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Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham
on Sunday evening, 4th. August, 1929

Text: John 7 v. 46

"The officers answered,
Never man spake like this man."

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The Pharisees and chief priests sent officers to take Christ. His doctrine offended them. He was not answering their expectations. They were looking for a king who should deliver them from their present galling bondage. They had a king, though they hated his yoke and they wished to be delivered, and the promised Messiah, they were expecting to be their deliverer in that particular, and they were disappointed, and disappointment in this case led to enmity, to utter rejection of Christ, and continually during His ministry they were seeking to take and destroy Him. They were not able, until His hour came. These officers would seem to have been honest men, if, at any rate, if they were not honest men, the speaking, the teaching of the Lord Jesus so affected them, as that they went back to those who had sent them, without their prisoner, and when these Pharisees and chief priests asked them why they had not brought Christ, - to arrest and to take whom they were sent - they answered, "Never man spake like this Man."

As His Person was unique, so His preaching was above the preaching of all who had preceded Him. Moses spoke according to God's direction; the prophets were inspired, and they spoke according to the inspiration of the Spirit; they all preached Christ. The types, were speaking types; they all preached Christ, but nobody understood them and Moses was only understood very partially, and the prophets, though they searched and enquired diligently with respect to their prophesying, looking into what they were speaking, did not understand it, but now, He had come of whom they spoke, of whom they prophesied, - He had come. His teaching arrested men, but it provoked them. It did not answer their expectations. This wondrous preaching that extorted this confession, supposing it were not a willing confession, we may look at in these ways: first, what the Lord Jesus said with respect to His Father. He preached His Father. He made known His Father and He claimed to be the servant of His Father. His Father had, in that particular, drawn attention

to Him by Isaiah, as you have it in that prophesy, "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold: Mine Elect in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." That Servant was His own eternal Son incarnate, and this Servant always said He was the servant of His Father. He came, He declared, "Not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." He said that He did not speak His own words, nor do His own works, but that He spoke the words His Father sent Him to speak, and did the works which His Father sent Him to do. What servant ever uttered so disinterested, so absolutely good and true words of Him who had sent Him? O and what words they were; words of the covenant of grace; words of redemption; and the Spirit of God being on Him without measure, constituted Him the Prince of preachers. No preacher ever approached Christ for greatness, for dignity, for beauty, for glory, for blessedness. In Isaiah you have it again, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified." This was the ministry; this was the preacher; this was the preacher anointed by God the Holy Ghost, who as we have it in this gospel, was given to Christ without measure. Never man spake of God as did Jesus Christ. Never man opened and declared and preached the name of His Father, as Jesus Christ. No man ever made known the will of God as did this His Servant, Jesus Christ. O my hearers, listen to Him; go to the Bible and read what the Lord Jesus said concerning Him who had sent Him; concerning the character of the Father and the will of the Father and the love of the Father and the commandment to Him, of the Father. "No man ever spake like this Man," - this God-man. They knew Him not to be Almighty God as well as man, but such He was, and such He is. Thus, speaking of His Son and of His Servant, the Father said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased - hear Him". He came from heaven to declare God. He came from heaven to declare the will of God. He came from heaven with a divine law,

with a just commandment in His heart, He preached that law; He obeyed that commandment. The commandment was, that He should lay down His life, and it is written of Him in this inerrant Book, He was "obedient unto death."

Look at, in the next place with respect to what Christ preached concerning Himself. He did preach concerning Himself. The Jews fretted against that and objected to it. They said He was His own witness, but He said I have the witness of My Father, and I have just quoted that great witness of the Father to Him, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." O I wish you were as pleased as a regenerated people could be with the Lord Jesus, and the Servant of God, but what did Christ say concerning Himself? He said this, - listen to it - "The Son of man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister." He took a basin. He girded Himself with a towel and washed the feet of His disciples. "I am among you as He that serveth." He was chosen to serve. "Every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God." What things pertain to God? God's character, justice, holiness, mercy, love - these things pertain to God's nature. He is naturally of that divine and glorious character - holy, holy, holy. And man has outraged this great God by rebellion. You have, I have, all men have. A priest is necessarily a mediator. A person between parties who have a difference, a quarrel, and our Great High Priest is between His Father and offending men, and the men for whom He is chosen and called to be a priest, being sinners, must have made on their behalf a satisfying sacrifice, and this is the service that Christ did. Every high priest is called and ordained for men. That is His position with respect to men, and He is called to serve in things pertaining to God, and serving in things pertaining to God, had this wondrous, this everlasting issue: the salvation of all for whom He served. And this is what Christ said of Himself.

