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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday evening 4 January 1920

JOHN 3 v 14 and 15

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
even so must the Son of man be lifted up:
That whosoever believeth in Him should not
perish, but have eternal life."

We shall only value the mercy God gives to a person if He graciously, thoroughly convinces us in our hearts of our sin. If we are not sensible sinners we shall never be sensible of the mercy of God in Christ. We may please ourselves with religion, but

True religion's more than notion
Something must be known and felt

Therefore happy is the man whom God correcteth, whom He chasteneth out of His law, and chastiseth with the stripes of conviction, because such a man comes to know the solace of love in the Person and love and blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Sin known and felt makes up a heavy cross, a bitter cup, but it prepares the soul to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Therefore if you, my dear hearers, are destitute of a sound, thorough conviction of sin, you will never want the Man Christ Jesus as He is here spoken of, or rather speaks of Himself. "Even so must the Son of man be lifted up". There is none to the Father like His Son, and if we are born again there will be none like Him to us. Where the Father's affection is, there our faith and love will be, and we shall say at times - None but Jesus can do helpless sinners good. The gospel is in this text, a very full gospel, part of which I endeavoured to express to you this morning. After speaking of what was intended by the word lifted up, we saw that in the first place it respects His death - "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This said He signifying what manner of death He should die". But after that it means His resurrection and ascension into heaven, where He sits at the right hand of God, where He is as a High Priest ever living to make

intercession for all them that come unto God by Him. It means that as there is none like Christ in the Scriptures - that the Scriptures lift Him up and it is as if He were the only Person to be noticed in the Scriptures - so in the ministry He is to be lifted up; that all true ministers are to find their chief business in preaching the Person and the work of Christ; that all other subjects which please men must be abandoned in the pulpit, have no place. May it ever be a characteristic of the ministry here, both with regard myself and to all who shall come after me, that there shall be one subject and only one, as said the Apostle Paul, "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." This is the source of life, of true experience, the source of all godliness, of all true separation from the world. May the God of all grace help one to preach Christ, to preach Him properly. I mean not merely to utter His Name, but to preach Him properly. He is to be lifted up and is lifted up and glorified by His Spirit. The promise of Christ is that the Spirit shall glorify Me for He shall receive of the things of Christ and show them to all His disciples. There Christ is high, having a Name given to Him above every name that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess, confess that He is Lord of all.

Well one might now say, insofar as He is lifted up as one speaks about Him, - "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" What was His position here? What do you think of His groans, His bloody sweat, His vicarious death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension into heaven? He is to be lifted up in His precious love; the love of Christ which passeth knowledge is to be known. Says the Apostle to the Ephesians, I pray for you that ye may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. You may know a little of it; even as you may take up a little water out of the sea and the sea remains full, you may know a little of the love of Christ which in its fullness passeth knowledge. The love of Christ is made known in several ways to His children and He is lifted up in that His love is thus made known as first in His incarnation and death. Love brought Him from heaven to the earth; love took Him to the cross, to the grave. The greatest love that He could show He did show in giving His life a ransom for many. That is one way in which the love of Christ is known, set up, lifted up. All other loves die; in the face of this they fade away to

nothingness. This is eternal, fixed in the decree of God upon men who should be created in time. This is stronger than death, death which He who is Love should undergo voluntarily. Stronger than many waters; as a divine flame. All the waters of sorrow and of evil and of death itself could not quench this love. Love beyond purchase. If a man should offer all the gold and silver of his house for this love, the price would be utterly contemned. That is one way in which the love of Christ is known, exhibited in the Scripture, set forth as the mighty moving of God to sinners.

It is known, in the next place, by the Holy Ghost taking it and shedding it abroad in the heart where it becomes a flame, an influence, a life, a peace, a comfort, a joy, lifting up the soul above all sorrow, giving it power to believe that all is well whatever remains to be endured. This, once felt, is never wholly forgotten or given up.

If once the love of Christ we feel
Upon our hearts impressed
The mark of that celestial seal
Can never be erased (344)

Confusion may erase it from your memory for a time, and temptation and guilt may make you wonder if ever you had it, but it will come again.

