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Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham
on Sunday evening, 28th. August 1927.

Text: John 4. v. 24

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him
must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Having spoken this morning on the first clause of this important word, it remains now, that as I may be helped, I should speak about the second clause of the text - "They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." While public assemblies are according to Scripture; while it is proper, as in God's sight, to meet as we are now met to hear His word, to read it, to pray publicly and to sing; Scripture not only smiles on such meetings but commands them, and says to the saints, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." This is a plain obligation laid on us, and here I would say, beware of neglecting any privilege put into your hands; any external privilege with respect to assembling with the saints, neglect not. If you do, if you belong to the Lord, you will have, probably, some thorns later on in your pillows, even for this as well as other things. But while this is proper, is commanded, the solemn text withdraws us, so to speak, from such assemblies and tells us to get into our closets, to shut our doors about us and to pray to our Father in secret, promising that our Father who sees us in secret will reward us openly. The externals of religion for the moment, are put aside, as Christ said to this woman, reclaimed, made His, by His own convincing teachings, He said to her - "Neither in this mountain," that is Samaria, where the Samaritans had a temple and carried on their improper worship, "nor yet at Jerusalem," where God's temple was, and presence had been, but was now to be withdrawn, and the temple destroyed. Neither here nor there, but all who worship God acceptably, do so in spirit, and "the Father," who will be worshipped, "seeketh such to worship Him," and perhaps one might here say, that the eye of God seeks in this congregation all who "worship Him in spirit and in truth." May we not rest in the form. "Ordinances tease and tire." May we rest nowhere but in the bosom of God, nor be content with any service in which the spirit of our minds is not.

Worship is a beautiful thing, and if we follow the type, we shall see this, that all who worship God acceptably, are right; that for the moment, when a person observes God's rule of worship, he is right. Israel was punished for turning away from right worship. They brought no sweet cane, they neglected the offerings which God had laid upon them. They turned to idols and so they were brought into desolation. Follow this into the anti-type. If the Spirit be not in our worship; if we do not pray in the Holy Ghost; if we do not read in the Spirit's life and light; if we do not make melody in our hearts when we sing; then we are short, we are grievously short. Not among ourselves perhaps, not as to our mutual friendly judgement, but

as in the sight of God, we are short. In the discharge of this so arduous, so difficult, so awful an office as what I hold this evening, I would draw you away from this place and that place, to no place but one. May we go to the throne of God's heavenly grace and worship Him, worship Him in His Son. There, if we are favoured to get there, there, God and our souls will be in amity. He will be our Friend, and call us His friends. There, we shall bring an acceptable offering to Him, and there, He will let a smile fall on us which will make our faces shine. Give us bread to eat which will strengthen our hearts and oil wherewith our faces will be anointed. We must, if we worship acceptably, do so "in spirit and in truth." Worship, as I said this morning, is the prostration of an inferior, before a Superior. A worm of earth falling flat in his spirit by faith before, "I Am that I Am," in our own nature. A sinner apprehending something of God, seeing something of the way appointed for him to approach God; feeling through faith something of the greatness of the reason that the Scripture gives him, and that the Spirit brings into his heart, for worshipping God and feeling, as faith is strengthened, that he cannot let the Lord go without a blessing. And if I am enabled rightly to speak of this great thing - worship, it is a great thing, it may be a means of good. I say, it is a great thing - worship, and as it is to be "in spirit and in truth," I shall try to take so to speak, take ourselves to pieces and examine the faculties, the graces that God may have given to us and see if, in the exercise of them, we worship God.

It is good to be particular. Do not rest in generalities. As God has given us faculties and has, as we hope He has, given to some of us grace and faith, it will do us good perhaps to look into the exercise of those faculties, if they are exercised in this great thing - worship. I will take for the first, that very important, singular, great, and authoritative thing in us which we know as conscience. There is a conscience in man. The wicked have it. Some have got it so seared, that it is incapable of feeling; irresponsible to everything that is good; "seared," as it is written, "with a hot iron." The heathens have a conscience, and though they are without the law, as to the form in which it was given to the Hebrews by Moses, yet they have it written in their hearts. The law, as to its essence, is in every person's heart. Paul speaks of the heathen as having "the work of the law written in their hearts," even the people who are without the law and the work of it. There seems to be the substance of it - what it commands; what the servants of God are to do. And this people, with this conscience find themselves, "accusing or else excusing one another," which shows, these things show, that there is at work in such people, a conscience. You, who have no fear of God before you, have a conscience, and perhaps if you remained away from your attendance here, conscience would tell you about it and if you attempted to do evil, conscience would tell you. If you lied, conscience would speak of it. If you become frivolous in your behaviour and behave in any way dishonourable, conscience will tell you of it, and if it is so with any of you, what I would say here is this - listen to it! May the Lord keep you from brow-beating your conscience. Never, God keep you, never turn a deaf ear to any protest that your conscience enters against any piece of conduct; any project that is wrong: any attempt against the

