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Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham
on Friday evening, 1st. June 1923

Text - Luke 15. v. 2.

"And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying,
This Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

That which was a reproach to the scribes and Pharisees will fill heaven with people who were sinners and with eternal praise, and we shall sing, as we have just concluded in that beautiful hymn, we will, when we reach beyond the grave, sing of salvation full and free. What a mercy for us it is, that Christ is the Friend of sinners. May we be enabled to remember it. Hart says, "Be that forgotten never." He is the Friend of sinners. I hope God will grant, if it can be His sovereign pleasure, that there will not one, in this congregation die under that awful word, "which need no repentance." It does not mean that there are innocent persons anywhere to be found, but that there are many in their own judgement, who have no need of repentance. Bless God it is not so with some of us. We do need repentance, we confess it before Him. We feel we need repentance. We need two things which the Apostle speaks of in the Acts - "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ;" and if we have these two inestimable blessings, we shall one day fly from this body of clay and from the body of sin and death and enter heaven. O what a gospel is the gospel of Christ, the glorious gospel of the blessed God; the blessed gospel of God's free, rich and sovereign love. Happy the people who are sinners. Not living in sin, but repenting of sin through the grace of the Spirit. This Man - the Lord Jesus Christ, sent of His Father; coming of His own free will and love; taking our nature; bearing our sins in His own body on the tree; rising from the dead; ascending into heaven; there at His Father's right hand, ever living to make intercession for sinners. This Man! O blessed sinner who can sing from his heart, in faith - "A Man there is, a real Man, with wounds still gaping wide, from which rich streams of blood once ran, in hands, and feet, and side." This Man notices sinners. One point we may just, in passing take notice of in the parable of the prodigal son; when he was returning, his father saw him a great way off. This Man notices sinners; looks on them; sees their pain; hears their sighs; their inward confessions; their resolves as to what they shall say when they get an audience of God; He hears what they intend to say; how they will abase themselves. How they will declare that they are not worthy to be called the sons of God, and in His love and in His pity He runs to meet them; they are more to Him than the whole world. A repenting sinner is, in the eye of God, a beautiful person, and not one of his sins that he has committed, - now that he is turned by the Spirit and caused to walk in the way of righteousness and cleave to righteousness, - not one of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned to him. The only thing that shall be mentioned to him, is, the best robe, the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace, the ring of sweet assurance and adoption into the family of heaven and the fatted calf and the heavenly merry-making. His sins, which are many, are

all forgiven him, and all his business is like that of the woman who was a sinner, but who was permitted by the Lord to draw near to Him and wash His feet with her tears and wipe them with the hairs of her head and anoint him with ointment. That is the occupation of one who is received freely, fully; graciously received by Jesus Christ.

The sight of this Man by faith draws the soul to Him, He is seen to be the Friend of sinners, and seen to be exactly suited to the case of sinners. A bad case, a case of filthy garments, a case of dumbness, a case of guilt, a case of temptation, and the devil seeming to claim the person. This case looked on by Christ, taken notice of by Christ, this person is received. "This Man receiveth sinners." It makes you love Him when He receives you; makes you wonder that He could receive such a person as you. It makes you dissolve in the sweetest repentance, and contrition, that He should have received such a person as you. Oh, it makes sin bitter. It makes Christ believed, it makes salvation great, and mercy sweet. To rebuke these scribes and Pharisees, Christ uttered three beautiful parables, as we have read. Beautiful parables, all illustrating His mercy. Something lost, something found. A prodigal going astray, brought back, - everything to illustrate and set forth in its beauty and its greatness, and its glory, the sovereign love and compassion of the Lord Jesus. It is a great mercy to be the characters. Some tell us, we should not preach to characters, but if we did not, we must forsake the Bible, and find something different from the Bible, for from the beginning to the end of the Scriptures, wherever salvation is spoken of, there are certain well defined characters also set forth. "This Man receiveth," then He takes hold of them. He does not coldly permit them to come near to Him, but He takes hold of them and brings them in. Brings them in! Oh what a God He is! If you approach Him with a repenting spirit, He will take hold of you, and bring you in with a loving spirit, a loving heart, and with all that forgiveness that you stand in need of; with all that tender compassion that your soul feels it needs.

