

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 4 March 1923

JOHN 3 v 14/15

"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."

This is a word for sinners, bitten, dying, ready to perish; poison rankling in their veins, and threatening quickly to put an end to their languishing life. The passage referred to by Christ is in the chapter we were reading just now. (Numbers 21) The people sinned a great sin, when they said - "Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread" It might not, perhaps does not, appear to some to be very, very great, that the people should thus murmur against the Lord, and against Moses, but this was the thing, as I judge; they said they had nothing but the light food which their soul loathed, and that light food was a type of Christ, and therefore the sin was very great. I do not know if any of you have reason to be particularly thankful for one word in the Scripture; I have. "All manner of sin and blasphemy against the Son of Man shall be forgiven". And these people, in this particular sin, proved it. They loathed the light food, a type of Christ, and yet the Lord God provided a remedy; told Moses to make a serpent of brass, and put it on a pole, and lift it up, that everyone who was bitten, and had his eyes turned to that serpent of brass, should live. O dying sinner, if you get a sight of this serpent, that is to say, the great anti-type, Jesus Christ, lifted up, you live. And one would think just to make this remark on the type, that the serpent of brass was ordained of God certainly to be lifted up. A metal which would catch the rays of the sun beating down upon the wilderness, and the people, and making it, as it were, a centre of light, and therefore it would attract the people. No obscure thing, is the gospel. What a mercy it is that God most graciously has put into His Son incarnate all fullness that, when He is lifted up, the eyes of poor, dying souls,

are attracted to Him, and they find in Him, who was lifted up before them, life eternal. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness", as in the midst of these dying people, bitten by fiery serpents, bitten for their sin, so that each bitten one found, when he looked on that serpent, so lifted up, healing coming down into his body, and recovering him, so a poor, wretched, guilty creature, no matter how old in a profession, no matter how debased in his feelings, no matter how bound in his conscience, no matter how guilty he might be feeling, lives when he gets a view of this blessed anti-type, Jesus Christ. The lifting up of Christ is God's ordination, and we may look at it in two or three ways.

First, in respect of the death that Christ died. In this gospel you will remember that Christ Himself said - "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." This spake He concerning the manner of death He should die. The kind of death, the uplifting from the earth of that wondrous Person, despised of men, chastised of God, cursed by the law; this Man crucified should, and will, and does, and ever must, draw all the election of grace to Him. "Will draw all men unto Me." You could not keep away if you had a thousand times more unbelief, fear, bondage, hardness, guilt, and terror than you have, if the attractions of Christ should fall on the eye of your faith; on your desiring, but ruined soul. He does draw when lifted up, because lifting up here, means His death. This spake He of the manner of death He should die. The death of Christ was vicarious. The devil moves numbers of men today in pulpits to deny the vicarious nature of the death of Christ. He was a Substitute. You will want to know if He was one for you, if you are born again. The death of Christ was the death of deaths, was the removal of enmity, enmity in two respects; passive, and active. Passive, as in your nature; as when a child is born, and unconscious of anything, and everything about it, but it is one; there is enmity in that child - "The carnal mind is enmity against God". And Christ has removed that enmity, slew it by dying. He slew that passive enmity, so that the people of God have nothing of that, that shall be a bar. And then the active enmity, what you feel in your spirit sometimes, that readiness to fall in with the cursed advice of Job's wife - "Curse God and die". That feeling of rebellion against God in His providential dealings with you, or in the withholding of mercy for which you cry. That enmity that will

rise up sometimes against the mystery of God in the incarnation. Enmity in your reason, enmity in your feelings. O, this bitter, active enmity. And Christ slew it virtually. He was a Substitute. He stood in the dying traitor's place. And if you are born again you want the Lord to tell you that He stood there for you. A thousand ministers, if they could put their voices into one and tell you that you had evidence enough to warrant them to say to you that Christ did die for you, that would not satisfy you unless the Holy Ghost was in the word. Every soul born again wants the Lord to say to him - "I am thy salvation". Well, poor sinner, if the Holy Ghost causes the death of Christ to be lifted up before your eyes, you will look on Him, and looking on Him, you will be drawn to Him. No devil will keep you away. No unbelief will keep you away. No guilt will keep you away. "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hosea 11 v 4) the Man Christ Jesus.

