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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham at Galeed Chapel
Brighton on Wednesday 27 December 1933

Text: Luke 2 verse 14

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will
toward men

You are acquainted with the beautiful connection, the incarnation of the Son of God, and the announcement of that incarnation by an angel, and on the back of that announcement immediately there was with that angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying "Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace, good-will toward men. This verse is a manifestation of the greatness and wisdom and love and power of God. To reach it, we shall never be able fully, but to have a little knowledge of it, real understanding in it, by the Holy Ghost, is an unspeakable blessing. Glory is riches, wisdom, illustriousness, and everything that you can imagine respecting God as self-existent, immense, eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, but here in a manner suited to the capacity which God has given to man and to the heart which He has opened to attend unto the things spoken in holy scripture and brought home by the Holy Ghost.

In the Highest. We cannot reach it, and I would say if any of you are naturally religious, do not try to reach it that way. You will never manage it. There is a certain religiosity in some people which betrays them often, if they even be God's people. I, if I had to choose between that natural religiosity and the doubting, the reasoning of Thomas, I would choose the latter. Not to excuse the reasoning and the doubting of Thomas at all, but it is safer, in my view, to be seeking revelation from God, than to be sentimentally imagining something about Him. Perhaps I say this because I know so much about Thomas, and I have often sympathised with the Scotch minister who, serving a second table at a communion, after the first had been served, and the minister who served the first table said that he hoped there would be no Thomases at the table, prayed that there might be Thomases there, and that they would get that relief that Thomas got. So may

the Lord help us. But the Highest must reach God Himself. Just to illustrate a moment what I mean - Solomon had glory, Judah and Israel had many, were many, as the sand by the sea-shore, and Solomon ruled over kings at that time and presents were brought to him at that time. The Queen of Sheba came far to see him, and see his wisdom and behold his glory. Now all that reached Solomon, but did not go higher. Now when God reveals Himself in the incarnation of His dearly beloved Son and that truth is opened by the Holy Spirit to any sinner, that sinner, as far as his faith goes, reaches the throne of God, but it does not reach the Highest. Angels veil their faces, spirits of just men are prostrated to ascribe wisdom and riches and power and might unto God. We are, in the chapter I read just now, exhorted to worship the Son. Let all the angels of God worship Him. And when we see by precious faith this divine Person in our nature, and see that God did give Him a revelation of His will, and a commandment to do a great work, and hear the Lord Himself saying to His Father - "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" that will excite in our hearts praise, and we shall desire to reach what is unreachable to us here - the Highest. As in Revelation there will be a mighty multitude, spirits of just men round the throne, four and twenty elders, ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of holy angels ascribing glory, honour, majesty, riches, power and blessing. They were reaching, as far as creatures can reach, the Highest, when they gave glory to God.,

But look first in respect of this as it belongs, or may belong to us, at how it comes. The deep condescension of God - the coming of the Eternal Word, the Son of God, taking on Him the lowly nature of man, the frail nature of man, without spot or wrinkle or any evil, for He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. He had no sin. He did no sin, and yet He humbled Himself. O, as we cannot reach the Highest, so neither can we sink to the deepest of the humiliation of the Lord Jesus. We have here, as God may help us, to look a little first at the lowly Saviour. To the angels was given this mission - to sing Glory to God in the Highest. But first of all this was announced by the angel. And the angel said unto them, that is the