things of God. Never turn away from the protest of your conscience, but when the same faculty is regenerated, when the light of God shines into the conscience, then its movements are different.

It has been said that a regenerated conscience is the guardian of God's interest, and I believe it is true. Every regenerated conscience has the light of life in it, and thereby perceives not only what is right among men, but what is right in the sight of God, and that gives a Christian many a sad hour when conscience tells him of this and of that evil. When it tells him of the innumerable slips and falls of his spirit; when it tells him of the evil of unbelief, of carnality, of worldliness, of conformity to the world, of disbelief of the Scriptures; when it tells him of various evils in his heart and that well up as from a terrible spring of iniquity, his conscience bears witness for God. Every protest of your enlightened conscience, O Christian people, God give you grace to listen to and turn away from. Conscience is not the arbiter, it is not your rule, but it is, as God teaches it, a protester against wrong, and an asserter of what is right in the sight of God. Conscience has a right, and conscience in the Christian has sometimes a power to govern a man. Now when a man of God worships, this conscience is in exercise. Is your conscience burdened with guilt? When you kneel in your heart before the Lord, does conscience tell you of some turning aside of which you have been guilty? When you would call on His great name, does conscience say you have profaned and polluted that name by your unbelief, ingratitude and hardness of heart? Listen to it. It speaks to you, thus, listen to it. And then there is this remedy, this great remedy - "if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot unto God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Conscience may say to you - you only serve yourself. It may say one day - you do not eat and drink to the glory of God. It may say - you have not that fervent love to the brotherhood which Peter exhorts. It may say - you are not clothed with humility as the Scriptures speak. It may say - you are not a believer, a full sweet believer in God's sight, but a poor carnal, carnally-minded and earthly-minded creature, and as you are an honest person, you will acknowledge that indictment. you will say - 'it is true' and here is a worshipping "in spirit and in truth." A dealing of this conscience with God; a seeking a remedy - the atonement; a seeking the application of it by the Holy Ghost whereby your guilty fears will be removed, your hardness dissolved and your distance taken away and you will then worship Love Divine, and prove that love and grief compound an unction in your spirit, and you worship the Spirit, the Eternal God who is a Spirit. Conscience is a great faculty, a mysterious faculty given to our being, and it will never die when God turns a sinner into hell. When He turns nations who forget Him, into hell. Conscience will be lively. There will be in it a worm that will never die. A fire that will never be quenched. O sinner, dead now in sins, may the Lord quicken you if it please Him and give you to believe what I tell you - that you have got a conscience, and that conscience will live as long

as you live, and if you sink into hell that conscience will be your tormentor. That conscience will pierce you and burn you and grieve you. The remorse of your conscience, the remembrance of your sins you will live over and over through eternity. You will live your sins over, as it were. Conscience will never let them go. Justice will never let you escape. Life divine, will ever burn, but, in the godly. O, how different! We get our hell here. We get our griefs and torment here. O the shame with which conscience sometimes covers us as it accuses us of having gone against the Lord. O the shame when we remember and conscience brings it before us, how we have dishonoured the Lord Jesus. "Worship Him in spirit." Go honestly, humbly, with this conscience before God, but as in such cases as I have named, this conscience is a tormentor, so, when forgiveness is proclaimed, when gospel liberty is entered into and enjoyed, when the favour of the Lord makes the soul like "a hind let loose", when goodly words from Jesus Christ are spoken into the soul, then conscience, unburdened conscience purged, becomes a sweet companion. O, a sweet companion. It will talk kindly to you, as God talks kindly to it and comfort you on every side. This is a part of the worship of God in spirit.