And then the lifting up of Christ may be said also to be in the Scriptures. O what a Book, this is. If we had eyes to see Him, we should find Him as we read in the Prophets, and in the Psalms. And in every place in the Word of God, more or less distinctly, the Lord Jesus Christ is. And probably some of you have found sometimes, in reading, that you have seen the Lord Jesus in a Psalm, where you were reading it years and years in the past and never thought of Him. Ah, it is a wonderful Book. No wonder the devil made men speak against it. No wonder he is moving them today to deny its inspiration, because it is that testimony of God, that revelation of God, that declaration of His mind, and will, and intentions, which, received by power, makes a sinner wise unto salvation. "Search the Scriptures", said Christ, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life." You search them, search them for you think you have eternal life. "And they are they which testify of Me." (John 5 v 39). When walking with those two disciples to Emmaus, He began to open the Scriptures, and the Psalms, and the Prophets concerning Himself, their heart burned within them. Did you never find sweet burning in you when you have been reading, and Christ has appeared to you? It is a great thing, when He is lifted up in the Scriptures.

And then He is lifted up, according to God's ordination, in the ministry. That is a poor, dead ministry, that has no Christ in it. A

poor, dead preaching, that brings no good news from a far country, even Christ and Him crucified. It was Paul's great purpose and determination, not to know anything among men, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And very remarkable it is to observe, how that in the whole of the ministry as recorded in the Scriptures, this was the one thing. In the Apostolic days, and preaching, you find that they preached and mightily testified concerning Christ, and His resurrection from the dead, and God gave power to that testimony, and it was eminently useful. O what a mercy it is, when God sends a minister to preach the Lord Jesus, and gives Him power so as that He makes him a good minister of Jesus Christ.

Now what is this lifting up? It is setting Him forth, declaring, proclaiming - for that is what preaching is - not offering, but proclaiming, declaring, telling about, speaking of; speaking in the message, like as it is said of Haggai - "Then spake Haggai, the LORD'S messenger in the LORD'S message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD." (Haggai 1 v 13). Lifting up then, is that; setting forth Christ. But may we never forget this, that Christ, as to His Person, and His work, is relative. He does not stand alone. He has relationship to sinners, who are His brethren, and whom He is not ashamed to call brethren. And I mean this, that whenever Christ in His death is proclaimed, that death has relation to dead sinners. The brazen serpent set forth death as it was then among the people, for death was devouring them. And the Lord said, take and make a serpent like these fiery serpents. Take death and set it up before them. When God will have a poor sinner live in his conscience, in his soul, and bring peace to his heart, then a sinner looks at death. What death? The death of the Lord Jesus. And thereby, and therefrom, He lives. The death of Christ is wonderful. It derives its beauty, glory, and blessedness, from several things, as first, from the Person. O, what a Person, is the Person of Jesus Christ. If Moses, if the most eminent saint of God, had been crucified, there could have been no efficacy in that death, but when the death of Him who is the Son of God incarnate, takes place, there is eternal efficacy therein. So it is said that Christ obtained eternal redemption; redemption from hell, redemption from death of every sort, and kind effectually. Redemption from a guilty conscience, and all the torments of guilt in the conscience. Redemption by Jesus Christ, is great redemption.

And if Christ - as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness - is lifted up in respect of His death, there is that efficacy. And the death of Christ means this, too - and it is a great consideration - that He swallowed up death by dying. What death? Our death, the death of all the election of grace. And what is that death? The curse of God, an endless hell. He swallowed that up, took it away. He took the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, and contrary to us, out of the way, nailing it to His cross. He slew the enmity, He took away every bar, and obstacle that was in the way of a poor, fallen church, to heaven. Took all away from her and now there is no bar, and no let, and nothing to hinder. And when Christ is lifted up as thus effecting this wondrous redemption, He does draw guilty creatures to Himself.

