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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 18 September 1932

Luke 15 v 2

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

Multitudes came to Him. There are not many sinners today, not many publicans and sinners today pressing after Jesus Christ. How many of you would like to be classed with, or class yourselves with, publicans and sinners and harlots, and press toward and into the kingdom of Jesus Christ? A question you would do well to ask yourselves seriously. What is your character? What is your aim, if aim you have in religion? Who is it you are seeking? What do you seek that Person for? "I came not to call the righteous" said Christ "but sinners to repentance". Since the Scripture says "There is none righteous, no not one; there is none that doeth good; there is none that seeketh after God", clearly Christ meant some particular persons when He said He came to call the lost, not the righteous. And again, when He declared that the sick need the physician and not the whole, it is some particular persons intended, who had a particular case, were in a particular condition. Here, all publicans and sinners come to hear Jesus; publicans, loathsome to the Jews, sinners whom they would not look at. Publicans, one of whom was in the temple by the side of the Pharisee. And the Pharisee compared himself with this publican and declared to God that he was not like him. For the Pharisee, a terrible truth that he was not like the publican. Jesus was of another mind. The Pharisees and scribes spoke of Him as a man - "this man". They meant nothing beyond that. The eternal Deity of the Saviour they owned not. He was despised by them and in that tone and state of mind they spake of Him here as "this man". But He was marked by them and reproached in their hearts on account of His treatment of these despised publicans and sinners - He received them. This word "receiveth" means He receiveth them to Himself. Not merely gives them an audience, not merely looks benignly on them, but receives them to Himself, which means that He saved them. He taught them and He ate with them.

Let us look at these publicans and sinners. The first of them you find in Adam and Eve. God made man upright. An upright man became a sinner by his own act. His conscience was soon awakened by the awful voice of God. That voice which had been a pleasing voice to him now was a terrible voice. "Where art thou". "I heard Thy voice in the garden and I was afraid and I hid myself". How many of you would like to go beside him and say, "now we are just in that case, we are afraid of God". If men never are afraid of God, they will never rejoice in Him.

Sinners can say, and only they
How precious is the Saviour

We shall never bless God enough for conviction of sin, if we have conviction of sin. It is a preparation for the Saviour. It is, as Philpot said, digging a hole into which to put a post. It is preparing the heart for good news from a far country. Well, it is a great thing to be a sinner. We are all sinners by nature but this is different. To be a sinner in this sense is to be convinced of sin, for the light of God to shine upon a depraved heart, upon ungodly actions, upon infidel thoughts, upon innumerable wanderings from God.

Where must a sinner fly
Who feels his guilty load
And stands condemned to die
Out of the mouth of God

There is only one Man in the universe to whom sinners may go, and that Man is the God-Man Jesus Christ and "It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" "of whom" says Paul, "I am chief". This Man attracts sinners. His fame went abroad in Jewry because God was with Him and worked miracles by Him, and He went about doing good, as Peter testifies. And the report of Him drew these publicans and sinners. On another occasion when a crowd was surging about this Man, one poor woman sought Him. That woman was the strongest person in that surging crowd, diseased though she was and had been for twelve years. Curiosity made the crowd look on Him and follow Him, but necessity

took her to Him. He attracted her and faith was in her heart and she said "If I may but touch the hem of His garment I shall be whole". Is that faith in your hearts, that faith that sees Jesus to be the Son of God incarnate? It is a great thing to see Jesus as the Apostle Paul says "We see Jesus made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man". David was a sinner and he sought unto God when God sought him. He said "I have sinned", a confession that is not common today. I have sinned; I shall die. The sentence of death was in his conscience as it is in the conscience of everyone born of God and taught of the Spirit. From time to time people taught of God have death in their consciences because they have sinned, they have guilt, and then they want a remedy and the remedy attracts them as they see it by faith in the Scripture and as they hear of it in their hearts by the Spirit of Christ. "Sinners are high in His esteem" but they cannot think that while they are distant from Him, yet seeking Him. Sinners are high in the esteem of Christ. "I am come to save the lost". "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many". And this makes the man cry out "Heal me O Lord for I have sinned". Heal my bones. "Heal the bones which Thou hast broken". What were the bones? The man's spirit and conscience broken by the reproof of God. Then the cry was put into his heart "Heal the bones which Thou hast broken". Unless God breaks the bones of your consciences and spirits, you will never cry to Him as the Psalmist did. There is grace in that cry as there is grace in sinners coming to Him. Grace teaches them how to go; grace shows them the way to go; grace effectually brings them to Him. Christ is the centre of attraction. The sun draws water from the seas and the rivers, so Christ draws sinners to Himself. There is an amazing attraction in Christ to sinners; not the self-righteous, but sinners.

