. Then the law was broken; that every person knows who is brought under the teaching of the Spirit. Then in due time, in proper order, comes the gospel, the remedy for the malady, the medicine for the sickness, the righteousness for the ungodly, the forgiveness of sins, of all sin, all sin. This is the order. Take the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation you will find this is the order and what God has put in that beautiful order in the Bible do not try to reverse in your conversation or in your experience. Let us come to the gospel then, to know God there, and this brings in the Saviour, that great One, the glorious Son of God, Jesus Christ, sent by God. "That they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." A good deal of discussion has been indulged about this word, "and Jesus Christ", as if He were distinguished from the true God and inferior to Him, but the simple consideration that here the Lord Jesus is sustaining the character of a Mediator, sent to be

the Mediator by His Father, would be sufficient to remove all the discussions and doubts about His eternal Deity and equality with His Father. "Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent". This may lead us back in mind and thought to eternity. There is nothing new in the mind of God. His dealings are new to us, but His purposes are not new and in eternity the glorious Trinity entered into a wonderful consultation. Let us make man. And man, being ruined, the same blessed God said in Himself, let us make some men new creatures. And in order to this the Son was sent by the Father, sent to redeem, sent to be the Mediator, sent to be the High Priest, sent to be the One, the only One who could and would and did offer Himself without spot to God. Now here is the rise of all true christian hope. You have it in the Romans where the Apostle says "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand" (Romans 5 v 2) As long as a person stands in the law he stands condemned; out of the mouth of God he stands condemned. It is not good to talk of forgiveness till you feel your sinfulness. It is not according to Scripture to talk of justification if you have not been condemned and arraigned, but if you have been arraigned at God's bar and condemned, and have found that the law had no standing room for you, except to condemn you, then, O then, you will find the beauty and feel the blessedness of that "By whom we have access, through faith, into this grace", into the favour of God; entering into it. Grace to pardon crimson sins, grace to melt a hard heart, grace to bring a distant person near, grace to remove all disabilities belonging to the sinner in the way of his humble, bold, free approach to God. It is a wonderful change from being afraid of God, afraid to kneel before the divine Majesty because of your sins, to having that singular, that, to yourself, unexplainable mystery, how that you, a sinful person, hitherto trembling, now have a living hope and a real feeling of getting somewhat near to God. I have been glad that the Lord speaks of the positions of His people in respect to Himself in the terms of distance. You who sometimes were far off yet now hath He made nigh. To get near to a person from whom you have been distant means that you have ingress, access; just as when you came in here you found the doors open this evening. There was an ingress and no bar, nobody to say you must not come in, nothing of that kind, but just an open door. So, in experience, it comes to this, at times, there is an open door. "I have set before you an open door and no man can shut it"; an open

way. Well, but my sins; these were put away. My unworthiness; this is lost in the worthiness of Christ. My weakness; He is the strength of the weak. All the objections that you may bring up in your mind and set against God He will go through and burn them up. He says so. Fury is not in Me. Who would set the briars and thorns against Me in battle? I would go through them; I would burn them up, for let him take hold of My strength and make peace with Me and he shall make peace with Me. This is getting near, access, ingress, coming to God. And God speaks thus in the gospel - "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden". 'Tis God who speaks that and God in that most wonderful and beautiful consideration - God in your own nature. It is a soothing thing when it comes into a sinner's heart, God in human flesh, Here a sinner beholds as in a glass the glory of the Lord. This is the life, and there are two or three particular points to be noticed in this as, in the first place, there is righteousness. Solomon says, "Righteousness delivereth from death". Nothing else can do it. Nothing could do it. Tears are not righteousness. They may be true tears of repentance but they are not righteousness. Repentance is not righteousness, though it is a righteous thing to repent. Grief for sin is not righteousness, though it is a good and a sweet thing to have grief for sin. Doing your best is not righteousness. Duties fulfilled, fulfilled with more or less perfection; that is not righteousness. But it must be righteousness, dear friends, it must be righteousness. Ah, here God and man can meet and never sunder. Think of it. So this is a deliverance from death and a deliverance from death is life, real life. Then examine this. Have you a perception by faith of that righteousness of the Lord Jesus which is, as it were, Himself? "This is the Name wherewith He shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness". No man will ever get to heaven without this and no man will ever be shut out of heaven who has this. The next thing is the removal of sin, the remission of sin. The remission of sin is the removal of unholiness, pollution, and that fits the person for the presence of God. What an amazing thing. For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to bring this mystery and this mercy to pass, the removal of sin from a sinner, and I would just propound a question. If a person is righteous, if a person has sin removed from him, so that God can say of him, that he is righteous, and that there