He is lifted up also in His resurrection. The doctrine of the resurrection of Christ, if one may speak so, is the key to all the rest. O, Christ in the grave would have meant Christ seeing corruption. Christ in the grave, not able to rise, would have spelt this - dissatisfaction in the Father with what He had done. Christ remaining in the grave would have meant this - the dominion of death over Him, and therefore over the church too. See the importance, and the blessedness, of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. "Now is Christ risen from the dead" says the Apostle. He did overcome death. He that led into captivity was led captive, as it is written in the Revelation. He that led into captivity goes into captivity because Christ led captive all that captivity; ascended into heaven, "received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." O poor, dead creature, dead in your feelings, here is a living Lord, raised from the dead by the power of God, and liveth now after the power of an endless life.

He is lifted up also in respect of His entrance into heaven. God took one or two ancient saints to heaven, as of one prophet we read; he was caught up into heaven. But O, there was just the entrance of one person then, that person taken to heaven just for himself. When Christ entered into heaven, the church entered with Him.

One in the tomb; one when He rose;

One when He triumphed o'er His foes;
One when in heaven He took His seat,
And seraph's sang all hell's defeat. (405)

He is lifted up when His resurrection, His ascension into heaven, and His intercession there, are set forth. Intercession - "Able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him".

He is lifted up when His universal rule is preached. Who was able to approach the Ancient of Days, take the Book out of His hands, and break the seals of it, and look therein? Who controls all the thunders, and lightnings of providence, and the turning over, and destruction of kingdoms? Who is it that orders your steps, and my steps, in providence? Through whose hand come all those things that trouble us, and all those mercies that comfort us? Who directs us? Who puts us down? Who lifts us up? Who frowns? Who smiles? This great One who is lifted up. "Thou art worthy". Do you say so? Do you join the angels and the church of God in singing - "Thou art worthy"? You are not worthy, are you? No, No. If you feel sometimes that you are not worthy to think of God, not worthy to name His Name, I can go with you. Many, and many a time, have I said that to the Lord, that I am not worthy to think of Him, not worthy to speak of Him; but He is worthy; His Father says He is. His people say He is. Angels say He is. His Father says that all the angels of God are to worship Him, and His people are given grace to worship Him. He is worthy to be trusted, and they want to trust Him with their bodies and their souls, and their families, and their necessities, and their troubles, and all things. They want to cast their care on Him, knowing, as they sometimes do, that He careth for them.

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness". As, so to speak, at that time, that particular hour, the whole life of that nation depended on that serpent, so lifted up by divine direction, so the Lord Jesus lifted up becomes all and in all to His people. All their life, all their justification, and all their sanctification. All their wisdom, and their strength, and all their nourishment.

And when He is lifted up, He is lifted up in the fullness of grace that is in Him. "It pleased the Father that in Him all fullness

should dwell". Nothing out of Him that is good. You look into your hearts, and when you dig there, you will dig into corruption; nothing better. What a solemn experience that is. We would not be without it; that we can say, as many of us as are rightly taught. We would not be without the experience. But what does it do for us? It empties of self-strength. It weakens us; it distresses us; it distracts us; it makes us wonder if we shall live through this trouble or get out of that difficulty honourably. It makes us wonder how it will be with us when we come to die. O, this corruption, this corruption; do you dig into it? How sickened you will be by it. How worn out you will be sometimes by it. What does it do? It makes you say, Lord, I am vile. Lord, I have every sin in my nature that is done, and committed in the whole world. Idolatry, adultery, hypocrisy, theft, murder; everything that is done in the world I have in my heart. How many of you could honestly say it on your knees? It does not matter what bad names you call yourselves to other people; this is the thing, what do you say in secret? Well, what else does this do? O, it fits a sinner for a Saviour. Ah, Bunyan says, all men can talk about Christ being a suitable Saviour, but where will you find a sinner suitable for the Saviour? I will find you one, the one who is lost in himself, utterly lost. When Christ is lifted up then, this greatness of grace, this super-abundance of mercy, this wonderful righteousness, this wonderful sanctification, this wonderful reign of truth and grace, this wonderful Person is set forth. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness" and preached to the people, and said, Here is the healing, nowhere else, so a blessed setting forth of Christ before people tells them that, and may I again remark, that this serpent of brass, lifted up, catching the rays of that burning eastern sun, would cause it to be like a flame of fire to the eyes of the people, drawing them. O, is this the thing, is this how we are to be healed? So when the Lord Jesus Christ is lifted up, He draws, He attracts people.

