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Sermon preached by Mr. J.K. Popham
on Wednesday evening, 24th. August, 1927

Text: John 8 v. 58

"Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you
before Abraham was, I Am."

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The eternity of Christ, His eternal relationship with His Father is the foundation of our hope. A believing view of this, whenever the Holy Ghost gives such a view, is well nigh overwhelming. Everything that is proper to God, Christ is. Everything that is proper to a son in relationship to his father, Jesus Christ possesses, and though it is impossible for the human mind, and will be so through eternity in heaven with the saints, with their sanctified intellect, to grasp infinity, it has pleased God to reveal it in the Scripture. It pleases Him to reveal to faith, that eternity that is proper to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and every view, be it but for a moment, just as the flash of lightning, that the Spirit gives, endears to the soul, this Holy One of God. If I could speak to you now, under the influence, and in the light that it pleased God, I trust, to grant to me the other day in reading these words, I think I could speak well, at least, I mean I could speak well of Him, and He is worthy, - He is worthy. May we escape that condemnation that Christ uttered to the Jews, His enemies, when He said, "Ye do dishonour Me." My brethren, be careful on this point: mind the honour that is due to the Lord Jesus. Never, (by the grace of God, may we all be kept from it,) never dishonour Him. If you would honour God, you must honour the Son equally. This is the will of God: "That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father," and if we had any true apprehension of Deity, of eternal Deity, of an independent Being, of One who is incapable of extension, of diminution, - can never be more and never less, - of One who is infinite in all the perfections of His Being, and unchangeable; I say, if we have any true apprehension of such a Being and honour Him, may we give that honour to the Lord Jesus even as we give it to His Father and to the Holy Ghost and I am disposed to say this to you, that the more grace you have, the more you will be attracted to the Person of the Son of God and the more you will realise that He is the proper Object of your faith and your worship. The mocking Unitarian with all that he may say

against our worship, when we see that in the Man Christ Jesus resides, yea is united to Him, Almighty God, infinite in all that belongs to His divine nature, we shall worship Jesus Christ. "Bow down, sense and reason, faith only reign here." Brethren, it is great to believe in the Deity of Jesus Christ. He asserts this Himself, - may we believe Him! O if but a few rays of His Deity should beam through His humanity upon us we certainly should believe that He is Almighty God. It does not diminish from His Deity that He sighed human breath. It does not diminish from His equality with His Father that He was His Father's Servant. Faith must reign here. I have no grasp of this in my reason, nor have you, neither can we have. Nothing but faith, a God-given faith, the eye of faith and the light of truth falling on that eye; nothing else will make us true believers in the Lord Jesus as Almighty God. It is good to me to believe that there is such a thing as a spiritual intellect given, or a spiritual intellectual view by the Holy Ghost, not a grasp of it. No, you could sooner put the sea into a child's bucket than you could grasp and hold Infinity, but you can believe it by the Holy Ghost. I have no doubt of it. An unborn John the Baptist could rejoice, and did, at the coming in with His mother Mary, of an unborn Saviour, and I think there is a significance in that passage of Scripture not to be lightly passed over. It would say this to us: that no condition of the creature can keep out a real view and knowledge of Almighty God. An idiot can receive this. An idiot can worship this God in our nature. Would you be well grounded for eternity? Would you honour Almighty God? You must find this: the Person of Christ, Almighty God, once sighing human breath, now, in that human nature, glorified in heaven! "Before Abraham was", (God's friend,) "I Am," and after Abraham, even to Moses this I Am appeared. He appeared in the burning bush. Ignorant of who was there, Moses, for the moment said, "I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt," but Jesus said, "--- put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. - I am the --- God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. - I have seen, I have seen the affliction of My people --- and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them." This is He who spoke, as Steven said, to the church in the wilderness and was with the church in the wilderness. This is that Prophet of whom Moses spoke when he said - 'A Prophet like unto me shall

God raise up unto you, Him shall ye hear in all things,' - (Deut. 18 v 15) and solemn it is. The man who will not hear Him shall be cut off. Very solemn not to hear Christ - Almighty God - very solemn! See if you have ever heard Him. Look into the question. Examine it. Have you heard Almighty God speak to you? You may say, 'We could not bear it.' You could, if you heard it in Jesus Christ, as Paul was inspired to write to the Hebrews, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." Just as Divinity's rays are veiled to bearableness in that human nature, so is the divine voice, if I may use such a word, reduced to the capacity of a spiritual ear, in the Person of the Lord Jesus.

