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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham

at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 25 January 1928

Text: John 3 v 30

"He must increase, I must decrease"

John was honoured to be the messenger of the Lord Jesus, His forerunner; the voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight a highway for our God". Honoured to baptise the Lord Jesus, and men flocked to him, and he baptised in a certain place because there was much water there. It was needed, but now the Lord had come and there arose a question, a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. The Jews had quantities of traditions, and these traditions they were holding, and John would not have them all, and these Jews, they disputed with John's disciples about purifying; and they came to John with this question and also said to him - "Behold, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptiseth, and all men come to him" - as if they would just say something, that would stir up jealousy in the breast of John. John answered and said - A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven, or take to himself anything that God is not pleased to give him. Ye yourselves bare me witness that I said I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom which standeth and heareth Him rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled. You cannot tell what gracious things Christ had whispered in John's ear; what sweet mercy had flowed into John's heart, and what gracious and glorious views Christ had given to John, of His Person. He said the Bridegroom's voice is my joy, I have heard it. I have heard it. Take notice of this. Have you heard His voice? You will never hear another like it, and if there should elapse years between the first and the second hearing of that voice, the second hearing would make you say, I know that voice, I heard it years ago; it is the same, full of mercy, full of goodness, full

of love, full of sweetness; it is the same that I heard. I have envied John. The Bridegroom's voice, he said, I have heard, and this my joy is fulfilled. And moreover, they said to him "All men come to Him." Well, why not? As if he should say this is my joy, I don't want to have the people flocking about me now, let them go to Him, to whom the gathering of the people shall be. Then the text comes, "He must increase but I must decrease". Obviously the text is relative and comparative. Relative - the servant related to his Master, the messenger related to the King, whose coming he had announced; the friend of the Bridegroom. A good relation; a preacher related to Him whom he has preached. A messenger coming from heaven concerning the Lord of life and glory. This was the relation. John said, He is from above, I am from beneath. He is of heaven, I am of the earth, earthy. And everyone getting a sight, and hearing of Christ, and every true minister of Christ will find his joy in this, that the more he sees of Christ, the lower he sinks in himself, while yet there is an ineffable relationship between them. It is a comparative word - Christ can never be more than He is, and John will always be John. But it is a comparison between a King and a subject. They are not on the same level. "He must increase", grow in some way; "I must decrease" sink in some way. He must rise in some way; I, in some way, must sink and become as nothing. I believe some of you will follow me in this observation. It is the divine will that Christ should be extolled and be very high. It is no less the divine will, that the people of Christ should be as in the word read, grass in their experience. As the flower of the grass they are to fade away and lose themselves in Him who is their life, in whom their life is hid. "Your life is hid with Christ in God". But there is that in us, that makes this word abhorrent. I believe some of you will follow me there. There is in us such pride, pride, O the monster,

Against it preach, it prompts the speech
Be silent, still tis there

Say you have got little, or no experience, how proud you may be.
Say you have ever so much, O how you may stalk in pride. Real
humility is a rare plant, hardy in the root, delicate in the

fruit, sensitive to the least touch of the flesh. O there is something abhorrent in God's way of saving men to a proud nature; there is something so welcome to a new heart, so beautiful to a right spirit, so glorious and so glorifying to one who is under the gracious instruction of the Holy Ghost. What, could and did the Trinity look in mercy on a worm, a corrupt creature? Could and did the very immediate, the only begotten Son of God, take my nature without its sin into union with Himself, to do my duty, pay my debt, bear my guilt, suffer my death, that I might live in Him? How wonderful it is to get a sight of God in that scripture - "For as much as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." My brethren what a blessed salvation is God's salvation.

This increase of Christ. I will put it first, and speak a little about it, as the Lord may help me, and the other will follow of a gracious necessity. Follow to the utter mortification of the old man. He must increase, but not absolutely, not absolutely, only comparatively. He can never be other, He can never be more than He is and has been eternally, God. "I am the Lord, to whom then will ye liken Me or shall I be equal, to whom will ye liken Me saith the Lord." And you need not go very far, if you have the Spirit for your teacher, to know Christ is the speaker in that chapter. To whom will ye liken Me. I made the worlds; I hold them up; the stars roll at My command. It is very wonderful to see God only. [Is He to be seen in human nature?] As the Man Christ Jesus, He can never be more than He is, the Holy One of God. And in respect of His complex Person, He can never increase. Emmanuel is always Emmanuel; Jesus is always Jesus; the Rock of Ages is always the Rock of Ages; the Refuge is always the Refuge, neither more nor less comparatively. He must increase. Absolutely, He cannot. And how is He to increase? He will increase in the esteem of His people, and I am sure some of you will go with me in this. I have had as long an experience of this as perhaps most of you, if not all who are old, and I can look back to the time when I do believe I knew and loved Him, and that goes back to 60 years