And He is lifted up in the next place, and lastly here, as the One to whom the Father has committed all rule and all authority; by whom He will judge all the secrets of all men; by whom the poor church, no longer poor, the church of God shall be welcomed into heaven. Poor sinner, if Christ welcomes you into heaven, what glory will be given to you. Ah, but this is the pain that sometimes is felt;

we can scarcely hope, because we are so vile, and so far from Him, that we shall be of that number to whom He will say - "Come, ye blessed of My Father". What a mercy our fears do not rule the question. What a mercy it is that, when the church said she was black, that did not alter this, that she was also comely. Your judgement of yourself is a mercy for you, but it does not settle the question; it is not the end of it; No, No. God will have another word, and you will believe it, when He says it. "I am black", you will say, and when He says "Thou art all fair", you wont be able to dispute it. You think you would not believe it if He told you it, but you would. Unbelief is a lying spirit in a man. It lies against God, and it lies against the man. O, but Christ is King, Christ is King. He is to be lifted up in His Kingly authority. Who shall resist His will? King of kings, Lord of lords. Lord in the heart; Lord in the house; Lord in providence, and particular, special providences attend His people, and there is this Lord and King over them all. You say you will do this. He says, No; I love you too well to let you do it. You say, I shall never get to the end, and He carries you to the end of this trouble, and that affliction. You say, These things are against me, and He turns them all to your good. Everything is turned to a good account by the Lord Jesus for His poor people. He is lifted up when He is preached in His Kingly office. Devils are subject to Him. What a mercy; you will never boast of a victory over the devil, a victory gotten by yourself. That is a remarkable word that the Lord has to His disciples when the 70 returned to Him and told Him how they had behaved and how that the devils were subject unto them. What did He say to them? Took their minds away from their success to this - Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you; "but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10 v 20). And you will find it so in your experience. You will find if you begin to boast of your experience, or think a good deal of it, the Lord will come round to you and let you know, by a painful defeat, and then by a gracious testimony, that the grand thing is, to have your name written in heaven. What is to be compared to it? What is to be compared with it? A name written in heaven. Who was the Writer? God. When did He do it? In eternity.

And the Lord Jesus will be lifted up, and is lifted up, when, in the ministry, and in the Scriptures, He is set forth before the faith

of His children as their great High Priest, as their blessed Prophet, and they come to Him sometimes in their affections, and in their petitions, and ask Him to be a King over their hearts, a Prophet in their understandings, a Priest in their consciences. O, what a Christ we have. Would that I had grace, and gifts enough, to preach Him properly. What a Christ He is. The older I get the more I, at times - not always, but at times - the more I see of His value and beauty, and blessedness. When you see Him, do you not want to go and be with Him? Do you not feel sometimes a longing to drop everything here, and just leave the world behind, and be absent from the body, and present with the Lord? What a Lord. "King of kings, and Lord of lords". King of kings, reigning over you, and in you sometimes, so that, that word you can even utter for yourself - "O LORD, our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us". I wish I could say the rest oftener - "They are dead, they shall not live"; they are extinct. (Isaiah 26 v 13/14). What a wonder it will be - wont it be a wonder - when we, some of us sitting here, often in trouble about our state of minds, our distance from the Lord, and the many enemies that rise, and the lusts that prevail, and the death that creeps over us; when we shall say, they are dead, all dead. Not a lust alive, not a corrupt feeling in you. Infinitely removed from sin, the being of sin rooted out; holy, and only holy. With the Lord and like Him.