And in the next place the love of Christ is lifted up and made known in His rebuking and chastening the objects of His love. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten" This is a very hard thing to believe when the rebukes and the chastening come, a very difficult thing to believe when only smart is inflicted, when comfort is gone and when the Lord appears to hide His face. And all this said and all this done, you can sum up in one word "chastened". "The Lord hath chastened me sore". But He would not have taken the trouble to do it if I may so speak, if he had not loved you. You would not take the trouble to chasten one in the street quarrelling in mud, in wickedness, to whom you had no relationship, for whom you had no love. But if you saw your own son behaving improperly, doing that which was a disgrace to his own name, doing that that was contrary to your

commandment, to your injunction, contrary to all the interests that he himself had, what would you do to him. You would take him home, you would correct him, chastise him; not, for the time, admit him to your table, send him his food to his room and let him know that you were displeased, angry, and the chastening would not obliterate the relationship, but be an evidence of it and of the love of it. So the love of Christ; He makes it known powerfully and eventually sweetly in His chastisement. Who, having been chastened and having had some of the peaceable fruit of righteousness would do other than bless God for chastening. And the Son of man is lifted up in His love. Greater love hath no man than this; better love has no man than this. Here is the Friend who loveth at all times, who sticketh closer than a brother. He is lifted up in His righteousness, that righteousness which is unto all and upon all that believe, which is their everlasting justification, and their title to bliss. That righteousness that makes them just as if they had done no sin. A mystery this, and one does not wonder that men should call it imputed nonsense because it is against every accepted thought, canon of morality, as men speak, that a wicked man should be forgiven and be as if he had not been wicked and be treated with all the love and kindness and smiles and favours and blessings that God can bestow on creatures who have no sin; that one who had alienated himself from God should be by God Himself reconciled and forgiven and taken to His bosom and treated as a dearly beloved child; that he should be indulged with the sweetest things of heaven, and be promised heaven itself; that God should see in Him no sin, no flaw, nothing blameworthy, but He should treat him as a man who is in every way conformed to the divine will. This is what human nature, human ideas of justice and goodness can never, never receive. I do not wonder that men deny it who have no teaching, no Holy Ghost in them. I do not wonder that unenlightened men who deal with the Scriptures, and criticise the Scriptures, should deny the blessed truth of justification by the imputation to a person of the righteousness of Christ. But O, this is the truth, or there is no heaven, for, said Christ - "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." And Paul was a Pharisee, as touching the law a blameless man, so he says himself in the Philippians. And yet that very righteousness, that blamelessness to which he honestly laid

claim - laid claim when he was not a blind Pharisee but an enlightened Christian man, a true believer in the Son of God - then he said that he had nothing to do with that, his own righteousness; he renounced it and that was that he might win Christ and be found in Him, not having his own righteousness, which was of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ. Sinner, Christ and Christ alone must be your righteousness if you are to be justified and go to heaven. None of your own righteousness will do; 'tis but filthy rags; the Scripture speaks that, filthy rags; no better than the tattered rags and polluted garments of the prodigal son.

He is to be lifted up in His power. Able to save, powerful to forgive sin; that ye may know that the Son of God hath power to forgive sin. Well, if a person leaves this world without the forgiveness of sin there is no place for him in heaven, but if a sinner receives the forgiveness of sin there is no place for him in hell. Heaven is his home, God is His Father, Christ is His brother and Christ will present him to His Father. O forgiveness is great, and Christ has power to forgive sin. He is to be lifted up as being Almighty to save from all evil, to deliver from all the evil of indwelling sin. And really sometimes some of you might have thought that this was the most of all to you. Would the Lord subdue your sin, indwelling sin; would He kindly do it. And if so, He must be often doing it, very often, inasmuch as indwelling sin is perpetually at work, ever lusting, moving, striving, struggling, wriggling, in its deceitfulness, in its power, in its ceaseless temptation and seeking to be, both admitted and indulged. And there is only One who can save us, Jesus Christ, the Almighty God, and I would lift Him up before you if I could. Any of you to whom indwelling sin is a bitter experience, who would do good but find yourselves unable quite to do, and sometimes almost as unwilling, and who then have to groan and mourn and enter into the Apostle's language in the spirit of his language when he says "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened"; who can run well with a limping Psalmist who said "Woe is me that I dwell in Meschec"; to you I would lift Him up and say, Behold an Almighty Saviour.

He is to be lifted up in His promise. His promise is "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," and that means wherever you go,

whatever you are, however you suffer, however you fail, there will be One with you. Christ was with the Church in the wilderness and O, if we might but consider that that Church was always grumbling, always failing, The first touch of trouble made them murmur and the difficulties of the wilderness discouraged so that they murmured again and again and the absence of their instructor and of him who was as God's mouth to them, Moses, led them to such a forgetfulness of Egypt, such a forgetfulness of their deliverance, such a forgetfulness of the God who had brought them out of the land of Egypt and the house of bondage, that they made a golden calf and they sat down to feast and rose up to play, and said, These be thy gods O Israel. Would you have thought that that church in the wilderness so blessed, so delivered, so fed, so led, could deal so with God. And yet His promise was with them and He was with them. He chastened them, He slew them, He turned to be their enemy, He delivered them, He helped them, He brought them into the land of promise according to His own oath and covenant. And that same Jesus is with the Church in the wilderness and with the individual members of the Church in the wilderness to help them.