shepherds, "Fear not". Why should they not fear at a vision of angels, or an angel, hearing an angel speak? "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, For unto you is born this day in the City of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord". Not much good news here for the world today. Not much tidings of great joy to the world today. In heart christianity is saying - Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him. Yes, christianity, with its terrible mockery, as in the church of Rome, as in the ridiculous and wicked imitations of Rome by the Anglo Catholics. " Away with Him", say the modernists filling countless pulpits in the land, and in the world, "away with Him". His Person is nothing. He is just a historical person, but there is no divinity in Him. He had just His Jewish limitations, and prejudices, away with Him. A good while ago a man called a minister of the gospel was preaching in Brighton, and said that there was nothing of virtue in the blood of Christ. One day he will know how he trampled on it, either here in mercy with repentance, or hereafter in gnashing of teeth. A Saviour. That is great tidings is it not? Yes, to some people, when the Holy Spirit opens something of the nature of God, as revealed in the law, and brings that holy law into the conscience. The sinner understands the fall then. He believes in his guilty participation in the fall then. Then, if ever he meets with it, he will understand Dr Goodwin's experience, who, relating his experience of sinfulness, said, one night he was obliged to rise from his bed and kneel in the room and confess that it was as if his were the hand that took the forbidden fruit. Ah, it is a great, a grand thing to be a sinner in the sense in which Hart writes of it

"A sinner is a sacred thing
The Holy Ghost has made him so"

I wish every person in this chapel now were like that.

Tidings, not from earth. These tidings never grow, never could grow out of the earth. Good news from a far country. The highest, the best news God, may I say it with reverence, the best news God could devise and send to the earth; His wisdom, glory

to His wisdom, infinite understanding of what His nature demanded, of what He could devise and did devise for redemption. Wisdom that called for the love of His only begotten Son, to put Himself in the breach which sin had made between Jehovah and man; that called for the Son to become a servant, to be made man, that being man He might receive the terrible imputation to Him of the sin of mankind, of some people; all the sins of some people. Wisdom drew this plan. Therefore, glory to God, the wise, the only wise God. Have you ever given Him that glory? Have you looked on Christ and seen Him to be the wisdom of God, that all divine wisdom is in Him who is the Man Christ Jesus, that wisdom into which He could not grow. We are told that He grew in wisdom but that is in respect of His human nature, not the divine nature in its fulness. Glory to God in the highest for uttering to men this great joy. Joy, well men love joy naturally. We all love it naturally, but here is a joy different in nature from that, different in its origin, different in its communication, different in its effect. Different in its power altogether. It is holy joy, the joy of redemption, of adoption into the family of heaven. Great joy. Yes it is great because it is more than human. It comes to men, but it had its origin in God. He devised it in the love He has to His people. It shall be to all people. Jew and Gentile stand on the same ground when brought into conviction and for such people this great joy is uttered, spoken, communicated. Think of God, sending this, the glory of His love. It can have no higher expression than it has, where John speaks - "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." And this love is expressed by Paul in the Romans - "That God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all." There was something to deliver Him up to. What was that? He delivered Him to the curse. "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us". He delivered Him to that. Men took Him and by wicked hands crucified and slew Him, but the hand that was in that was God's hand. The counsel, the determinate counsel that was in it was God's determinate counsel. The sword that pierced Him was God's sword. He spared

not His own Son from that. The Son of His love; the Son of His substance; the divine Son; He spared Him not, but delivered Him. That was love. Glory to His love in the Highest.

Also glory to God, the God of all grace, all grace, not an atom of the creature, only grace and all of it. We do not know yet, how much grace we have needed, and shall need to the end of our time, but all of it is here. All for all his people. The Epistle to Timothy says that God saved us, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the world began. According to His own purpose. You have a purpose in your mind, and use your utmost endeavour to accomplish it, make it materialise, as men would say. God has a purpose. A purpose of grace, to give grace, and He gave it to His Son who was to give it to His people. Hence we read that grace is poured into the lips of Him who is fairer than the children of men. Why poured into His lips? Not to keep to Himself, but to communicate to sinners. The communication of grace to your hearts will always have this effect - to put you into the dust of self-abasement, and lead you to your utmost to say in your heart - "Glory to God in the highest". "Why me, why me, O blessed God" Has not that been the feeling of some of you more than once. O the melting influence of grace is very very wonderful. There is no stone can retain its stoniness if I may so coin a word, when the power of grace comes. Icebergs melt, stones dissolve, when this precious mighty grace comes into a sinner, so then He says "Glory to God in the highest". Glory to God's omnipotence. This reaches men, O yes, this reaches men. Men who are determined to have their own way, and make haste to hell, and the word goes - "Almighty love, arrest that man". He is a liar, arrest him and make him a true living man. He is a worldling, arrest and catch him and keep him out of the world for the future. He has robbed Me, arrest him and convince him he has robbed God. Omnipotence will reach you if you have a place in the love of God. And when it reaches you, you will know it, you will know it. You cannot do what you would. If the power of God has got hold of you, it will catch you, it will catch you in your sins, in your transgressions, in your lusts. It will catch you and stop you. Then when love

