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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham at Galeed
Chapel, Brighton, on Sunday Evening, 13th
January 1924

TEXT: JOHN 20 verses 15 and 16.

"Jesus saith unto her, woman why weepest thou, whom seekest thou? She supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto Him, Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni, which is to say Master."

Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God by miracles and signs and wonders, was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God into the hands of wicked men. They took Him, crucified and slew Him. The most horrible, wicked thing that can possibly have been done. Nothing for wickedness was ever done before, nothing for wickedness like it shall ever be done in the future of the world's life, but it was according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Christ poured out His soul unto death, said "It is finished", bowed His head, and gave up the ghost, and was buried, and His enemies appear to have thought that they had got rid of Him, yet some suspicion that it was not quite as they expected, was in their mind, and they went to Pilate and said to him "That deceiver" - O what a terrible word - "That deceiver said that He would rise again the third day. Now, lest His disciples should come by night and steal Him away, make the sepulchre sure, set a watch upon it." Pilate told them what they could do. There was a watch set, but the men slept. What could these poor men do where omnipotence was at work. God, we are told, loosed the pains of death, for the Lord Jesus could not be holden of death. How could He? How could He be holden of death? There were two reasons why He could not. First that He owed nothing to God or the law, and second that He was omnipotent. God raised Him from the dead. Throw down this building said He, and I will raise it up again the third day. Thus spake He of His resurrection. The disciples, when they saw

their Lord die, seemed to die themselves. Their hopes died, their expectations died, and seemed to be buried with their Master. Still there was an attraction which they could not at the moment understand in some and they went early to the sepulchre. The woman, Mary Magdalene, out of whom the Lord had cast seven devils and healed her, with the other women went early, while it was yet dark, to the sepulchre, and they found the stone rolled away. The great stone, that was set to keep the Lord a prisoner, they found rolled away and an angel spoke "He is not here, He is risen", and the women ran to Peter and John and told them what they had seen and heard and these two disciples ran to the sepulchre. John reached there first, and looked in. Peter, with all the ardour of his disposition, when he arrived at the sepulchre, went in, and saw it empty, and the linen clothes and the napkin that had been about the body and head of Christ, wrapped up, deliberation marking everything there. And then the Lord Jesus appeared to Mary. She spoke to the angels. They asked her why she wept. They say unto her "Woman why weepest thou". She saith unto them "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. He held her eyes, kept her from, for the moment, recognising Him, as He did the eyes of those two disciples a little later who were walking to Emmaus, and He said to her "Woman why weepest thou, whom seekest thou". She, supposing Him to be the gardener, saith unto Him "Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him and I will take Him away." I, a poor, fragile woman, strong in love, longing to see Him and have possession "I will take Him away". She did not know what she said. God is not offended with the ignorance of love. Warm love burned in her, though she was ignorant at the moment. God is not offended with warm love for Himself, though it expresses itself ignorantly, as here. Then said the Lord "Mary". He had said "woman" before because He intended that for the moment she should not recognise Him. When He would make Himself known to her, He

used the familiar name, and the accent of His voice at once struck her and she said "Rabboni" which is to say my Master. These words so beautifully set forth, first of all a marvellous fact, namely, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. A fact which is this day being discounted very much by some, so called, religious teachers. A fact which has been a joy, a strength, a peace, a comfort to the church ever since the day when it took place, which will be the same fountain of goodness and peace, life and hope to the church militant while there is such a church on the earth. A fact which will fill heaven and eternity with light and glory, and all the souls of the saints with everlasting bliss. The resurrection of Christ is expressly stated in the scriptures and it seems that, because the Holy Ghost knew well how that the death and burial of Christ were being stressed by His enemies, that that deceiver was now out of the way, led His disciples to lay particular emphasis on that truth, the Lord is risen. So we read in the Acts again and again that the Apostles mightily bore witness to the resurrection of Christ. It was their hope. Says Paul to the Corinthians, if Christ be not risen, our hope is vain, our preaching is vain, your faith is yet vain, we are found false witnesses for God, for we have borne testimony that Christ was raised from the dead, who is not raised from the dead if so be that the dead rise not.