The approach of a soul to God is a great thing. Think of it! A sinner, infinitely beneath God as a creature, but O the deformity, the turpitude, the wickedness of the sinner's nature and conduct. O, what a solemn thing it is to have to draw near to God with. One striking thing we have set before us in the Scriptures for an encouragement, an attraction and a wonderful vision, - the praying of Jesus Christ. He had no guilt on His conscience, but He had guilt imputed to Him. His conscience never could upbraid Him, for He was without sin. He had no guile, but He prayed, and the Lord puts this question in the prophet Jeremiah. He says, speaking of the restoration of Israel and that their governor should be of themselves, "and he shall approach unto Me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto Me?" We are told in Luke, that the Lord "went out into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer", and when you, led by the Spirit and carried in His power to the throne of God's heavenly grace, go with a conscience, go sincerely and pray in that gracious influence that is upon you, you follow Him, and a purged conscience brings a sinner to enjoy somewhat of the holy confidence of Christ. - 'I know that I shall not be condemned.' O, how wonderful when a man has been favoured with purging blood to say that - 'I know that I shall not be condemned!' That is heaven below. Heaven begun, and it does not matter how guilty one feels. How wicked one is, in one's spirit, the blood of Christ can cure and heal and purge and remove all sin, and the sins of condemnation, so that the sinner is enabled to say - 'Where that God is, I one day shall be.' - "Surely, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength." What a wonder! This is free grace.

Now the next thing that I would name in this approach to God, is the will. We have a will, and by the fall, it is in bondage. There is no free will in existence, but God's, but we have a will and it is in bondage. Pharaoh is not alone when he said, "Neither will I let Israel go." He said what you have said, and what I have said many-a-time without saying the word. In heart, we have said, 'I wont do it.' Alas for me, I told the

Lord once I would not do what He told me to do, but He gave me grace to do it. O, this stubborn will, this wretched will, unbending, in opposition, in rebellion, in fretfulness, in arraigning God at the bar of fallen corrupted reason. This wicked thing, my lord will-be-will. There is a will against it. O, if the will of God is that your will should come down into the dust, and by the hand of the Lord be suppld and bent and made straight with the will of God, what a favour that will be. Here is a sinner. He has got trouble, an affliction in providence, perhaps in his own body or in some way in his family or in his business, and he cannot bend to it. No. He may say it is neither kind nor wise nor good in God to send this affliction. He may in a petulant temper ask why this has come to him. Now he cannot worship with this. He may kneel. He may begin to say words, but he cannot worship. God will resist him. "With the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward." You will find it so. A froward will. A stubborn will, unbending, rebelling, opposing. Well, you wont worship. You may come here or go somewhere else. You may mingle your voice with the voices of the congregation. You may hear a chapter read and bend your head when prayer is being made and all that, but you do not worship. O, but when the hand of grace is put into the hole of the door, and when myrrh is left behind, and you rise in a strange, blessed softness that has come over your spirit, to find the Lord again; when the influence is with you and it works and works and works, till you cannot let the Lord alone: you go after Him in your spirit and seek and seek and seek till you find Him, and when you have found Him, there is no dispute between you. The dispute went on when He was absent and you were made to seek Him and now you have got together, there is no dispute between you. When it was prophesied by Agabus that Paul, if he went up to Jerusalem would be bound hand and foot by his enemy, his friends besought Paul not to go, but said he - "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus", and when they saw they could not prevail on him to stay away, they said - "The will of the Lord be done", and when you have found sometimes here and there that the Lord would not give way, He has given you grace to give way and to say - "The will of the Lord be done." This is part of the prayer Christ put into the mouth of His disciples - "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Did you ever get anything more sweet than this after a fit of rebellion, to say in your heart - "Thy will be done?" If that will has mortified you - "Thy will be done." If it has in some things killed you - "Thy will be done." If it has gone against your ambitions - "Thy will be done." O sinner, O saint of God, worship Him thus. The will! I have been glad He does not break it to pieces. A subdued will is better than a smashed will. Subdued by grace. Subdued by the love of God. Subdued by the blood of Jesus Christ. How sweet it is to be submissive to the holy will of God, and here the Lord's people are brought into an obedience to that Scripture - "I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good,