He said also, I am the Light of the world: that whosoever believeth in Me should not walk in darkness, but have the light of life. (John chap. 8 v. 12). He said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." He said, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." He said all these things. Whoever said them before Him - what prophet said them so perfectly, so beautifully? Never man spake the gospel as

Christ spake it. Never man could have spoken as Christ spoke. Tongues of angels would be, as it were, dumb, compared with the tongue of the Lord Jesus. He said all this concerning Himself. The climax of His teaching and speaking concerning Himself is this: 'No man taketh My life from Me.' "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father." The great concern of all who are born again is this: 'Did the Lord Jesus say that for me, for me, for me!' You will get that enquiry in the whole church of God from time to time and it will be expressed again and again in this petition, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." His last word was this: "It is finished." To His Father as it is recorded in this gospel in the prayer of the Lord Jesus, He said, "Father I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." He was so near to the accomplishment of all for which He came that He said, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." Then He dismissed His Spirit.

H Now in the third place, Jesus Christ speaks as no other man could speak. Never did man speak to the church, to sinners, as the Lord Jesus speaks. He does speak to people. He does speak to people. If we never hear His voice, woe unto us. Better that we had never been born, but He does speak to some people. He is a preacher, a great preacher, divine preacher, anointed preacher and His preaching is what I have referred to. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek." What would be good tidings to you, to me? If any of us should hear tomorrow that we were interested in a will, that a considerable sum were left us which would make us for the future independent of any labour of our hands, naturally, that would be good news. Some might be taken immediately out of poverty into comparative wealth. Now if a sinner knows and feels himself to be a sinner, if he heard Moses, and is hearing him, if he hears this word, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them", and if such a word enters his conscience and brings up before his gaze, - his pained gaze, - his heart as depraved, his life as imperfect, his thoughts as abominable, his motives as impure, what a state that person will feel in. Some of us have been there. We have been there. I was there more than 60 years ago. It will be 65 years since I came into that state, this summer. The Lord's word, His holiness, His purity, His character, His glory shining into the

conscience of a sinner, - ah, it makes havoc with his natural peace, that is to say, it destroys it. He is brought in guilty. Now for such a person to hear a divine voice, to hear it in his heart, and to feel the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ freely, lovingly, vicariously shed, sprinkled on his conscience - that is good news; good tidings from a far country, good tidings when he is told that there was given a substitute for him, that there was sent and called and chosen a High Priest for him; that the sacrifice which was necessary for his salvation, was provided by the Lord for him. Would not that be, is not that good news, wherever and whenever it is heard? Ah, it may be a tale to some of you. It may be a bit of interesting history as recorded in the Bible which you do not entirely reject, but that is not enough, it must come into your heart. It must come to your conscience, you must feel it. The voice of pardon, - the preacher to come and preach pardon. I preach it to you and have been doing it for many many years, but then, many of you do not believe it for yourselves. You have no feeling of need of it. That is very solemn for you. O when a sinner realises that he is a sinner, then he needs the preacher whose preaching can be, and is effectual. He needs the preacher who carries such conviction with his preaching into the conscience, that he says, "The voice of my Beloved!" Instantly he realises whose voice it is; enjoys the good news it brings to him; receives it into his heart as the Thessalonians received the gospel. As the Apostle Paul relates to them, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." In much affliction too. "Never man spake like this Man", when He speaks salvation; when He speaks forgiveness; when He speaks justification; when He tells a sinner who has realised that he is alienated from the life of God through wickedness, that he, that sinner, has access to, and acceptance with His Father through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Why sinner, when you get that in your conscience, you will be for the moment the happiest person on earth. Preach peace, preach peace, says God to His servants, by Jesus Christ, and when the preacher is Jesus Christ Himself, then, then the sinner knows for himself that "Never man spake like this Man."