If we are taught of God, the resurrection of Christ has a place in our faith, our hope, our comfort, our love, our peace and our prospects. Let us look at this case, thus, as enabled. Here was Mary Magdalene; she had been delivered from the possession of seven devils. The Lord had cast out the evil spirits and made her one of His disciples, an affectionate disciple. She had ventured out in the dark, before it was day-light, to the sepulchre, which she knew, or believed, did even then contain her Lord. She saw a vision of angels who told her that He was risen, but she was weeping, she was seeking. Let us look at these two points. She was weeping; she had lost something. Not a piece of silver, but her everything. She had lost something.

O my friends, this was the cause of her weeping. Do we weep for His absence? If He is absent from any of you who fear His great name, if you have not had recently a visit from Him, if He seems to hold aloof from you, are you enabled to venture out in the dark to seek Him, to venture wherever you may expect or hope to find Him? Do you venture to seek Him? He is to be found. Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Weeping expresses some depth of trouble, expresses some fervency of mind. This poor woman wept, for she had lost, as she thought, her all. It is a great thing to weep and speaking now generally, I will here say that there are two great reasons for weeping in the church of Christ, in every individual member of that church. First, sin. He who never weeps for sin does not know what grace is. A man may not weep literally, tears may not trickle down his face. It is to some an exceedingly trying thing, they can never shed a tear. Weeping does not come readily to some people, but there is a weeping in spirit, a mourning over sin, a looking on it as that awful thing that God hates, looking on it as sin. Not simply as something wrong, which deserves and will receive punishment, but as something that is contrary to the nature of God. You may, without having great terrors of hell and dread of damnation, mourn many a day because you perceive that your nature is contrary to God, and I would say here, that I would rather esteem this kind of sorrow than the terrors that some may feel and give loud expression to. The terror of a slave may make the slave cry out very bitterly. The terrors of one who is arrested for some crime may be great upon him, and yet neither of them hates sin; neither of them cares for that so long as punishment can be avoided, but a child of God hates sin at times, and perceives that he does so because it is against God's very Being. You may have perceived sometimes that your nature is so against God that you would be glad if He were not. This will be a sorrow, perhaps unexpressed, except when before the Lord. Deicide is in our nature; we would be glad as we are fallen creatures if there were no God. The thought of God is a restraint on

man and as long as God keeps that in a nation it is one of the greatest bulwarks against the violence of sin that can be and when that is taken off a nation, then the great bulwark is removed, and who can say what will take place. God, if it please Him, keep this alive in the minds of our fellow countrymen. When a child of God has this conviction, it is a deep thing with him. O he is against God and feels it. God is against him as he believes, and he mourns, he realises something of the blackness and the turpitude of sin and how that it deserves the deepest, lowest hell, the severest possible punishment under a broken law. My friends, do you weep for sin? Has it cost you anything? Did it ever keep you awake for five minutes? Were you ever really under the feeling, powerful feeling, that you are against God, contrary to Him; that your nature is that way, against God; that your conduct is a rebellion against His holy will? I would value all conviction of that kind. Terrors may be without it, they may accompany it, often do, but it is a great, very great blessing to have true conviction. It comes from the light of God shining on sin; it comes from the law of God applied in some way to the conscience. You may not have had a distinct thing of that kind and may think now I have never had a law work, but conviction of who God is, and of your breaches of His holy law, will prove, if you are so blessed, that you have a law work. By the law is the knowledge of sin.

Then there is a weeping for the absence of Christ which argues a knowledge of Him. Who can mourn the absence of a person of whose existence he is ignorant, of whose beauties and excellencies, he is ignorant? Do you mourn an absent Christ? See Him in the scriptures, but feel Him far from your own heart? Hear Him preached, but feel that the word does not come near to you, is but like a picture, and you look at it, and if it be well drawn, you admire it, but at the same time say, alas I feel nothing, no power, no unction, no entrance? Then your sighs go up to heaven - O that I knew Christ. O that He were with me, that He would be in my heart, that I might know for a certainty that He loved me and gave Himself for me, that I might