Let us look as we may be enabled for a little time, at this very great word. First of all, the Person of whom this great thing is said. Said in reproach by the scribes and Pharisees. Said in His honour by the Holy Ghost who records this by the pen-man Luke. Said for the encouragement of His children who in their evil cases are drawn to Him. "This Man!" He is a real man, as well as true Almighty God. A glorious Person and without sin. "Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. - Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: - A Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Of sorrows we can scarcely conceive. Sorrows penetrating to the uttermost part of His tender heart; His holy soul. Sorrows from sin imputed to Him. Sorrows that His Father inflicted on Him; that the law inflicted; chastisement, stripes, wounds, bruises; all were the experience of "this Man." A Surety, a suffering Surety, who became a Surety with that infinite knowledge, that He alone possesses. O, what it meant to Him to be a Surety. We may become a surety with scarcely any proper conception of what the position would entail, and not knowing that we should ever come into any trouble by it. But when Christ became Surety, He knew absolutely what it meant in His

infinite knowledge, and when His holy human nature shrank, without any sinful shrinking or unbelief or rebellion, or not wishing to do the will of Him who sent Him, then He was enabled to sacrifice His own will and Himself and say, "not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Not as I, in my nature, human nature, having a real will, the will of a man, not as this human will, if it were just alone would, but, as Thy will is, so is My will. A Surety, a bleeding, suffering, patient sufficient Surety, - "this Man." This Priest, (a priest must be a man); this blessed Priest, this Great High Priest of our profession, He must be a man, because He must stand between God and men. The priest's office is peculiarly, beautifully blessed. It is sufficient; it is that of a mediator, a middle party between two who have a controversy. A priest, and because of sin, he must have a sacrifice, for without a sacrifice, that is, "without shedding of blood is no remission." "This Man" is a Priest, yes, a Great High Priest, and His offering is Himself. Himself the Altar, and the Priest, and the Sacrifice. And so, as the Spirit says by Paul in the Hebrews, He "offered Himself without spot to God." "This Man," is also an Intercessor in heaven. He ever liveth, having entered heaven with His own blood, His own infinite merit. He ever liveth at the right hand of God, to make intercession, and is able by that intercession, "to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." And "this Man" is an expecting Man now, in heaven, "expecting till His enemies be made His footstool." He has devils, and these are to be His footstool, He has men against Him, and these are to be His footstool. He has some men who answer to the prodigal, and these He conquers, but not to make His footstool, rather to call them brethren. And He is not ashamed to do it, - again, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." And He is expecting a Kingdom, when He will have all His happy subjects, happy because holy with Himself. They shall go in, as His Kingdom, and never go out. He shall have them all with Him. He is expecting some who are sitting here. Expecting them to come to His blessed footstool. And how will He get them there? By His good Spirit, for they cannot come otherwise; by His good Spirit He shall bring them, and also by His Father's drawing. "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me. - No man can come to Me except the Father which hath sent Me draw him." And expecting them to come, by reason of His own attractions. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." Oh my brethren, what an attraction there is to Christ, as He is seen in the light, the revealing light of His Spirit. This is the Man, a Prophet to teach the good and right way. A King to rule over all His subjects, and "of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end." "This Man" has wonderful names, descriptive of His work - "Wonderful" and how wonderful is His work. "Counsellor," and how sweet and infallible are His blessed counsels in the hearts of His people. To seek Him; to turn not away from Wisdom's ways; and to invite them by His counsel, to come in, saying, - O ye simple, turn in hither, I have builded My house, I have hewed My seven pillars, I have killed My sacrifices, I have mingled My wine, all things are ready; O ye simple turn in hither! "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Can any believing soul here, be surprised at what the Scriptures speak of, namely, that "Christ is the Friend of sinners," seeing He is such a Man, that

He is such a Surety, that He keeps such a position, that of Priest and of Prophet, and of King; that He is a crowned Priest; that "His heart is made of tenderness; His bowels melt with love." O my friends have not you felt, often it may be, the great, the sweet, the suitable, wonderful, powerful attractions of the Lord Jesus?