is no spot in him, what is there, what can there be found in that person as a reason why God should hold aloof from him? It is worth your consideration and mine. It may come near to us yet. Is it so? Has God brought righteousness? He says He will. I will bring near My righteousness. Has He brought it? Has He forgiven sin? Then humbly, reverently I would say, in the person so blessed God will find no reason for holding aloof from that person. He will bring him near; He will indulge him by bringing him near; He will hold fellowship with him. This is life eternal. It is not for time only. If it were only for time, it would not be eternal. A break in this would end the eternity of it. Time does not come into the reckoning of eternity. Now sinner, this knowledge, in some measure, you must have if you are saved or to be saved. "This is life eternal that they might know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

Now I would, in the next place, bring before you some particular things which will evidence the possession of this eternal life. First, the fear of God, the clean, holy, tender, filial fear of God. Not the fear of a slave; the filial fear of a child whose heart says that he would never displease God, and therefore he comes into that word in the first Epistle of John "He that is born of God sinneth not for His seed remaineth in him", and he cannot sin. He can never sin as he has sinned. John does not contradict himself in that Epistle when he says, if we say we have no sin, we are wrong and also says, he that is born of God cannot sin. A man born of God can never wilfully, persistently, and of love and choice, commit sin, but he has got within him the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts and so he painfully enters into the experience of the Apostle Paul - "The good that I would I do not". O but it is so different. If you look at one who says to the Lord, depart from me for I desire not the knowledge of Thy ways, and who finds pleasure in sin in some form, and another who says if I had no trouble in providence, the one trouble that I have in my heart, namely that I am a sinner and fall and I commit sin, the difference is the difference between life and death, light and darkness, and the filial fear of God differing entirely from the fear of slave who would do his duty to avoid the lash. That is the mark; if you have the life of God in you, you fear the Lord, and that will make you greatly desire in the next place the second evidence, to walk with Him. Enoch walked with God. To walk

with God means this, first, an agreement with Him. How can two walk together except they be agreed? Are you agreed that God is right and you are wrong? Agreed that His attributes, His perfections must be honoured. Agreed that He is a sovereign and that you are at His disposal, and you would not be at yours, if you might. Are you agreed that His Word is right, His ordinances just, His promises good, His precepts perfect? You are surely agreed with God if you have His life. Then you will want to walk with Him. Jesus promises that some shall walk with Him in white. They shall walk with Him in white for they have not defiled their garments by a persistent backsliding. They have not defiled their garments by receiving error of doctrine and walking in error of experience and carelessly walking. They shall walk with Me in My righteousness. See if you are careful about walking with God. Another evidence will be a humble confidence in Him. It appertains to Him to do for us what He has promised; it appertains to Him to rule. He is King of kings; Lord of lords. If it were put to you who fear Him and want to walk with Him - Now in whose hands would you wish to be? At whose disposal? In whose hands do you want your matters to be? Where would you leave them with humble confidence that they will all turn out well, according to His direction? Why, you will go, perhaps, in your mind to the Lamb in heaven as it were, as it had been slain, and bless God that that Lamb was worthy to approach the Ancient of Days and take the Book out of His hand and loose the seals and open it. There you will be and go with the Psalmist and say "My times are in Thy hand", and there I would wish to leave them always. Burdens are weighed out, difficult paths are measured, heavy temptations are permitted, sorrows in the family and difficulties in the business and various depressions come, just as He will. O it is good to be in His hand. Of all the comforts of the gospel this is one of the sweetest, that your times are in the hands of God and while you believe that it keeps you from stumbling. Of some of the difficulties that rise you will say "What shall I receive good at the hand of the Lord and shall I not receive evil?" And then you may reflect also this - Christ promised tribulation as well as peace. I have been thinking a little this week at different times of two things that are vastly different. One is the doctrine of divine chastisement. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten" What a beautiful doctrine it is. One may say, you would not speak so if you had certain trouble. Well, I am not ignorant of