be able to say "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Take courage from this poor woman. Remember this, that the Lord looked on her weeping and did not spurn her because she was ignorant of Him but said "Why weepest thou" to draw out her heart. These two things do belong to all true christians. Weeping for sin, over sin. Weeping over an absent Christ. Happy he who weeps because He has not Christ with him. Happy he who would gladly part with all to feel his Lord and be found in Him. Blessed is that sinner who can say "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee O God". Remember that the highly favoured prophet Jermeiah mourned and he said "The Comforter which should relieve my soul is far from me." Therefore he was pained, his heart was pained. Why weepest thou sinner? Why weepest thou this evening? What are these heavy sighs that go to God silently, unexpressed? Do you say because I have n ot the Lord? Because I am afraid I have no interest in Him; that He has no care for me; that He did not love me and give Himself for me. Is it not because you cannot get that sacred sense of His holy blessed presence that you want? May He who recognised the tears of this seeker, this woman, who came to His sepulchre thinking to find even solace if she saw His body there, look on you. He looked on her. She saw an empty tomb; she saw an unrecognised Saviour; she heard His voice and did not know even that but He said "Why weepest thou" If Christ enquire into the cause of your sorrow, would your answer be this "They have taken away my Lord" Ah, men have taken Him away from us as much as in them lies. The critic has taken Him away as to His divinity. There is no Christ as to the vicarious offering of Himself; there is no Christ as to His blessed birth; there is no Christ as to His glorious resurrection; there is no Christ to-day, and do you weep because they have taken Him away, taken Him out of the Bible - He is a mere man - taken Him from the cross as to the efficacy of His atonement, and just hang Him up as an example and nothing more. Taken Him away from the grave in some way of natural resurrection that has no grace, no life, no power, and no glory in it.

And then He asks her a second question. "Whom seekest thou?" Who is it you want? Why are you here in the dark? Why have you come to this sepulchre, it is empty.

"Whom seekest thou." My friends, let us look at this. Whom seek we? Whom seek we when we go to the scriptures? For whom do you look? After whom do you make enquiry? Is the Lord there? Is He in that Psalm? Is He in that gospel? Is He in that Epistle? And, as you read, do you look for Him? Seek to have some gracious vision of Him, vision of faith of Him even. I do not mean a visionary religion, but a sober knowledge of Christ, as He is seen in the scriptures and revealed therein by His good Spirit. Whom seek you when you read the word of God? Is it Moses? You will flee from Moses if he begins to speak to you. Is it an absolute God? You will perish for ever if you find Him. Whom seek you my friends? Is it a notional God? If so, you will find notion wont save you from your sins. Is it a God of empty theory, beautifully expressed, perhaps? You will find emptiness there, no life, no power. Is it God in Christ? Is it the beloved, and only begotten Son of God incarnate, born of the virgin Mary, suffering under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead, buried, raised again, ascended into heaven, is that the God you seek? Can you say, "yes, I seek Him when I read the scriptures; there is an empty place in my heart that none can fill but the Lord Jesus, a wound in my soul by sin and law that none can heal but the good physician, a poverty that none can remove but that blessed One who said "Durable riches and righteousness are with Me." O, if you seek Him in the word of God, the day will come when you will find Him. Whom seekest thou? O seeker, is it the Lord Jesus? Are your desires fixed there? If you have love, can you say sometimes it centres there, in that Man whom God approved, with whom God was, and who gave Himself a sacrifice to God? Satisfaction was wanted by Mary. She had had her Lord with her. She had been healed by Him. Sin had been cast out by Him and she knew the benefit of this blessed One, and so what could comfort her but His presence again? Nothing.

Christ does heal sinners. He does cast out sin, as to its dominion and guilt. He does give peace. His presence gives peace. This man shall be our peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land. They seek Him in the word of God. Go to the scriptures, leave the critic. God will deal with him one day. Leave the critic, leave the flippant critic, the critic who cuts to pieces with the pen-knife of his criticism this book. Leave him with God. Seek the word of God. Seek Him in His own word, and the Spirit wont leave you destitute always and altogether. Where else is He? Sat at the throne of grace. "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