about, but when I compare what I then knew and felt and enjoyed, with what I have been mercifully favoured to know, to enjoy, since, and particularly in my latter days, how little, O how little. I do not know much now, O do not think I do; I hope none of you think that, because it would not be true, but comparatively He does increase in the esteem of sinners. Sinners are high in His esteem. Probably some of you younger people who know the Lord a little, can scarcely follow me in this statement. You think sometimes you have cast the arms of your faith and love about Him so fully, that though you acknowledge you have not a great deal, you wonder if you can love Him more, but wait and go on. You will know things as you get along, by the Lord's merciful teaching. He will increase in esteem. But now there are reasons for this. Our religion, if real, is not a blind religion; our love is not a blind love; and our esteem of Christ, is not a blind esteem. We love Him and esteem Him for reasons, good reasons; for what He is in Himself. This ought perhaps to be named the last, because it is one of the greatest attainments I think, amongst the Lord's people generally; just for what He is; that He is glorious, O glorious. I should like to spend my days in looking on Him in His glory, in the glory of His Person. There is something peculiarly solemn, weighty, deeply humbling and powerfully spiritualising and transforming in the views the Holy Ghost gives occasionally to His people, of the Person and the grace and the glory of the Lord Jesus. There is nothing will so effectually take the eyes away from that corrupt and proud, haughty monster self, as a view of Christ, and at the same time, nothing will bear such a witness in your conscience, that in Him is everything that you, as a corrupt creature, can need to save you. It will say in your heart with a loud, melodious, sweet, penetrating voice, here is the remedy; here is the balm; here is the physician; here is the God of all grace. And this voice in your heart will say to you, run to Him; go in every trouble, with every sin and every fear and all your guilt and all your ignorance and all your stumblings; go to Him. That is one reason why you esteem Him. What He is, what He is; The Son of God incarnate. But now take some of His offices. And let me take that which is first and last His Priestly office, and when I say His Priestly office, I mean all that is contained in

it. And if we look at His constitution as a priest, there can be, as God opens it, nothing but glory. Glorious love and wisdom and power in the constitution of our High Priest. Why, my friends, there is no going to God without this. Who made Him a Priest? His Father. How did He do it? With an oath. And, were that opened to our faith, it would appear very beautiful and very glorious to us. Some men may perhaps be able quite easily to descant upon that in a dry way, but to get the glory of it in the heart, by the Spirit's grace; to get a view of it by faith; to see the Father calling His Son, preparing a body for Him by the overshadowing of the virgin by the Spirit; to see this Person Jesus, called by His Father to be a High Priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec, and to see Him put into that wondrous office, necessary office, glorious office, with an oath, so that He shall never be removed from it while God is faithful, this will hold you a little. This will fill your eyes and your hearts. Such an High Priest became us. There is the Priest. Such an High Priest became us, is suitable to us. He is the way. A priest must have two things with respect to his office. He must have an altar; the sacrifice is not to be offered anywhere; not every corner of your field will do. There must be an altar, an altar not built after your own pattern; not one you have seen at Damascus and which you would have copied, and have set up in your own house. It must be God's altar; it must be after His fashion. We have an altar, says the Apostle; we have an altar. Is Jesus that altar? Did you ever see Him as your altar? And then the Priest having an altar to approach, must not approach empty handed. He must have a sacrifice. He is consecrated; his hands must be full. Consecration means having the hands full, and the Saviour, when He goes to God as a Priest, must have His hands full. He must have a sacrifice, that is Himself. Therefore we have an altar whereof we have a right to eat if we are the Lord's people.