And He speaks comfortably to His people in their various cases. A winter state comes to people, - the people of God. The tree has its seasons, it has its winter; no sap is actively moving in the

trunk and branches, it has gone down into the root. That winter state is known to the church, and there comes an end to it. Who brings that end? Why, this blessed Man, this God-man, Jesus Christ. He says, "Rise up, My love, ---- the winter is past, ---- and gone." The minister may say to his congregation, or to a person he visits, 'Now this winter state of yours will end,' and the congregation or the person may say, 'But you do not know. You do not know how vile I am, and how I have deserved and brought on myself this winter state.' And the preacher is useless, in a sense, when he thus preaches, but when this Man speaks, when this God-man speaks and says, "Rise up, My love, --- and come away." 'Come away, from this winter state, this barrenness,' O how the sap flows. "Never man spake like this man" - so effectually. Instantly His voice, His word, His preaching will make a difference. The difference is felt, and the sinner rises up, and he says, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine", 'and now we are together again. We have been separated and I have been as in the winter, barren, fruitless, but now He has come and all my unbelief and my barrenness and my darkness and my distance, these are all ended because my Beloved has come and He has spoken to me and said, Come away.' Sometimes He speaks an invitation to His people. An invitation that their shy spirits need at times. He says, "O My dove, that art in the clefts of the Rock, in the secret places of the Most High, let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." One may say, 'My voice could never be sweet to God.' What is your voice? Why, it is nothing but confession. Is not that sweet to Him who said, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity," and now you are doing it. Is it not sweet to Him who said, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," - and now you are doing it! 'Let Me hear thy voice, thy voice is sweet.' Which of the two voices was sweet to God in the temple, the Pharisee, strutting about as if he were somebody, and boasting as if he did something, or the voice of that depressed man who had not courage to lift his face up to God; who smote on his breast indicating where his anguish lay. Which of the two was sweet? Scripture says, "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other", - his sins forgiven, his filthy rags taken away, and a change of raiment given to him. God had heard his voice, - his sweet voice, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "And thy countenance is comely." 'Why,' says one, 'mine could not be comely, it is wet and foul with tears.'

If they were tears of remorse, without any faith in God, in Christ; if they were tears of a thief who is sorry he stole, not because stealing is wrong but because he is in prison, there would be no comeliness in that countenance, but if it be the countenance of one whose tears trickle down his face because he has sinned against his God, because he has done that which is evil in the sight of God, there is a comeliness there. Grace has made these tears. Grace has given the strength to confess sin. Grace has brought the sinner to that place, and so the Lord says to him, 'Your countenance is pleasing to Me.' A man's judgment of himself may be very far from correct, but God's judgment is correct. If He says you are comely to Him, you are so. He invites His people near in certain conditions. We have it in Matthew's gospel, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." I, able, being God, able being your substitute and your Saviour, I, possessing all power in heaven and in earth and all grace, "will give you rest." O what a bosom is the Saviour's bosom. What a rest His smile gives to a sinner. What a rest His gospel is. Rutherford has a strong word. He says that Christ's will is a bed in the fire, and people find it so. "I will give you rest." It is a cleansing word to the leper. He said, "I will, be thou clean." It is an inviting word, and a healing word. "Never man spake like this Man." He speaks lovingly to sinners. He says to them, "Fear not." "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." He speaks promisingly to him. He says, "I will never leave thee." He says to them, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Is there any voice like this to you? 'Ah,' some may be saying, 'it is a long time since we have heard it, so long as to make us think, to fear, that we have never heard it really. And what course do you take then? 'Well,' says one, 'the course I take is to go to Him as well as I can and tell Him that I have deserved His silence; that I do justify Him if He does not speak again to me, but I want to hear His voice.' "The companions hearken to Thy voice: cause me to hear it," says the church. 'Let me hear it,' says the sinner. 'Thy companions and my companions hear it, let not me be destitute of that.' And you have another petition in the Psalms. "Be not silent to me: lest, if Thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit."