44 "As Moses lifted up the serpent". Where? "In the wilderness". In the wilderness of sin, of trouble, of trials, of thirst, of hunger, of danger, and of death. "In the wilderness"; in your wilderness. There was another figure, there is another figure, used in the Scripture, another experience set forth, and yet the same, when Jacob, in the wilderness, lying on the ground, and having a stone for his pillow, had that vision of a ladder, whose top was in heaven. It would not have mattered much to him if the top had not been there. Whose top was in heaven, whose bottom came to him. O what a sight. Do you ever see the way to heaven in Christ? Christ coming from heaven, returning to heaven. Christ the Friend of sinners. The wilderness. The wilderness was not the home of these people. They were wandering up and down in it, because of their rebellion, but it was not their distant home. The Land of Promise was their home. In the wilderness, they experienced thirst, and hunger. In the wilderness, they had dangers. There was death. You are not at home, you who fear the Lord,

and are born again, and have His Spirit. "This is not your rest: ... it is polluted". "Arise ye, and depart" (Micah 2 v 10). This is not the rest of a poor child of God, but he is just passing through it.

What creatures we are, to want to make this wilderness a home. You will never succeed though, never. But Christ, He says, I will bring you through. I will never leave you, I will never forsake you. He is lifted up to poor sinners in the wilderness. "And I, if I be lifted up" this is My intention, this is the end of My lifting up; this is the end that shall be accomplished in all whom I draw; they shall come to Me.

Well, my brethren, look now for one moment, in conclusion, at this great question - Whether this blessed One has ever been lifted up before you. He is lifted up. No-one with open eyes can read this Book and not see Him who was lifted up. He was lifted up on the cross, and there is the record of it. He is lifted up here and there where God sends a true minister. Then the question comes to this - Has He ever been lifted up in our experience, before the eye of faith? That is the question. Bless God, some of us can answer it in the affirmative. O, yes, sometimes we have been able to sing

What object's this which meets my eyes
Without Jerusalem's gate;
Which fills my mind with such surprise
As wonder to create? (950)

Well, what a mercy to say, Yes, 'tis Jesus, Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Some of you may be saying, O, if we could but be brought to that point. If it would please the Holy Ghost to bring that great sight, the sight of sights, a sight for weeping eyes, a sight for weary hearts, a sight for sin sick sinners; that blessed sight, the sight of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I will put the question to those of you who may be saying that. Do you want it? Do you really want it? If you do, I will tell you what is your business often. You are plying the throne of grace with petitions. Lord, do come, save me, bless me, deliver me, reveal in me the abundance of peace, reveal in me the Lord Jesus. Make me know my interest in Him. Whatever I may miss, whatever I may lose, whatever I may suffer, do this one thing in me, even make Christ known to me as my All and in All. And if you are

at that business, I can say one word more. The day is coming when you will say - "This is the LORD; we have waited for Him." What a great thing to say that - "This is the LORD". I have embraced Him; He is in my soul. I have waited for Him. I wept, I feared, I sank, I grieved, I mourned; I thought I should never know Him; I thought I was out of the secret. I often felt dead, and hard, and distant, and careless. Then I was stirred up, then I feared again, and now "This is the LORD" and He is in my heart. I have waited for Him. Blessed be His Name, He has come to me. O blessed day that will be. Some of us can tell you that the one day of all days of our lives up to that time, was the day when Christ was revealed in us. That was the day when death's terror was taken from us; the day when the wrath of God was removed; the day when guilt was taken from the conscience, and bondage from the spirit. The day when we said - "My Lord and my God".

"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." "Believeth in Him". Who can help it? When the faith of the operation of God is in you, and when that great Object of faith, Jesus Christ, meets that faith, these two join together, and then the blessed subject of grace says, Now I know. The Lord bring us to that point.

AMEN.