comes, when forgiveness comes, then you will say 'O that power'. When you saw and felt that power in the law, then you dreaded it. When you saw and felt it in Christ, who is the power of God, then you loved it and could not praise it enough and never will do here.

"Glory to God in the Highest" in the visits which He pays sinners. He does visit men. Yes, He visits sinners. He is the friend of sinners and His friendship is known. He lets people know that He is their friend by visiting them in their difficulties and their perplexities, and their afflictions and their burdens, when they are bound under a yoke and cannot straighten themselves. When they are in the mire and are sinking lower and lower then, even then, He comes. He visited Jeremiah, at least Jeremiah said he cried unto the Lord in the low dungeon, and the Lord heard him. He did so to Jonah. He cried out of the belly of hell and God visited him, brought him up. And so you will find it. The difficulty with us is, to get into these places, because we do not like them. But, when God says - "Down you must go" you have to go down, when He will chasten you. If one stroke is not enough, you will have another. You do not think love is in it at the time, but later on you will say - It was good for me that I have been afflicted. Good for me that God laid a fatherly rod on my foolish back, that He set my wandering feet in the stocks. Then you will praise Him and say - Glory to God in the Highest".

But I must look a little at the next clause. "And on earth peace". This is quite consistent with Christ's word in another way - "Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth, nay but a sword". How then is this to be understood? If He has come to send a sword, how can He send peace? There is a distinction to be made. The distinction is this - "He looketh upon men and if there be any that say - "I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not", He is gracious to him and delivers him from going into the pit. That is the peace. Peace on earth. And how does it come? Two ways. First, by the precious vicarious death of Christ. No peace without that. No peace to the wicked. No peace to any sensible sinner without the

death of Christ. He made peace by the blood of His cross. He is the peace. This man shall be our peace. You will never undervalue the blood of Christ if you are convinced of sin, and get into your conscience the peace of God, by that blood. It will make you afraid of trampling on it. It will bring into your heart a powerful peace. Paul speaks of the "peace of God which passeth all understanding; keeping the heart and mind", and the word is, "as in a garrison". As a soldier is garrisoned, so the sinner, with this peace, is kept by it. It has a power in it. It fixes his affections, it sets his gaze on the Son of God. O it is a sweet peace. Nobody knows it but those who get it by the Holy Ghost. It is wonderful. You lie down in peace in your affliction. You will gladly, willingly, submit to God in affliction. You will understand Rutherford when he says "The will of God is a bed in a fire" and you will lie down in God's will, in your affliction when you have this peace and you will say -"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done" Thy will be done in me, and that is how the weapons, which are not carnal, but mighty through God, are used to the pulling down of all your strongholds. That is how you get an understanding of the scripture, which speaks of the bringing into captivity of every thought unto the obedience of Christ. This is preached for the obedience of faith in all nations on earth. Peace, sweet peace. Blessed peace. Peace in a storm. Peace that calms your troubled breast. Peace that makes the Prince of Peace precious to your soul.

Goodwill toward men. When you look at the welter of the world today, when you begin to reason about the sovereignty of God, and His dispensations in and toward nations; when you read of what happens, what takes place here and there; terrible storms, unspeakably awful accidents as we speak, which occurred the other day in Inverness; when you think of these things, and reason about them, you may say "Where is there good will? Where is it? Good will toward men. Well, you must come to a certain place called Zion - God's resting place. Though Eternity is His place and time as one speaks, says He "To that man will I look and with him will I dwell who is of a poor and contrite spirit, to revive the heart of the contrite ones." "He will not always

chide". He does not keep His anger for ever.