Does He grow in your esteem in this particular? Do you get less guilty? Do you get more rarely defiled? Is the leprosy quite cured? Does it never break down? Do you never see it in your will and have to take the thing to the Priest and say - it seemeth to me there is a leprosy in the house? Do you find the

words of God by Moses, less instructive or less necessary? - "Take heed to the plague of leprosy". Said God, by Moses, - Take heed to it, listen to all the Priest says with respect to it. Why, you are saying mentally to me, alas, why we get worse, bigger sinners; deeper is the guilt. Then go to the Priest. He must increase. As your malady grows in your experience, so will grow the remedy in your experience; as your wickedness grows in your feelings, so will He grow in your esteem. Who will take away that malady? Who has offered Himself once in the end of the world and by that offering put away sin? Well dear friends, does not He grow? Notice this point, It is good to have clear points in your religion. Notice this point, this great doctrine, this everlasting Priesthood of the Lord Jesus. It invests Him with power to save unto the uttermost. Seeing that He is a Priest continually, "He is able to save all them to the uttermost, that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them". This, and this only, gives a right boldness to faith, as the Apostle in the Hebrews, having spoken of a wicked person dissected and opened to his own shamed, pained gaze, says - "Come boldly to the throne of grace" because there is a High Priest. Well, if I have spoken the truth on that point, I might sit down, you might go home, and by the grace of God, say each to himself and herself, let us go home and think on that. We shall never get to the end of the mercy of it, never get away from the need of it, never get away from the glory of it as we are under the teaching of the Holy Spirit. All your troubles, all your diseases, all the freckles, all the outbreaks, all the seeming leprosy, everything that says there is a death, there is a wickedness, there is a distance, there is a separation between God and your soul, all these things make the Priesthood and the priestly offering on the God ordered altar necessary. And this wont allow despair. I have loved Hart's word

Zion's mourner's cease your fear,
For lo! the dying Lamb,
Utterly forbids despair,
To all that love His Name.

Here we are to have our relief; here we are to see the veil

rent; here we are to see the glory of God; here we are to see the Shekinah; here we are to realise that there is no voice of anger to be ever heard from that Ark in which the law is; here we are to see mercy, and here also to hear God speak, for He says "There will I commune with thee". Do not look for God; do not expect God's smile; do not anticipate a kind word from Him, apart from the High Priest of your profession. He must increase with respect to knowledge and the enjoyment of His Spirit. He, Jesus, is at the Father's right hand, and Peter, preaching that wondrous sermon on the day of Pentecost, told the people that God had exalted the crucified One; that though He had been in the grave, because it was not possible for Him to be held there, He is now exalted at the right-hand of God in heaven, and hath shed this upon you, that is the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit several times, distinctly, ere He left this world. He promised the Holy Spirit, and said what that Spirit should be in the saints, and what He should do in them, and how He should glorify the Lord Jesus, and that, therefore, it would be to the advantage of the disciples, and of the church of the living God, to the end of time, that He should be away from them as to His bodily presence, but He would come to them in His Spirit. He would teach them by His Spirit. He would not leave them orphans or alone, but would give them His Spirit, and come to them by His Spirit, and this will make Him more and more valued, that we shall go to Him, and ask Him for His good Spirit, and that He has power and love to send His Spirit; that the covenant secured that to Him; that He should have the Spirit always with Him without measure. By Isaiah God made this promise to His Son - This is My covenant with Thee. "My Spirit which I have put upon Thee, and My word which I have put in Thy mouth, shall not depart out of Thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of Thy seed, nor out of the mouth of Thy seed's seed henceforth and for ever." This is the blessing promised in Isaiah - "I will pour floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon Thine offspring". And this is the blessing that openly, gloriously began to be on the day of Pentecost and has been ever since in different degrees, and will continue until the end of time. Is He full of the Spirit? Yes, God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him. Then dear friends our dried up spirits, our barren hearts, our gardens

overrun with weeds and briars, as the Prophet Isaiah speaks, will remain barren and dry and overrun until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high. No remedy for a bad case, but by the Holy Spirit; no remedy for ignorance, but by the Holy Spirit; no remedy for barrenness and hardness and dryness of our souls, but by the outpouring upon us of the Holy Spirit. And He is to increase in this. We have had drops, some of us, and some of us have had showers occasionally. There have been special seasons when the Spirit has been with us, and when we may have had some feeling of that, that the Lord promises in this gospel, "He shall be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life," and He has sealed us unto the day of redemption, or spoken on our hearts some gracious promise, or given us to understand that our names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Some operation, some discovery of Christ, some discovery of our own standing in Christ, we have had by that Holy Spirit. Ah! says one, and what more do you want? Nothing of another nature, but more of the same blessing, that is what is wanted, more of the Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. Perhaps some of you have trembled at that word of Paul's in the Romans "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His". And perhaps you have looked into your heart, at your thoughts, at your ways, at your fretfulness, your carnality and examined yourselves and could not see a single thing for the moment in your own favour. And then that word perhaps has come in to trouble and pierce and wound and pain you - "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His". That does not mean all that easy, what is called charity; it means power; it means light; it means life; it means instruction; it means reproof. In the prophecy of Isaiah we are told about the Spirit of Christ coming down on Him, the root out of the stem of Jesse, the Spirit of God coming upon Him as the Spirit of light and the Spirit of counsel and of wisdom and of the fear of the Lord. Now if you have Christ's Spirit you will have all those things. O some may say, if you press that, we shall die. No you wont. If you are right in the main, God will bring this to you. Just what the Holy Spirit was, without measure, in Christ, so, in measure, He will be in you. It is difficult to stand to this, but it is true. Then as the Lord sends His good Spirit at times, prompting you to secret prayer,