and acceptable, and perfect will of God." An acceptable will - an acceptable will! A will that intended and has accomplished the living sacrifice. The painful sacrifice. A perfect will. No lack of wisdom in it, no lack of love in it. No lack of power in it, and to prove that in affliction; to prove it when God takes away something you would like to keep; when He weakens your strength in the way; when He cries folly on your wisdom; when He makes you understand that you are to have tribulation here; then, then to say, "the will of the Lord be done", is as I apprehend, to "worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Take the understanding. Paul said he would pray with the spirit and with the understanding, "understanding what the will of the Lord is" - "Redeeming the time because the days are evil." You have got an understanding. It may be dark, it may be very dark, but you have got an understanding. As being regenerated and taught of the Holy Spirit you have got an understanding of several things. You have got an understanding that God is, that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. That is a great thing to know, a very great thing. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. - Without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." And having had some manifestation of mercy and of Christ, this is true of everyone so favoured, "and we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." The light shines on the understanding. Jesus is the Prophet in their understanding. He tells them of things that are to come. He tells them in order that they can bear things that are to trouble them. He tells them of tribulation to be their lot. He tells them of grace that is to be tried, a work that is to be tested by fire. He tells them that Satan desires to have them and to sift them as wheat. He tells them that He will be with them, and in these things, they have some understanding and with this they are to worship in spirit. Think of it. You are to worship with the understanding, pray with the understanding, and sing with the understanding and this is worship, when you understand your weakness and go to God with it; your wickedness and go to God with it; and your frailty and liability to fall. When you understand how that nothing that is not perfect can be accepted of Him, and then how, given that same understanding of Him who is Perfection and whose perfection is imputed, there is worship in those things. God is a Spirit and they that worship Him will go with an understanding of that, and worship Him in the spirit. Acknowledge Him, acknowledging His goodness and His mercy. We are poor ignorant things, knowing but little of God but we must not say, if God has been our Teacher, we could not say, we have no understanding. You may feel so sometimes, but the man who said he had no understanding and that he was as a beast, said all that out of an understanding. He said it because he had an understanding of his weakness and his wickedness and the evil he had done in arraigning God at the bar of his corrupted reason and trying by his own balances and reed of measurement to put things straight which God had made crooked. He had an understanding, and when further light shined into his

soul and he was taken by the hand by the Holy Spirit and led into God's sanctuary, then he understood two things which before perplexed him, which he could not understand. He understood the end of the wicked, and that killed all envy of them. When you get a sight in God's light of the end of a prosperous world, a prosperous business, a prosperous person and see that God may put that business and that world and that person into a slippery place; when he will suddenly slide into destruction as in a moment: you will have no envy living in you, of that, and then he understood another thing - he understood how it was that he stood, that he had not been carried away altogether. He understood how it was that his faith had not entirely made shipwreck and this was it - "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand." I am still with Thee - though I am wicked, though I have been as a beast before Thee - I am still with Thee, and he got such a sight by faith of this goodness of his God, that he said the Lord would be with him to the end. O my friends, there is an understanding of things in worship. We understand sin and redemption. Self in its wickedness and Christ in His beauty and glory. Bondage in self, liberty in Him. Blindness in self, sight in Him. Death in self, life in Him. Hopelessness of self, hope in Him. This is what a man of God has some understanding of, and so when he kneels in spirit before his God and Saviour, he does not do so in utter absolute ignorance of the God he is approaching and of the way by which he approaches.

In the next place, he worships in and with love, that golden chain that binds him to the Saviour. He worships in love. "I love the Lord" said the Psalmist, in one place, "because He hath heard my voice and my supplications," and this wrought well in him. He said, "because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live." 'I will go to His throne. I will run into the habitation. I will seek Him as my Refuge. I will build on Him as my only Foundation. I will hang on Him as on the only One who can sustain me, and carry me, and bring me honourably through.' That is no strange thing to some of you is it? Neither guilt on the conscience, nor devil in his temptations, will entirely drive a man away from God and when he gets some favour, some answer to prayer, then he says - 'the Lord has done this and I will go to Him again.' "I will call upon Him as long as I live," for I shall have sin with me and I shall have trouble with me and I shall have the devil, the accuser of the brethren, about me and "I will call upon Him as long as I live," to protect me and help me, guide me and cover my head in the day of battle and bring me honourably to my grave. What is that? I should call it worship "in spirit and in truth." No hypocrisy here. No double mind here. Says the man of God - "I know whom I have believed." - I believe Him to be Almighty God and infinitely wise and good and I love Him! My friends, this is like going to a fountain and drawing fresh supplies day by day and while it lasts, it is a beautiful life to live. The Lord said, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Living by the day in this manner is a beautiful way of living. Ah, you get a little of this, and you will understand what the Lord says, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." That is - Come to Me - Hang on Me - Apply to Me every day and do not take too anxious thought about tomorrow. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all the things you need, that shall be

for your good, shall be added unto you. Have you got some natural good before you? Something that you desire and long to have. Well, when you have got this spirit of worship in you, you will go to the Lord for it and about it. You will seek Him. Here then is worship in love, and there is one more word I would say before closing.