Sinners can say, and only they
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They go to Him. They go, not as they would like to go. They would like to go good, righteous, upright, tender. They would like to go repentant. But instead of being allowed so to go, they have to go hard, impenitent, unrighteous, unholy; in every respect of the word,

lost, excepting the respect of being in hell. They are not there and they never will be. They go to this dear Saviour. "O that I knew where I might find Him" was Job's cry and that cry is put into the heart of every living child of God. Oh that I could get near to God. Then conscience says, you are not fit to go, and the reply of the heart is, I know I am not. Then the devil says, you ought not to go, and the fear of the heart says, I believe that. But notwithstanding God draws. The Father draws to the Son. "No man cometh unto Me except the Father which hath sent Me draw Him". "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto Me." Thus drawn, men go as publicans, as sinners, as lost, as helpless, as ignorant, as proud and as guilty. No improvement is possible in the case; just salvation, nothing short of it. They want to hear Him. People go to hear sermons; sinners go to hear the Saviour if they may. I have told you many times if you come to hear me preach sermons you must be disappointed. I do not know how to preach sermons, but I believe I know a little how to preach the Lord Jesus. People want to hear Him. He has something to say. It is said of Him in the Psalms in the spirit of prophecy "Grace is poured into Thy lips". Who poured that grace into the lips of the Saviour? His Father. "I came", says Christ, "not to speak My own words but the words which I have heard My Father speak". And these are the words, words of grace. The law came by Moses to kill sinners, either here that they may be saved, or hereafter that they may be ruined and punished for ever. Grace came by Jesus Christ. A truth this is; what these people came to hear. Is there a word of God? Can I have a word from God? Will He speak kindly to me, a sinner. Says the prodigal to his father "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son". That is what every child of God has to say more or less distinctly in the substance of it; not worthy to be received; not worthy to be in the heavenly family; not worthy to be smiled upon; yet we come to Thee. They came to hear Him and He preached to them.

When men come to Him today, He has got some preaching for them. Ah, if you are sinners you want the Saviour to speak to you. "Speak Lord for thy servant heareth". "Be not silent to me, lest if Thou be silent to me I become like them that go down to the pit". "I will hear what God the Lord will say". Have you got an ear? If you have the

hearing ear, Christ has the gracious word to speak to you. The hearing ear God creates. Then He speaks the words which His Father gave Him to speak to sinners to hear about salvation. "What must I do to be saved?" is the cry of one who goes to Christ and Christ sets him no hard task. "I am thy salvation". O what a word for Christ to speak to a sinner "I am thy salvation". That word heard by a a sinner puts gladness into his heart more than in the time when the corn and the wine of the wicked increase. To how many of you would it be a gladdening word that Jesus speaks, if He should say "I am thy salvation". "Look unto Me and be ye saved for I am God and beside Me there is no Saviour".

And what did He do when these publicans and sinners came to Him for to hear Him? Well, two things are said of Him regarding His treatment of these publicans and sinners. First, He received them. The Pharisees and scribes would turn their backs on them. This holy Person, holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners, of whom the Pharisees and scribes thought, He defiles Himself by contact with these publicans and sinners; He does not know who they are; if He were a prophet He would know these people and have nothing to do with them - just the opposite of truth - He receiveth them. He did not coldly say, "What do you want", did not distantly look on them and say "I have nothing to say to you except go and reform your lives". No, He was a different Person from that. Touched with the feeling of their infirmities, knowing their convictions of sin and the pain of sin, having Himself felt the pain of sin without the conviction of having done sin, for He knew no sin, He looked on them with pity and, as it were, opened His divine arms and embraced them.