He "receiveth." The word "receive" is beautiful, because, as I hinted just now, it does not mean that He coldly permits a guilty person to come to Him, but He draws him, and takes hold of him; yes, when men and devils, seek to overthrow and destroy; when sins committed and sins working, and all manner of evil living and lusting in the nature of a repenting sinner threaten to devour him, and ruin him, at every step he takes, "this Man" takes hold of him, and brings him. He "receiveth sinners," warmly, lovingly, giving them a Divine welcome. A welcome they could not imagine, awaited them, as they were, with shamed and painful, and weary steps, returning to their home. Who could imagine, that infinite goodness, and holiness, could extend to a guilty creature, so kind, so tender, so loving, so wonderful a welcome, as is awaiting everyone brought prodigal-like, to Himself? He receiveth them. He says, - Come in! Wherefore standest thou without! He says to His servants, - Go into the byways and hedges, and lanes, and everyone you find, poor, and maimed and lame and blind, and halt, compel to come in. Do not listen to their objections; do not allow these objections; tell them of a good God, who is a very Man, the Man Christ Jesus. Of His love, of His goodness, of His kindness. Tell them of the sufficiency of His best robe, the sufficiency of His forgiveness, and the blessedness of the fatted calf, and also of the sweetness of the ring, and the security and comfort of the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace. Tell them of the gospel, and so compel them to come in! My friends He will have you, and at times I believe He will have me. Yes, notwithstanding all the objections of a wicked heart. Notwithstanding all the stumblings of an unbelieving heart; notwithstanding all the objections and obstructions of a tempting devil; of a guilty conscience - "this Man" will take hold of repenting sinners, and have them in. He "receiveth" them, O do let me, without tediousness, say again - it is not a cold sort of reception! Like a superior might allow an offending inferior to come and say, "I have done wrong," and have no more to do with the matter. No, that is not it, - it is all love, and all mercy, and all sweetness, and all pardon "this Man" has, wherewith to welcome a returning sinner. Blessed be His loving and ever blessed Name, the Lord Jesus Christ. He says in the Psalms, "When I shall receive the congregation I will judge uprightly." Now do not tremble at the word "judge," there. When Christ receives a repenting sinner, the judgement is just that, you have in Zechariah. "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" That is the judgement, O yes, not the judgement you fear, not the judgement you think He must pronounce, and say, - Depart from Me, you are too wicked and guilty, and deformed, and defiled, - but, the judgement of a good Saviour, a great, a sufficient Saviour, that is the judgement with which He will judge the congregation when He receives it. He receives them in love, and if one may use the word, He does not take notice of the things they come with, except to remove them. O the loving reception that a wicked person with repentance in his heart receives. The wonder of love, the wonder

of grace, the wonder of justification, the wonder of sanctification, the wonder of a heavenly merry-making, all awaiting a poor, coming, wretched, unhappy, guilty prodigal, - a sinner. Such a sinner as you may feel to be. Such a sinner as I am, and feel myself to be. "This Man receiveth sinners." O may we be bad enough for Jesus Christ, - O may we be bad enough for Jesus Christ! I say it would be impossible to reckon how many are too good for Him. Bunyan says, "It is one thing to speak of Christ being a suitable Saviour for sinners, but where will you find a sinner suitable for Him?" Bless God that some of us are suitable for Christ. Suitable sinners, - bad enough, poor enough. Convictions, as such, penetrate our hearts. We know not by thinking, not by hearsay, but by painful feeling, we know we are lost. Nor have we skill, (as we were just now singing), nor have we skill to heal our own wounds. Do read that hymn again when you get home. It is a beautiful gospel hymn, and may the Lord make it useful and beautiful to us. "This Man receiveth sinners."

Now let us look at this great word, "sinners." Not good men. There are holy men in the church of Christ, the mystical body of Christ is holy, and there are holy men in the visible churches, but, there is not a good man by nature, for there is no man that doeth good and sinneth not. If there were more conviction of sin in us, there would be more true humility. There would be more separation from self and from a wicked world; and more frequent and diligent errands to the throne of God's heavenly grace, and more coming with lameness, with maimed conditions, and a guilty condition to the Lord Jesus Christ. We need not be afraid, though we are so, of deep convictions. We need not be afraid of a running sore, though a running sore makes us afraid, and we think we shall be lost. O, but Christ heals where He wounds. "I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal." Happy is the soul then, that is fenced in conviction. That, is a real sinner, that feels he has no skill to heal himself. No skill to shun the snare of sin and the devil; no skill to walk uprightly as he fain would walk; but who must find his way, and shall find his way, to the throne of God's heavenly grace, from time to time. Not once only, but all through his life he must be a coming sinner. Hart asks the question, concerning the prodigal, - he says,

"What treatment since he came?
Love, tenderly expressed.
What robe is brought to hide his shame?
The best, the very best."