We worship Him when we admire Him. Not a cold look, as you look on a picture, beautiful but dead, but a living look on a living Saviour, full of goodness, with all the good pleasure of God dwelling in Him. All the grace we can need, given to Him. All the power that we need, He possesses. All the wisdom of God, He is. All the victories that have been obtained by the Church, were given by Him and admired in all them that believe. O sinner, have you never admired Jesus Christ? If we get to heaven we shall never tire of gazing on Him, never weary of saying - "Worthy is the Lamb", never, and to have a little here of that spiritual admiration, not looking on a great exemplar, but on a blessed Person, a great Redeemer and almighty Saviour, a full Christ for an empty sinner. Well, you need no words here, just the motion of faith and hope and love in you will be acceptable when your eye looks on Him as it looks on no other, and your heart entwines itself about Him as about no other. When your confidence is in Him and in no other, when you can and do sincerely and humbly say - "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." I thought, nearly sixty years ago that I loved Him and I did love Him a little, O but how little. Now, I do not love Him much, I wish I did. "Lord," says one (and some of us say it)

" - it is my chief complaint,
That my love is cold and faint:
Yet I love Thee and adore;
O for grace to love Thee more!"

and love is always attended with admiration here, to admire His Person in the constitution of it; to admire His grace in the fulness of it; His righteousness in the perfection of it; His atonement in the vicarious nature of it; His precious blood in its cleansing efficacy; His arm as almighty; His wisdom as infinite; His patience as wonderful as against our sins: to admire this Jesus Christ, this blessed God who said - "Before Abraham was, I am." I made the world. I uphold it by the word. I am power. Providence is in My hand. I move as I will and I move men as I will and I am the God of poor sinners. I am the God of poor sinners who come to Me and I receive them and I eat with them and I wont let them go. Their waywardness shall not tire Me and their perpetual sinning shall not discourage Me. Well now, have not you admired Him a little? Come poor sinner, is there no life in you? Do you wonder at David, when the priest Abiathar said to him in answer to his request, have you a sword. He said he had only one, the sword of Goliath the giant. Do you wonder that David said, "There is none like that; give it me." That was the blade that cut off the head of the giant. That was the sword that delivered Israel from the Philistines at that time - "give it me." And O, if Jesus has done you good and blessed your souls, delivered you from some bondage, some sin, some fear, some devil,

some temptation, some worldliness, some evil, if, I say, He has done this, you will say, in faith and love - 'There is none like Him - none like Him!'

"Compared with Christ, in all beside
No comeliness I see;
The one thing needful, dearest Lord,
Is to be one with thee."

How many of our hearts can worshippingly say that of Him? How many of us could humbly go and say in spirit, 'Lord, be everything to us, be righteousness, be sanctification, be wisdom, be redemption to us and in us. Leave us not. Give us not over to the will of our enemies.' And let me say again, as at the beginning, stripped of all the externals of religion, all the attractions of an external religion removed from you; the aid of your own voice and the voices of your fellows in singing in a congregation, or in prayer, go alone: can you worship? Do you worship then? May the Lord help us to worship Him. God is a Spirit, and therefore no carnal conception of Him can stand. God is a Spirit, infinitely pure and glorious; a Spirit independent, eternal, not borrowing leave to be. Giving Being to all that existence. A Spirit, and so no shape, no form. Said Moses, you saw no shape when you heard the voice of God. We must leave the Papists with their pictures and their forests of the cross, for they are bits of wood enough, I suppose, to make a forest among them all. We must leave them and come as God helps us to this one thing. We have to do with an infinite Spirit, a great God - Father, Son and Holy Ghost - and we shall come to a death bed soon, and perhaps before we come to that, some fear will come to us to try the work we profess to have been, and to be, the subjects of. Nothing will stand but that that is between our souls and God - nothing else, just that. That is as much religion as we have, what He has given. His movements toward us and the response of faith toward Him, faith standing in the power of God, that is the religion we have got, if we have got any that is worth having, and no more; and this God must be worshipped "in spirit and in truth." My brethren, may the Lord look upon us. I need Him to teach me, and you need Him to teach you. You will never stand, without His grace. You will never be rejected, with it.