trouble, but I do say it, it is a beautiful doctrine; as beautiful, yea infinitely more beautiful than you esteem - a wise father whose love is strong enough and whose wisdom is firm enough to move him to chastise a disobedient son. Ah you need not run away from tribulation, bitter though it may be in some particulars. The other matter is this, that there is an oven that shall burn up the wicked, root and branch. Take these two - here is a man afflicted, sorely troubled in providence and the Lord speaks to his conscience, by it draws him from the world, draws him from himself, poor, miserable self and brings him to the divine Majesty and gives him to lie down in the will of God in the affliction. Rutherford, I think, somewhere says very beautifully, the will of God is a bed to lie down on in a fire. Blessed be God if He has taken the trouble to chastise us and to bring the flail of a separating providence to separate the chaff from the wheat. Do not forget the difference between the threshing machine and a sword. They are not the same. The threshing machine has to do with the chaff, to separate it and leave the wheat. And when God sends trouble to a child of His, that is what it is, the old Roman tribulum is sent, passed over the wheat, that the chaff which hid the wheat may be separated from it, but the oven, the full judgments of God. Now a sign of a child of God is that he has chastisement" "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore and repent." Another thing is this, that no child of God is left in chastisement and affliction to perish. He will be with thee - says the Word to a child of God - in six troubles, yea also in seven. You will search the Scriptures in vain if you search them to find a child of God left to perish in some affliction. If you look for the wailing and grieving, and sometimes fretting, of a child of God in trouble, you will find plenty of that, but you will find God is faithful, God is faithful. I will never leave thee; I will never forsake thee. I will be with thee in six troubles and when the seventh comes, though you may feel as David did. He said it was better for him to get out of the land than to be continually exposed to the anger and the might of Saul. He said there was but a step between him and death, but he never took it in the way in which he expected and feared. God delivers His people and it is written by the Apostle Peter by inspiration "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation". And lastly, I say lastly not because the thing is exhausted, but I must just conclude. Lastly you will find this, in the church of Christ, and in every individual child

of God sooner or later, namely, he will be praising God. "I love the Lord" said the Psalmist "because He hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live". "I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord will I sing." "My soul shall rejoice in the Lord". Why? "For He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61 v 10) Praises, why they are in this Book, and shall they be nowhere else? Shall they never be in the hearts of the people of God? Come, you saints who complain perhaps a good deal of not enough. Plenty calls for complaints than we make, but come now, has God done nothing good for you? No handfuls of purpose left for you to glean? Have there been no times of goodness sweetly felt? No glimpses of the Lord Jesus? No testimonies of His favour? You would not dare to say, no. Well then, thank Him, praise Him. Remember that it is good to give thanks unto the Lord and praise is comely for the upright. And remember even this, which seems one of the most astonishing things, when you consider what the Lord says about the matter, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me". Why, when you sit at your table and sometimes feel your heart rise up to thank God, not for the bread that perisheth only or chiefly, but because He has given you the bread of life, what is that? "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me". When, in your heart, you thank Him that He reigns and bless Him for reigning over you and sometimes reigning in you, that is offering praise. Well, we shall soon have done with this life. Have we eternal life? Then we are to spend an eternity with God. Think of being the guest of God in heaven. Here He makes us His guests at times, but think of being His guest for ever. "This is life eternal that they might know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

AMEN.