Now, dearly beloved friends, if you are going to heaven, you are going there through this Person, through Almighty God incarnate, through the very, the only begotten, Son of God incarnate. Is it not therefore a wonderful mercy to be led to see this truth, to believe and receive it into your hearts and to be grounded as to the foundation on which you are building your hopes of getting to heaven? I will try to tell you a little of what I have seen in this, this Man, this Servant of the Father. It is very observable that in this chapter, at the end of which Christ does so assert His eternal Deity; He does, again and again, express Himself as being the Servant of His Father: this office of His is not in respect of His Deity. It does not belong essentially, though it is connected with it, it is not essential, to His divine Person. It is a covenant business. It is in the covenant. It is in that promise - the first words God spoke after the fall - Gen. 3 v 15. The Seed of the woman, - that Seed of which the apostle Paul was inspired to write to the Galatians, "He saith not, And to seeds as of many; but as of one, --- Thy Seed, which is Christ." And this is that which we have in the prophecy of Isaiah, "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him." - This is the anointed Preacher - "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek;" O what a Person! Look at Him as He is, Almighty God! Who made the world which we live in? The Son of God! "By whom," it is written of the Father, "He made the worlds." Who upholds them? The Son of God! "Upholding all things by the Word of His power." Who raised the dead to life, who gave back to a widowed, sorrowing mother, her only son? The Son of God! Who opened the eyes of the blind; who loosed a

tied tongue; who opened deaf ears; who fed five thousand with a few loaves and fishes? The Son of God - the very Son of God! Oh, have you seen Him? Have you really believed in His eternal Deity for five minutes at any time? I know if you have, you have been believers indeed and in truth and you have worshipped Him, really worshipped Almighty God in your own nature. It is a beautiful sight when one gets it. It is known to be very beautiful and very wonderful in its efficacy. It works efficaciously in the believing heart, and as the blind man whose eyes Jesus opened, when he heard the Lord say to him, "Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee," so with us, - "And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him."

Worship!.... It is the prostration of a poor sinful creature before Almighty God. It is the adoration of a living soul. It is the admiration of a believing heart; the admiration of what He is and of what He has done, and of what He is doing, and there is great matter for admiration in Jesus Christ. Worship - it is beholding His beauty; it is beholding His greatness; it is beholding His goodness and prostrating your soul before Him. How I have wished I could know Him more, then I know I could preach Him better. Of one thing I am persuaded, there is nothing worth any man's preaching, that is not connected with the Person of the Lord Jesus. Nothing! Everything that we have, except sin, we owe to Him. Every hope we have of good, is centred in Him. It is all put there. "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell."

Now, see the connection there is between His Deity, His omnipotence and our safety. You will see if this be opened to you, how the Lord has connected omnipotence and the safety of a sinner. "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." No man, - be he king or pope or a religious, learned athiest preaching against His Deity, - no man shall pluck a poor sheep out of the hand of the omnipotent Lord Jesus Christ. Then, do you faint sometimes, are you ready to give up? Do you say, 'How can I get through these difficulties, - how am I to live with this body of sin and death tied to me, - how am I to get honourably through with all the entanglements of sin in my members?' Well, if the Spirit of God turns your eye to the omnipotent Lord Jesus, then you will say, 'Here's my safety. If I feel Him not, here's my safety!' "Neither can any man pluck them out

of My hand." He seemed to do it, that wicked devil once, when he got hold of Peter and began to sift him, O it seemed as if Peter were gone. What could keep Peter now? No man, no devil could pluck Peter out of the hand of Christ.... Do wicked thoughts teem in your mind sometimes; does carnality bind you sometimes; do cares depress you sometimes; does guilt sink you sometimes; are you driven of the devil sometimes? In these things we prove our weakness. It is weakness indeed that belongs to us and we learn by such things, that "safety is of the Lord"; that, "An horse is a vain thing for safety": that the Lord "taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man", but, He taketh pleasure in a poor sinner who fears His name, who fears being the servant of sin and becoming a prey to the devil; He takes pleasure in such a man, for such a man says, 'Lord save, or I perish; keep me alive, if I am alive; quicken me, if I am not alive; quicken my soul, and quicken me in Thy righteousness and cause me to escape.' Why dear friends, our weakness is no bar to omnipotence, therefore no danger to our souls; danger indeed to our experience, indeed very dangerous, but not to our safety. "Safety is of the Lord", then, if I have rightly expressed this point and the Lord should show it you, you will see the connection between a poor weak worm and omnipotence, - omnipotence in your Saviour; the divine arm clothed with your own nature. No sight more wonderful than that, when given by the Lord! Now this will narrow things up very much to us. It won't leave us free to say we will be more watchful or more careful. No, it will make us careful, but it won't leave us free to say we will be more careful. Peter fell there. - 'I will go to prison with Thee and I will die with Thee and if these, my brethren, should deny Thee, I will not. If they are wicked enough to do it, I will not do it.' O what a lesson he had to learn! Weakness indeed endangers our experience; brings darkness and guilt and many, many an hour of bitter bondage, but it does not interfere with omnipotence. He, this omnipotent Saviour, is the Father's Servant. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged."