The best heaven could procure, the best that the love and skill and power of the Lord Jesus, could weave and bring in.

Let us look at the treatment the sinner receives. "This Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them!" O dear friends, there is a table spread! Well might the Lord Jesus say, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." This is the Gospel feast - it is nothing less than Christ Himself. He will give them Himself. This we are instructed in, in the institution of the Lord's Supper. He took bread, He gave thanks, and then gave to His disciples of the bread, and said, "Take eat; this is my body, which is broken

for you:" Likewise also, He took the cup, when He had supped, and gave thanks, and He gave to His disciples, and said, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." What! Will a poor, hungry, sin bitten, hunger bitten soul get this feast? He says he is not worthy: that is quite true. He says he has many fears; and they do not really hurt him. He says he is not able to go, he is too weak, and is lame, and he has lost limbs. He is a maimed person, but then the Lord sends His Spirit to him, and He carries him on the wings of prayer and of faith, into this blessed house which Wisdom hath builded: and there is the feast, and there is the trembling sinner, and there is a good God, who wont let His trembling child starve. So He says, to take away all his shyness and unbelief, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." This is nothing else than receiving Christ by faith, and Christ receiving the sinner, and embracing him. Eating, is eating by faith, the Blessed Lord Jesus Christ, as He was a sacrifice for us. Christ, our Passover was sacrificed for us. Just look at that my friends. If you cannot eat the world; if you cannot be satisfied with yourselves; if you feel everything has a bitterness and a death in it; - O then, the Lord Jesus Christ will one day say, "Eat, O friends; drink." Eat My flesh - this is life eternal: drink My blood - this is for your cleansing. This brings you into the Covenant; within the bond of the Covenant. This is the Testament sealed with His own precious blood. Now when this is the case; when this is the experience of a sinner, he is satisfied. He eateth with thee, and this shows what a society there is, and what a communion there is here. The society of Christ with sinners, and sinners with Christ, is intimate, and brings out that communion that is so blessed. It shows familiarity. Yes, you think you could never be free in the presence of an offended God, but when you are in His presence and His love speaks to you, then you will be free with Him. He "eateth with them" and that brings out what is in the parable of the prodigal son. Let us make merry, - "for this my son was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found." Let us make merry - and in the merry-making, there were these things. First the fatted calf and then the music and the dancing. The Lord Jesus received into a broken heart, exemplifying that word - "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." Bringing out the sweet truth of it, that a sinner by precious faith receives Jesus Christ into his heart so as that salvation is an experience, - a sweet experience. O what goodness has God showed to some of us, more than once, in bringing us into this place. Here is liberty, true gospel liberty; here is heavenly-mindedness; minding the things of the Spirit. Here is peace of conscience, - that "peace of God, which passeth all understanding," - that keeps the heart and mind by Jesus Christ. Here is a sinner's sweet entrance into the presence of God, who has reconciled him unto Himself by Jesus Christ. It is not like the praying at a distance that often was felt; it is not the praying with guilt on your conscience and tears running down your soul, if not your face; it is not with bitter feelings of hatred to yourself, though there is that in an increased measure indeed, it is not the coming with guilty fears and shaking and trembling and sobbing and wondering what the Lord will say to you and be with you. No, but it is the entrance into the presence of God who is your heavenly Father, and it is the Father receiving you lovingly. It is the sweet music of the gospel, preaching everlasting love and the covenant of grace,

and your salvation and your union and your fellowship in the spirit. It is music indeed! Heavenly merry-making. Angels rejoicing over the repenting sinner and the Trinity rejoicing over the repenting sinner and the sinner rejoicing in the manifestation of God's mercy to him. "This Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