What is it that troubles you? Indwelling sin. What causes fear of the future? Indwelling sin. What makes you afraid of, and feel the weakness of, your heart through sin? What makes you feel sometimes so desolate and also so desparate that you cannot do without God, that you cry and shout, though even He may seem to be shutting out your prayer? A want of God, a lack, and there is a place to go to. My friends, there is a place. "Come boldly to the throne of grace." What is the throne of grace? The Lord himself. No empty throne. No elevated seat vacant with a halo about it even, but the Lord Himself. "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary" That is the Lord. Mercy, where is it in all its fulness, but in Jesus. Grace, where is it in all its fulness, but in Jesus. So when sinners go to the throne of grace to seek the Lord, when they get there, they, in some way and measure find Him. Relief comes there. Help comes there. Hope rises there. Love warms there. Expectations come there. The heart becomes eloquent in prayer when the lips are silent and when there are unutterable groanings ascending from the heart. Why, to seek the throne of grace is to seek the Redeemer, the High Priest of our profession, the prophet to tell good things to come, the King to rule in the heart and rule for the creature, a poor, depending sinner. To go there is to seek the eternal love of God and the sweet pardon of sin and the

blessed justification of a sinner and the sanctification of a polluted one. The throne of grace is the place my friends. God give us power to traffic there. Go there empty, seek wealth without anything, seek bread and milk and wine, without price, and you will find all in a crucified, risen, glorified Saviour. Whom seek thee? Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God's Son, Mary's Son, one Person. Jesus Christ is the Saviour, the anointed Saviour, given by His Father to save the lost.

We should be very thankful, as many of us as can say we cannot do without the Lord, and would not if we might. We should be very thankful to Almighty God, the Holy Ghost, if there is in us a hunger and a thirst for God. If we can honestly say "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul, our souls, after Thee of God"; can say, "As a thirsty land wants water, so we thirst after the living God." Christ crucified; Christ buried; Christ risen; Christ in heaven. A grand object. The only worthy Man, Almighty God. Is He the one we seek? How it would make the heart dance for joy if He would come into it. How it would revive every hope that has been, as it were, forlorn and all but dead. How it would bring peace and comfort into the conscience through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Therefore, anyone who seeks Jesus Christ, has before him this great wonder. "Mary". He will say it. That is to say, He will speak so as that you will know the voice. "My sheep know My voice"

Whom seekest thou in the next place in the ministry? The ministry is given of God. I speak now generally. A gospel ministry is of God, and if you carefully peruse the scriptures in this particular you will see that God has ordained it for the good, the edification of the saints, and the Apostle Paul was a pattern for every God sent minister in his resolution to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It is a great thing to be a servant of the Most High, for when God sends a servant to do something He tells him what it is that he is to do. If He sends a messenger He gives him a message. "Go preach the gospel in all the world", that is is the commission given to the servants of the Most High God. Therefore, godly hearers are

warranted to go when they go to hear, to seek the Lord Jesus. Will He speak by the servant to-day? Will He give the minister some word that will meet a bad case? Will He give him a word that will tell of a great Saviour for a great sinner? Of one who justifies the ungodly that believeth in Jesus; that proclaimeth a fountain open for sin and for uncleanness. Ah, it is a great thing when a minister is enabled to be true to his charge and to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Hearers may be improperly critical. They may be properly critical. They may be improperly critical if they go to hear the sermon and criticise it in part - it is not well put together, sentences were not what they should have been, the whole thing was rather a patchy work. And so, they get no good. They may be critical, properly critical, as when they go with a bad case and if the minister does not preach a great and a good Saviour. They may say that is not right. If he sets up evidences which a natural person, naturally religious, may have, they may say that wont do. They may say mentally, put no foundation for us to build on but the Person of Christ, speak of no way of pardon, but by His blood, of no justification but in His righteousness, of no grace to sanctify, but that that flows from Christ. Do you seek Him? O God grant I may never bring anything or anybody into the pulpit save this Blessed One, the Lord Jesus, and if I do, through grace preach Him, then you have a warrant to expect at times that God will give something. Dr. Goodwin has a very encouraging word for ministers. "Every little accession of grace" he says "is adding to the body of Christ" and so if it pleases God to bring a little grace to you now and a touch again and some hint about the Saviour, it wont be in vain that one preaches.