"Before Abraham was, I Am." I am Wisdom. "I Wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions." He found out the knowledge of the witty inventions of the world, with all its beauties and all its complications and the invention of these our bodies with their wondrous organism and He finds out witty inventions in providence to help His poor people, and the witty inventions that the Spirit is willing to manifest as being in Himself able

to deliver - 'knowing how' - as Peter speaks so beautifully; O it is a strong word, - "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations." Not only is He able to do it, but He 'knows how'! There may be quite strength enough in one man to bring a drowning friend to shore, but there may be difficulties in the way and he may not be able to do it. There are no difficulties with God. No difficulties in the way of omnipotence and of Infinite Wisdom. He does not know difficulties my friends. You do, I do, and we may be often frightened about them; the sight of them is weakening, but there are no difficulties with Christ. Tangles, entanglements, temptations, O, they hold us, but they are no hindrance to Him. "I, wisdom", Infinite Wisdom, "dwell with prudence", and so He says, "Blessed is the man that heareth Me", as if He should say, 'Now in your perplexities listen to Me.' "Blessed is the man that heareth Me." What does he do when he hears Christ? He goes to Him, 'Lord save or I perish. Guide me else I must go astray.' Do we see the connection between Infinite Wisdom and our poor wandering, wavering, mistaken selves? Mistakes - why, they are natural to us, they belong to us, but not to God. I would exalt Him in your presence. Infinite Wisdom! Then do not sink when you feel your foolishness. O do not say, 'I shall never get through; I do not know what to do next, or what step I ought to take.' But then, that does not matter; all you need, is not to get wiser but to have wisdom on your side and made known to you. The direction of the Spirit by James here, is very beautiful, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

And yet another word I would say: our gracious, infinite and glorious Redeemer has all fulness. We are leaky vessels and things leak out very quickly, very quickly. You cannot keep a good feeling. Good Bernard Gilpin, when he was taught that he could not keep good things, and he got some good thing from heaven, said, 'Lord, keep it for me', and that was a very wise thing. When you get some gracious experience, you may be apt to say, 'Now I will keep it.' When you get some access, you may be disposed to say, 'Now I will follow this up.' You soon do neither the one nor the other, but if, realising that you can let everything slip, - things leak away from your memory and from your spirit, and the influence seems to die down very, very soon, - with that before you, you can say, 'Now Lord, let Thy fulness be supplying me.' It was a great sight that was given to

the apostle John, of which he tells us, "He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal." The same river was shown to Ezekiel and in his case, the various degrees of its manifestation we have given to us. There was just a measurement in the first instance reaching to the ankles and I dare say it greatly strengthened them. When you get a little outpouring of grace from Christ's fulness, your ankles are strengthened and you feel you can stand in the old way and ask for the good old paths and seek to follow the Lord more fully, but there was a greater degree to come, even to reach to his knees, and then he would pray all the more, as you do when something comes; a degree comes, you get on your knees, and you seek the Lord and are earnest with Him, cannot let Him go. It is grace that makes us pray better, more fervently. It is grace that brings us to our knees, when our hearts kneel before Him when we may be engaged with our occupations. O, a little more of this would be great in us, would it not? Still more was given to him, even it reached his loins and then he would swim in it. And this he discovered: it was a river not to be passed over, and when you get some sense of the infinite fulness of Christ; His life, His merit, His righteousness, His goodness, His unchangeableness, His promises which are yea and amen, then you say, 'I shall never get to the end of this', - "a river that could not be passed over." You can come back to the bank, who does not? We have no unchanging experience here; no unvarying feelings here; no constant swimming here. We get back to the bank and feel as if we were just as before, though we are not. The experience remains, though we may find the memory of it even die away from us. But now, this fulness of Christ is very encouraging. A full God and a full Man. God in all His perfections. Man, the Man Jesus, in all the purity God ever will require of human nature. O may the Lord show this to us. I think He has showed it to me. All that ever God will require of purity in the human nature of the church, and she only has that nature, He has found in His dear Son incarnate, Jesus Christ. What then?... 'O,' faith says, 'let me go to Him. Let me seek supplies from Him; pardons, may He multiply them; sanctification, may He bestow it on me; grace and strength and patience and humility - give me these Lord.' A full Christ - a full Christ! Do not try to make your religion better or bigger. Why not?... Go to Him who has all the religion you can ever need. There is ever so much of our religion will perish, but none of His, none of His. And in this fulness, there is this great matter, namely, the fulness of the Spirit; the fulness of the Holy Ghost.