He receiveth them. Look at this point. Did you ever get near to Christ and did He ever receive you to Himself? Not as persons with whom He would have no connection, with whom He would have no dealings, but just received you, embraced you, called you His. Oh, but one may say, in legal bondage and fear, I cannot expect that. Why not? Who tells you not to expect it? I will tell you who does not. The Lord does not; the gospel does not; the Scriptures do not; the Spirit does not. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come". He came to save the lost and to receive them to Himself. Not a bare look, but a reception into His heart, into His

house, to His bosom. Vital religion in you, if you have it, will never be content with anything short of a reception of yourself by Jesus Christ to Himself. That poor diseased woman pressed through the crowd. Her faith touched the hem of Christ's garment, touched Himself, touched Himself. He said "Who touched Me?" The disciples were astonished at the question. Here is the crowd pressing about Thee, surging carelessly, wanting to come near and to look at Thee, and Thou sayest "Who touched Me?" He knew, He knew that healing virtue had gone out of Him, as Cowper says so strikingly and beautifully,

"And healing virtue stole"

If you touch the Saviour it will be because He has received you and virtue has flowed from Him into your soul.

The second thing to be said is this "He eateth with them". Christ, holy, pure, infinite, a pure man, allowing sinners to come, and more than that, preparing a table for them in the midst of their enemies and in the wilderness and inviting them to come. "Eat O friends, drink, yea drink abundantly O beloved" "Eateth with sinners" What is the provision? The provision is Himself. "Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood shall never die" That is the provision; the glorious gospel of God declares it; the everlasting gospel opens it; Christ speaks in it and the Spirit applies it. That is the provision. That is how Christ eats with people. "The cup of blessing which we bless" says Paul, "is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" So Christ says, "Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man ye have no life in you".

Let us look at this. The eating that Christ graciously, condescendingly has with His people is communion. In the first place He lets fall from His divine lips some gracious word of encouragement, an invitation to Himself. Looking on these burdened, these despised publicans and sinners - there are not many of them today, as I said - but looking on them, He said, "Come unto Me". Sick of self, come unto Me. There is gospel in that invitation, a

free gospel, a gospel that will suit and please sinners, real sinners, to the end of time. "Come unto Me". It says to an empty soul, there is a full Saviour; to a lost sinner, there is a justifying righteousness; to an unholy person, there is a sanctifying Saviour who sanctified His people with His own blood when He offered Himself to God without spot; to a weak sinner, who is always falling through unbelief and stumbling by reason of his ignorance, "Come unto Me". "I wisdom dwell with prudence and find out knowledge of witty inventions" "Come unto Me". If you can, poor distracted publican and sinner, listen to this invitation, to the glorious gospel of God, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". And consider this, omnipotence is in this. The Father committed all things to His Son, and all rule and authority He possesses. He speaks an omnipotent word "I will give you rest". The rest you are seeking I will give you. The rest, without which you must die, I will give you. This rest, what is it? The rest of Christ's precious death. The rest His robe of righteousness provides. The rest of His good will, the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush. "I will give you rest".

"He eateth with them". "Thy words were found and I did eat them and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart". You will often, if you get it, eat this word of invitation. "Come unto Me". "Whosoever will let him come and drink of the water of life freely". It means really communion with Jesus Christ in His word. And the next thing to notice is this, that He sends His good Spirit to apply His precious blood. Hope in the soul is very sweet, but hope is not possession. Hope and possession are impossible at the same time in the same person. What you hope for when Christ calls you to His footstool, what you hope for when you get a view of the Person of Christ by faith, what you hope for when some good gospel word comes in, is not possessing the things which you hope for. But when the Lord the Spirit brings the atonement to the conscience, then you possess the peace of God which passeth all understanding. Then you say, in the substance of it "I am black but comely". I am black in my nature, fallen; I am comely in Christ. This is the Name wherewith Christ is then called "The Lord our righteousness". This blessed comeliness every saint covets as the best thing he is taught to covet. Jesus eats with them then. He gives them this precious food -

justification. Justification is not an act of a person who is justified, but the act of Him who justifies him. Justification is a sentence pronounced. Justification is the passing of a sinner from under the rod of the covenant of works into the bond of the covenant of grace. Justification clears a person's character, gives him a right and title to heaven. And when Christ gives this, He is eating with the sinner, He is having communion with the sinner. The sinner and Christ thus become united; they are one.