Perhaps some of you may say - Now that is beyond us! And what then, will you say? - That is what we want, what we pray for, what we look for sometimes, what sometimes we have even thought was coming near to us? Now, dear friends, the Lord give you power to press on. Remember the prodigal; remember the weary steps he must have taken; think of the shame that covered him; the fear that might have filled him. Think too, of how he had prepared a speech to use to the Lord, when he got back to Him, and that he was only allowed to use a part of it. An honest confession he was allowed to use, but a prayer that was never to be answered, - he never uttered. According to the parable, when he was returning, he said he would say - "Make me as one of Thy hired servants," but that was not the intention of his Father, so he did not pray that. What he said, was true, - "I have sinned against heaven, and in Thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son," - and then he was stopped. He did not utter an uninspired prayer at that moment. Some of us have uttered many prayers, it may be, that God has not answered, and will not answer, but when we come with humble confession, God does not stop that. He lets that go, - receives it. It goes out of the heart - it is welcome to Him, but this was his son and He would not let him say - "Make me as one of Thy hired servants." He had debased himself and his self-debasing was accepted. And now, the Father's welcome puts back that petition; does not allow it; and the heavenly merry-making soon started. "Bring forth the best robe." Take these evidences of his guilt away. Take his filthy garments away. Take his shame away, - the kiss does that. Take his shyness away. Bring him into the house. Set the table. Start the music; the sweet heavenly merry-making music; the dancing of them that make merry when the soul leaps before the Lord, as David leaped before the ark. All this is included in the word "This Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." For I judge, that these three beautiful parables are just an extending of this word, to rebuke the reproach that the scribes and Pharisees had against Him in their hearts. They said - He receives sinners and eats with them. Oh, said the Lord, here are these cases - a woman losing a piece of silver; a man losing a sheep; a father losing a son for a time, and all to exemplify and extend and illustrate this infinite goodness of His, in having these poor creatures back again into His very heart and bosom, where He would love them and comfort them and help them and confirm them, and do them everlasting good.

Depend upon it, the Lord will glorify Himself in salvation. He will glorify Himself in you who have faith and repentance toward God and Jesus Christ. He will glorify Himself, and there shall be no coming short here, although in feeling and in fear, we do come short, some of us. But O, God will convince and convert, and bring His children to Himself, and having begun the good work in them, He will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ.

So take courage, my friends,

"Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth,
Is to feel your need of Him,
This He gives you,
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam."

What a God we have! God in our nature. The encouragements of the gospel are very wonderful. The poor, the maimed, which means a limb, or limbs lost, and the lame, limping through weakness and frailty and disease. Bring these in, and the thirsty, let them come, and "take the water of life freely." Then they say, O but what will He say to such people as we are? What will He do with such sinners, as we are? And the text answers that question. He "receiveth sinners and eateth with them." Let the scribes blaspheme; let the Pharisees murmur; let them say what they will against this blessed Man. Be it given to us, to go with our convictions, and our shame, and our sins, and our guilt, hiding nothing; keeping nothing back; but letting all go out, in humble confession, "I have sinned, I have sinned." Yes, the beginner, and the backslider, and the poor, and the famished; and the hunger bitten ones, through tribulation, and difficulties, and their many failings and sinnings; let them see this great thing. A good God in their own nature, and ready to save, as Hezekiah said, "The Lord was ready to save me." And when the sweet day comes, of the reception that awaits the soul, then the soul will say that no minister half expressed the love of Christ, and the willingness of Christ, and the kindness of Christ, to poor, guilty sinners. And no minister would ever wish it to be thought, that he had said anything more than a very feeble, very very feeble word, in praise of the Lord Jesus. He cannot be praised; He is above all blessing and praise; and yet He is praised, and men praise Him, and sinners, above all, praise Him.

Every sinner blessed with grace shall praise Him here and hereafter. And we believe that some of us will, and if it could please God to grant that we all might come to this, in God's good time. To come as sinners. Think of the poor woman, entering Simon's house, when Jesus was there, bidden to dine with Him, and she a sinner, - she ventured. She crept, as it were, behind Him. She got to His dear feet, and began to weep her repentance out at His feet, and washed them. She wiped them with the hairs of her head. She wiped these sacred feet; she anointed them. And Simon thought, this man cannot be a prophet, He does not know who this woman is. He does not know her desolate character, else He would not allow her to come near to Him. And the Lord Jesus, seeing these thoughts of his, told him He had somewhat to say. There were, "two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other, fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, (their Lord) frankly forgave them both." And this woman was forgiven, so she wept her repentance, and her love at His dear feet. He allowed her to come. He drew her to Himself. He blessed her. This is the gospel of the grace of God. This is the glorious gospel of God, which may the Holy Ghost open to us; apply to us. So as that we may say, in our own hearts, each one - Why, He has received me, blessed me. He has given me, the bread

of eternal life. Refreshed me with His eternal love, and granted me the Holy Ghost, the witness of the Spirit, and I have had the fatted calf, got the ring, and the shoes, and I am wearing the best robe! And I have heard heavenly music, and my soul has blessed the Lord and gone forth in the dances of them that make merry.

May the Lord give us this rich experience.

Amen.