stirring up your hearts to fear God, strengthening your faith to call upon His Name in a day of trouble, as He says "Call upon Me in the day of trouble", I say, as you have the Spirit of God in these particulars, the source, the giver of that blessing will increase in your esteem. O to have the Holy Spirit. Religion without the Holy Ghost is not worth having; it is not worth the trouble of keeping; it will never do any good. But the religion with the Holy Ghost in it as the root of it, the strength of it, the life of it and the peace of it, O this is good. And that will bring you into some experience of that scripture to quote Isaiah again, of the Lord, the Child born and the Son given. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end. The government of Christ in your heart, the peace of God in your conscience brought by the Holy Spirit will never end, but go on growing until it is a river.

I have one more word to say then I cease. He must increase in His love as it is to be known. It is difficult for so poor a creature to speak of this; indeed I am not worthy to name Him among you. This is a great point in our holy religion - love. But let us be particular, not love for everything. O no; the love of Christ in you, will make you love Him, and His things, and His people and His providence, even though it may afflict you, but not error, not wrong ways, not the world. No, Christ's love will make you more severe than anything else, in your judgment of evil. That is a great word that Christ spoke to the Ephesian church, commending it. He said "I know that thou canst not bear them that are evil. I know that thou hast tried them which say they are Apostles and are not and hath found them liars." But then He found fault with them because they had left their first love. I wonder if there is a person here, a child of God who could say, now that is not true of me; I have not left my first love. Some of you say, we have never had a first love, yet if we get it we shall not leave it we think. I wish you may get it and leave the rest for the moment. But O this love! If you go to the Ephesians you will find the Apostle wishing that Christ may increase in this particular. He said I bow my knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." And this was the burden of his

prayer - "That ye may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." And I should say this, that if we get more of that love shed abroad in our hearts, the grace of love would be wonderfully increased in us, and it would go into particulars. It would go to the cross. The love of Christ on the cross. It would go to His vicarious death, to His justifying righteousness, to His presence in heaven, to His intercession there. May the Lord give us to see the increase of Christ in this particular, that we may feel it more in our souls; that, feeling His love more, we may love Him more. "Loved of my God" said good Toplady

Loved of my God, for Him again
With love intense I'd burn;
Chosen of Thee ere time began,
I choose Thee in return.

Well may the Lord increase in this. He is full of it; He has had it through eternity, and He lets it out in different measures from time to time. Some of us know it. It has surprised us, humbled us, broken us to pieces, made sin bitter, self hateful, the world an empty thing to us. Taken away the glitter of every good thing in this life comparatively, so that we have said again and again, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Well may the Lord Jesus increase.

I have said nothing about the thing except just to give a few hints. The fulness of it is beyond me but I wish the Lord may give us to enter into it, at least in some measure, and see in our hearts, men, world, things in providence, and self in particular must decrease. Room must be made for Him; He must increase. Room for His Person; room for His death; room for His life; room for His righteousness, and, as room is made, and He comes and fills that room, then we shall say - well He does grow. He grows in our esteem, and we can say increasingly - "None but Christ, none but Christ." And if we were to hold forth, as the Apostle speaks to the Philippians, if we were to hold forth the word of Life, we should say - "This is our Friend; this is our Beloved; this is our God for ever and ever, and He

will be our Guide even unto death." His love, great love, love to the cross, love to the very death that He came to suffer. He must increase. Ah, I hope when we come to die, we shall say He is more precious now than ever He was, greater than ever He was, sweeter than ever He was, and now we are going to see Him as He is, and then to love and praise Him as we ought to love and praise Him.

Now may we go to our homes by the merciful help of the Spirit of Christ, to think on these things. Do not be displeased with me for my poverty in the matter, rather look at the riches I have just named, and tried to commend to you. Look at them, rather at Him in whom they all are, at the Lord Jesus, the fairest, the dearest, the sweetest, the greatest in heaven and in earth.

AMEN.