'What has that to do with me?' says a sinner, a poor sinner. What has it to do with you?... Why, if you belong to the Lord, you have an interest in it and you must and will receive the Holy Ghost in every communication that is made of Him to you, from and through the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah, it was very significant when the Lord said to His Son, "My Spirit that is upon Thee." You notice it.... "My Spirit that is upon Thee --- 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, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." Does the Holy Ghost help us? He comes from Christ with that help. Does He teach us? It is the fulfilment of Christ's promise, "He will guide you into all truth." Does He open to you the Person of the Lord Jesus? It is the fulfilment of Christ's promise, "He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you." Go then poor needy sinner, go with the weakness and the emptiness and the leakiness that is in you. Go with these things, you won't be repelled. He won't say you ought not, to have lost what you have lost, do not come to Me again and again with your emptiness.' You will never weary the Lord Jesus by going to Him. You may weary Him with your sins, I have done so, but you cannot weary Him with your prayers of need.

Lastly, Deity is unchangeable. "I am the Lord, I change not." Has this any connection with us; has this anything to do with us? Yes, - "therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Think of it! Such changlings as we are, hot and cold in half an hour; now running after Him, then away from Him; cleaving to Him, and turning our back to Him; saying we love Him, and then no love in us, as to its acting. What a change - what a change! But He says, "I am the Lord, I change not." And this unchangeableness, the apostle Paul was inspired to teach us. He says, "The end of our conversation," that is, the conversation of all ministers, true ministers, the end of all their teaching and preaching and labouring, is this: "Jesus Christ." That is, to set Him forth, preach Him, lift Him up, declare Him, make Him known in that way: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday and to-day, and for ever." And again, the same apostle was inspired to express this unchangeableness in the promises: "All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us," - by us in whom they are fulfilled. And this unchangeableness is carried into eternity to come; an eternity past seemingly by our own existence interrupted, but there is an eternity to come,

when time shall be no more, and then the immutable God who has promised everlasting happiness to His sanctified people, will be to them throughout eternity all that they need. Do not you feel sometimes, that if the Lord would just give you one more smile, you would say, 'Now Lord let me come home.' Is that not one effect of grace in the sweetness and the efficacy of it? You do not like to see a changing world and, what is worst to you, a changing self, a sinful self, a poor sinful self. A hope so much divine we should give God thanks for, a sweet hope of getting to heaven; of being without sin. I am sure that sometimes the very thought of being without sin is very sweet to me. I am so troubled with sin, - it hampers me, injures me, defiles me, weakens me and brings me into bondage, - that I shall be glad to get rid of it. It dishonours God, it dishonours Him in me. May the Lord help us to see the blessedness that there will be in heaven where there is no sin. Now if I have been enabled at all properly, - most inadequately certainly - but at all properly, to set before you the Deity, the essential Sonship of Jesus, for He speaks these two things to set forth His Person - 'I am the Son of My Father,' and "Before Abraham was, I am," - then, may the ineffable connection of that Deity and our safety, be made out to our faith, that we may say in humble confidence, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day", and may the Lord keep us from putting our badness and the thorns and briars of our sins up against Him, and enable us to believe that He has said, "Fury is not in Me." - 'I would go through these thorns and these briars and burn them up. Let the poor creature who was so disposed to set up these things as against him', "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me and he shall make peace with Me:" and he shall be at peace with Me, I will be at peace with him, and we will walk together!'

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