One word more. He speaks a word of assurance sometimes. The friends, may say to you, 'We fully believe you are right', and you, object and wonder. Perhaps you have said, 'Have I at any time said

H things to so and so, that have given a wrong impression of my case?' and you may wish then, that you had never spoken. Friends who have seen you in difficulties, and seen God delivering you, say, 'O your unbelief has no foundation,' but you, think it has. One Man, can remove all fear; take away all questions; resolve all doubts, even this Man, this blessed, this divine preacher Jesus Christ. And if He says, "Fear not: I have redeemed thee", - "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom", then, then you will say, 'Now I know!' 'Tis a great thing to know! Guessing in religion is terrible. Supposing about your case, is grievous. To know things, that, is the matter; to know God, to know Christ, to know the Holy Ghost, to know the gospel, to know the way to heaven. Who can make you know - who can assure you? ... God the Son. This blessed Man. "Never man spake like this Man." He opens the ear to discipline, as the word is, - He digs into the ear. He opens it. God opened His ear and He heard, and He opens the ears of His people and they hear. They hear, O they hear His love; they hear His grace; they hear His promise; they hear what He has to say. "I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for He will speak peace unto His people, and to His saints." It is peace when He speaks peace. It is likened to a garrison, the peace of God, it is likened to a garrison that covers and protects the soldiers in it. That is what the word is, "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ." He is the God of peace; the author of peace; the object that gives peace; His is the voice that speaks peace. Never man then, spake like this Man.

One word more and I close. He speaks to people about their troubles, their afflictions, and no man, could ever say what He says. No preacher can ever speak what He speaks in this matter. He comes into a sinner's condition; comes into his place and He says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." He says, "My son," - O what a word, - "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." And that puts, O beautifully, and clearly, puts the love of God into the trouble and makes chastening an evidence of sonship, which is wonderful to the sinner to whom the Lord Jesus says such a word. Your enemy and Christ's enemy, the devil, may have tried to make you believe that your troubles in providence

come from God's hatred, that He has something against you; some particular complaint, and something which He wont forgive, against you. Solomon has a very great word on this point. He says, "No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them", - all providences, - God in some providence coming athwart your path, and now, says Scripture, you cannot judge that God hates or that God loves. Taking the case as it stands, providence proves nothing except in the issue of it, but when a sinner is exercised by his providence, when proving what is written in the Hebrews, "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby", when that comes, then says the sinner, 'I know now, it was kind of God to send that trouble.' David said it, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted", and a precious saint of God at Leicester, whom I knew a little, at the end of her day said, 'I bless God for every twig of the rod He has laid on me.' And that is what some of you will say when you come to reckon up your mercies and God's dealings with you. I will tell you what you wont leave out, you wont leave out your chastening, your severest pains and the severest rebukes God has spoken on your hearts. You wont omit them, you will put them in, and say, 'Mercy was in that, and love was in that, and goodness was in that.' "Never man spake like this Man." Do you believe it? O yes! Why do you believe it? Well, some say, because the Bible tells us to. Quite true, - others will add to that, they will not only say the Bible tells us and so we believe it, but, 'The Lord has taught us, we have heard His voice; we have felt His power; we have tasted in His word spoken to us, that He is gracious,' and that knowledge is best. All acquired knowledge of Christ in the Bible, good as it is in itself, is short. But this makes it better than anything else - the voice of the Beloved in the soul, making you say again and again, 'The voice of my Beloved! behold, He cometh leaping o'er the mountains that separate us, skipping o'er the hills which we cannot get over, - He is coming.'

May the Lord come. May He speak to us and may we hear Him so as to say, "Never man spake like this Man."