Dost mind the place, the spot of land
Where Jesus did thee meet
How He got thy heart and hand
Thy husband then was sweet

and what thou findest Him at thy best, He's at thy worst the same, and He will ever rest in His love. He is lifted up in His promise. And lastly on this account He is to be lifted up in His faithfulness. "Faithful is He that promised who also will do it". Whatever He said He will perform. He is the Brother that is born for adversity, the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. What a mercy it is to know this Jesus Christ. What a favour ever to have seen Him by faith.

Now Christ in the next verse tells us of the great end that was to be accomplished by His lifting up. "That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life." And this gives us the grand distinction between natural and spiritual religion, that is to say, between the church and the world, between a believer and an

unbeliever. Faith is the grand distinction. If you have no faith you will have nothing else of a spiritual kind and so, this being of such vital importance, may the Lord help us to look very particularly at it for a short time. "That whosoever believeth". First of all the character is to be noticed. "Whosoever" sets up no such qualifications as we should naturally imagine would be set up. It means whosoever of any nation, of any position, Jew, Greek, bond, free, rich, poor; whosoever of any description believeth with a vital faith in this blessed Person as lifted up, shall not perish in that condition in which he finds and feels himself. This is important. Whatever publican, harlot, wicked man, is brought to look to an uplifted Christ by saving faith shall not perish in that sin in which he feels himself to be; shall not perish in that condemnation he realises in his conscience, shall not perish in those difficulties which entangle him, shall not perish in that ignorance which confuses him, in that death that makes him feel only just fit for perdition. 'Tis a great word, a very great word, very particular; a pointing word which points to a person. "Whosoever" does not take in, so to speak, nations; it takes in individuals and this is kindly intended of God because individuals find themselves exercised on the point. Individuals find themselves troubled as to whether God will have anything to do with them. Vital religion has connected with it much trouble. True conviction brings much sorrow and many questions into the mind. The teaching of the Spirit makes the persons who are the subject of that teaching say, will the Lord have anything to do with us? Not because the Spirit teaches that doubt or works it, but because the person who is taught to know himself as a sinner finds that the sin of his nature and the sins of his thoughts, the sins of his heart, so work and so rise as to make him say, can ever God dwell in such a heart as this. And so this word is a pointed word. "Whosoever", be he Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female, rich or poor, believeth in Him lifted up shall not perish. God has put a great honour upon this grace of faith. He has made it a wondrous grace and given it a large place in the economy of experimental salvation; has given it a large place in the experience of His saints, and I say this again, this will distinguish between you who have it and all others who have it not. It will make you like a person who, of necessity, comes out of the world and must hang about Christ and on Christ and in your confusion it will bring you to venture wholly on His Name. And in your experience of

distance from God it will bring you to strive to enter in at the straight gate because straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life and, in your depression, which often you may feel to be very distressing, it will bring you to cry mightily. In their distresses they cried unto the Lord and He delivered them. Therefore, look at this "whosoever" and look at this believing. Now faith is a knowledge, and you have the two things here. The Person believed in. The faith that comes to Him must have knowledge in it else how should it come to Him? How should it distinguish Him from another? Christ is not One of many Christs, many Saviours. He is unique, alone, without another. It is said - "I am God and beside Me there is no Saviour". He is not one of a number, He is One alone. "Behold My Servant whom I uphold, Mine Elect in whom My soul delighteth." And O, you will sometimes, as led by the Spirit, get such a view of Him as will make Him, to your view, just what the sun is to your body, to your eye, to your sensation; what the sun is to the earth when he shines in his strength, and you will be a knowing person. Not wise in your own sight, but a knowing person with respect to Jesus Christ. "I know whom I have believed", will sometimes be your language, not early in your days, but later you will say it. "That whosoever believeth". Now if you believe in a person it is not a blind thing, it is not blind, you do not believe indifferently and indiscriminately. When you really believe in a person you believe something about that person; not a nebulous idea with no shape or form, but you believe something about that person. And if you believe in Christ you believe something about Him, something distinct, as, for instance, He is a refuge. "A refuge for sinners the gospel makes known". "The Name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe". Faith goes to Him. Here, says a living soul - you will understand this, many of you - I am in danger, danger from indwelling sin, danger from temptation. Danger in the providence of God surrounds me and what am I to do? I have no help in myself, and I cannot be a refuge to myself and I have no refuge in my circumstances. What then shall I do? Then the Holy Spirit opens up to your view this Christ, this refuge, and what do you then do? Fly to Him. "The Name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe", and "They that know Thy Name will put their trust in Thee for Thou Lord hath not forsaken them that seek Thee." That is one point in believing. Now a refuge serves as a