I believe in the next place that the saints sometimes do seek and find the Lord Jesus in His dealings with them in providence. If He is pleased to sanctify to you your deepest distress, you will get something of Christ, for He is sanctification, and He sends His Spirit to sanctify. If He is pleased, by trouble, to make an empty

place in your heart, or enlarge the place that is already empty, that He may come into it and fill it with Himself, then you will find good. You will find Him in His dealings with you if He is pleased to bring some good as He did to Paul when He said to him "My grace is sufficient for thee" Then your providential trial will not be in vain.

Let this be the test for us this evening. Whom do we seek? Say poor sinner who are you seeking? Do you want to be fit for heaven? You say, "yes". Who can make you fit? Do you want to be enabled to live as you ought to do? Who can enable you so to live? Do you want to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called? Who has grace to enable you for that? Think of these things. Who are you seeking? and God grant the answer may be Jesus. "Sir, if thou have borne Him hence" She supposed that the gardener or the bailiff of the place would know all about what had recently taken place, would be no stranger to the great transaction of the cross and to the burial in a new sepulchre in this garden, and so, without naming her Lord, she said "If thou have borne Him hence, tell me and I will take Him away." Now comes the great word, like an answer. It was the answer. Jesus saith unto her "Mary" She had heard that name before; she had heard that voice before - "Mary". If it is twenty years since you heard it, and He should speak it again to you, your own blessed name, written in the book of life, you would understand it, you would recognise it. Oh, it is a heavenly voice. Its accents are sweet and wonderful, penetrating. Look at the effect of that voice on Thomas. "Except I shall see in His hand the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe" I wonder if there is a Thomas here, seeking some indubitable evidence set up in your own mind, saying, "unless I get such and such things, I wont believe." If you find, sinking into your ear, a voice like this "Thomas, reach hither thy finger, put it into the print of the nails; reach hither thy hand, thrust it into My side", O what a convincing, wonderful, humbling power you would feel immediately in the word. So here "Mary" was a voice that made her at once know before whom she was standing. She was

standing in the presence of God in the image of Christ. "My Master, My Lord, My Redeemer" She found Him near. He was near. He was with her. His voice filled her heart, and it fills you when you hear it. We are carried away from the dark and miserable region of guessing, carried away from the gloom of supposing, into the sweet region of light and life and holy certainty so that as each blest this way says in a spirit of worship and adoration "Rabboni".

Did you ever call Jesus Lord? Says the Apostle Paul "I give you to understand that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost". Did you ever go, out of this Divine Person, and without the sweet assurance of an interest in Him, say "Lord God?" Did you ever perceive in the Man Christ Jesus, now at the right hand of the Father, true Almighty God, and say to Him, "Lord God" and yet at the same time perceive how that sacred human nature, born of the virgin Mary, is united to His eternal Deity, that you could see Jesus Christ, true Almighty God and feel a desire to worship Him? If you ever get as far as that, I can tell you you want to go another step and that a great step. You want to say "my Lord" and fall at His feet and humbly worship Love Divine. Then you see not a dead Christ to carry away to some place your own affection would take Him, but you see a living Christ, the living and true God, and He enters your heart and dwells there by faith. He is your hope; He is your strength; He is your love; He is your Lover; He is your God and Saviour, Prophet, Priest and King, All and in All.

What do you say then to this question? I may put it without any impropriety as I put it to myself "Whom seekest thou?" I thought this afternoon that I would say to Him "I seek the Lord, want Him". There is an empty place in the heart of a child of God that the whole world could not fill. God of gods, Lord of lords, Light of light, Life of life, Jesus Christ only can fill the empty place. And a believer can say sometimes

Emptied of earth I fain would be,
The world, myself, and all but Thee

and

For heaven alone my heart prepare
And have my conversation there

Now I must leave it. The passage is very beautiful. It sets before us two persons, the Person of the Saviour, and the person of the believer who seeks and cannot rest till he finds the Saviour. Are you the sinner? Are you the seeker? Are you the believer, saying I cannot rest. I cannot rest on my bed, I cannot rest in my business, I cannot rest in my family, I cannot rest in myself. I can rest nowhere until I find Him who is the centre and the circumference of my hope and my life and my desire and my aim and my prayer and all my expectation. The Lord give us to be seekers of Christ, then certainly if the scripture is true we shall be finders.

11/11/11