This Man receiveth sinners. A wonderful reception. The sinner rests in Christ; he rests on His bosom. The conflict is often severe; Christ gives a word of strength. "I will strengthen thee in the Lord" and by faith then the weak says "I am strong". Let the weak say, let the feeble, the poor stammering, stumbling creature say, "I am strong, strong in the Lord and in the power of His might". Strong in faith, giving glory to God, believing that what is naturally impossible is possible with God. Therefore "to him that believeth all things are possible". Faith lives on God, not on the creature or on circumstances. Faith looks beyond the ruin of sin to the Saviour; looks beyond the weakness of sinners to the strong and Almighty Lord Jesus. Christ eats with a sinner when He gives Him His strength. The sinner eats with Christ. Your faith will lay hold of the strength of Christ. "Surely" says one "in the Lord have I righteousness and strength".

And this knowledge of Christ, because that word means knowledge - "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength", this strength enables the sinner to do exploits. "The people which do know their God shall be strong and shall do exploits." One of the greatest exploits you ever can do is to say in your heart "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength", therefore, O law, O sin, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? You will triumph in the strength of Christ over sin and all things. What a wonder it is for Christ to eat with a feeble soul by giving him to receive the strength by which he stands, by which he fights, by which he overcomes. "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of His testimony".

He eats with them when, by His Spirit, He sheds His love abroad

in their hearts. The love of Christ shed abroad in your hearts will enable you to say "Now I am embraced by the Lord Jesus. He has not despised nor abhorred my affliction. He has not turned Himself away from me. He has not turned away from my prayer. The love of God shed abroad in the heart is one of the richest experiences that the Lord's people have in this world. They find it soothes their sorrows, heals their wounds, dries their tears, dispels their gloom, and enables them to embrace the Saviour and thank Him for coming into this world, for suffering, bleeding, dying, to make Himself known to them. "He eateth with them". He enables them at times to keep and do His word, and He says "If a man love Me he will keep My word and My Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him". A great word, and to reach it in experience is a great attainment. To keep the word of Christ is to hold the gospel, to hold every declaration that is made concerning His Person, every statement that is made of the doctrines of divine grace, every teaching concerning the work of Christ and the death of Christ and to keep that word is to hold fast to the Person of Christ. Then says Christ, "My Father will love him" not because he deserves to be loved, and not because the man has done this simply, but in the order of God's working and manifesting Himself, My Father will love Him and we My Father and Myself, we will come unto him and manifest ourselves to him and eat with him, sup with him.

"He eateth with them". My dear brethren there is no privilege on earth given to believers greater than this. The Saviour eats with His people. The provision, I have named to you. You cannot improve it; there is nothing like it. When you drink the wine of the kingdom you don't straightway say, I would like some other; you are satisfied with this. This is better than all else, and this is a precursor. It contains, if I may so put it, a promise of something, not better, but fuller; something that is not occasional, but constant; something that is not measured by time, but is eternal. The saints have a feast before them. What they get by faith they are told in the scriptures, and they are told in their hearts at times, is but the forerunner of what God has provided for them in eternity. The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne is also in the midst of His wondrous company, and He leads them to living fountains of waters so that they shall thirst no more, neither shall the sun light on them.

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. How blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness. This feast is prepared; the Host is Christ; the meat is Himself; the drink is His atonement. Eternal life is by Him and everlasting holiness and therefore everlasting happiness. God can never make men happy before He makes them holy, and this holiness is given by Christ. The whole is by Him.

This Man, this despised Man, this God-Man Jesus Christ receiveth to Himself sinners, not the righteous, but sinners, sinners who, being sinners, feel they dare not hope at times, have no courage to pray, yet must pray, must come to Him, being drawn by Him. He receiveth them and He eateth with them. If you are being drawn you will reach Him, and when you reach Him He will receive you contrary to your fears and eat with you contrary to your expectations.

AMEN.