place of safety when danger surrounds. What is the danger that we are in because of our sins? We are in danger of hell fire. Yes, fear Him that after He hath killed the body hath power to cast the soul into hell. Fear Him. And when people are thoroughly convinced of sin, then it is that they have set before them this refuge in the death of Christ, in the infinite merit of Christ, and their trust is there alone. You rely on that, O believer, dont you? In prayer how often you may have said to the Lord you have no refuge, no plea, no covering, no defence, no security, but what the blood of Christ affords. Says Christ, such a believer shall not perish. The guilt that frightens and depresses, the sin that terrifies and distracts, you shall not perish in. The law that curses, the curse of that law shall not fall on you. Faith in the bleeding Lamb will give liberty, deliverance from that curse. What a mercy this is then to have living faith, a knowing faith, a discerning faith, a faith that peers, and looks and looks again and sees into divine mysteries, divine mercies, and faith that says to Christ - "Entreat me not to leave thee nor to return from following after thee." O let me come, enable me to come, and when I come enable me to remain, to abide. "But have eternal life." How contrary this is to the experience of some people, gracious people, at different times, when instead of having life they feel death, death in everything, death in their praying, death when they read the Scriptures, death on all their exercises. A sort of deathly feeling comes over them, a clammy experience as if, in a short time the religion, such as it is, which they have will die away. Says Christ these believers shall have eternal life, shall outlive their troubles, shall outlive their sins. What a prospect this is, O believer, what a prospect this is. You, you are to outlive your troubles, outlive your sins. You are to outlive all the temptations that come, all the difficulties that arise, all the burdens that you have to bear. And this is Christ's word, not to be broken, "He shall not perish but have eternal life.". We are not eternal creatures; as here we are mortal; therefore to experience this we must die and this turns that which naturally is an evil into good. This turns that from which we all shrink, namely death, into a blessing and as people draw near and yet nearer to their end and God helps them and favours them, the thought of their mortality coming to an end is by no means terrible to them, but rather attractive. They can say, I would not live alway, and when they come to the end to say,

It is better to die than to live. It is a great matter. If you have eternal life through faith you are going to heaven. The earth is not eternal, our bodies are mortal, our circumstances are ever changing. Change God has stamped on all things here. Death is on all things here. A full stop is to be put to our life. And yet "eternal life", so it means heaven; it means being where the Lord is for ever; it means worshipping in the temple not built with hands, walking in the light of a sun that is not made and that does not go down, drinking at fountains of living waters that are ever there, ever flowing, ever filling all who get at them with eternal bliss, with unending satisfaction. "Shall have eternal life". This life is good enough for some of you, is not it? You do not want another life. If it were put to you personally some of you would say, No, we do not think of another life, we only think of this: "What shall we eat and what shall we drink and wherewithal shall we be clothed". This is what you think about, this is the concern you have. And what is the end of it to be? Well, if you die in the same state of mind, you wont cease to be, but you will live another life and you will live endlessly and terribly and in punishment; live for ever and ever, so to speak, in all the sins you have committed and be punished for all the ungodly speeches you have uttered and all the ungodly thoughts you have ever nursed and all the things you have done, and these will be brought up against you in the judgement, and then the last word you will hear from God will be the first you ever heard and a terrible word it is: "Depart from Me ye cursed" - what a solemn thing - "into everlasting fire". But that poor sinner who now may be feeling, what shall I do, what am I to do; I am a poor miserable sinner. I mope, I groan, I try to pray; I cease praying, I read and understand nothing. I hear and nothing comes to me What is to become of me? Well answer this if you can. What do you do sometimes? Well you may say I do try whenever I get any little sense on my mind of the Lord Jesus, I try to run to Him and ask Him to bless me, to save me, to do me good. Well I would say to you, you go on like that. When you can pray to Him, when you can cast a believing look on Him, just go. Make all your wishes known, confess every known and felt sin, and wait at His blessed footstool and the day is coming when you will say, I have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth. And when you so find Him, then you may be able also to say, "I found Him and I would not let Him go" "That whosoever believeth on Me should not perish but

have eternal life.