Good will, when a child of His is wayward. O some of us know what that is. When a child of His is wayward, God has a good will toward him. He wont let him stray beyond a certain place. There is a limit to straying set by God's good will. You may not believe it just now if you are in trouble, but it is so. In the Hebrews, we are told, that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Good will? Yes good will when the rod is laid on a foolish back by a Father's hand, that is good will. When an idol is smashed and the idolator spared, that is good will. Yes, and the idolator says later on "O how good of God to break my idol to pieces. How kind of Him to break it, and you will bless Him. Sometimes the good will is otherwise manifested, when in trouble, in sin-procured affliction, God says - "You have destroyed yourself". Yes, says the guilty one, I have, and I am shut up, Now says God in His good will - take with you words, turn again to the Lord and say unto Him "Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously". There is good will, when guilt stops your mouth and you do not know what to say, have nothing to say, but guilty. Then comes this good will in a mighty movement on your heart by the Holy Ghost saying - go to God; go to Him you have offended; go to Him against whom you have rebelled; go to Him, whose counsel you have despised more than once; go to Him. O says the devil - 'He will mock at you if you dare go. He will mock at your calamity.' 'No' says the Spirit, by a mighty movement on the heart, 'Go' and he says - "Ashur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the works of our hands, ye are our gods, for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy," and then good will comes. You are in the wilderness, and the Lord says - "I will speak comfortably to her heart".

It is good will when He makes all things new, and when He pours His Spirit as a shower upon the earth and the poor dried up creature perceives that shower coming, and he flourishes and grows like willows by the watercourses. And sometimes good will is shown towards His people in providence, opening ways where none appear possible, giving faith to believe in impossibilities.

"To him that believeth, all things are possible." Poor believer, has not it been so with you sometimes. Faith is a good prophet sometimes, standing, moving in the power of God, and urgently praying by the Holy Ghost moving him, he gets a blessing in the hand of faith, and he says, perhaps to one suffering with him, to one who has some need unsupplied for a time, he says the blessing is coming, God is going to do it for me. He may be many months before the thing is done, yea, a year or more, but it is done, to faith it is done. The man is troubled about it and very tried afterwards perhaps, but it is done.

Good will. Good will in another way, namely, in perseverance. O the fears that some poor believers have of apostacy. The times some of the Lord's people have thought and feared that they will make shipwreck as concerning faith and a good conscience. They look forward with a kind of dismay, to the future. How can we, with so many difficulties and temptations and lusts and corruptions and devils, how can we expect to get honourably to our grave. And the Lord drops something in. He takes perhaps one of the innumerable "Fear nots" He has written interspersed through the scripture - "Fear not". Or He may say - "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." He knows your need of grace; He knows your need of the Spirit; He knows your need of fresh strength and faith says "I believe it". Faith in the sinner at such a moment is like faith in that man whose eyes the Lord opened - "Lord I believe" he said and he worshipped. Good will? Ah, when a sinner is started in the life of God, and on a weary, troublesome pilgrimage, he gets very tired, hungry, because he is hunger-bitten occasionally. He is thirsty now and again; enemies are about him, snares. He is in the wilderness; he cannot grow food. He cannot go and buy food; he is just a poor, empty, hungry, thirsty dependent pilgrim. And sometimes he cannot depend. Sometimes he can depend, but good will is at night in the flame; the light that lightened them in the night; good will in the day time to shelter them from the heat of the sun, the cloud covering them. Good will telling them when to rest. Good will leading them to three score and ten palm trees and wells of water - good will. They are going through the wilderness and God's good will is to

bring them to the end of it into the land of promise. Good will toward men. Do not deny God's goodness, you who have faith. "Ah" says one "if you were in my place, you would understand what I am saying - "Is His mercy clean gone for ever, Doth His promise fail for ever more." Well, a good many have said it, but they have also had to come to David's place, and you will have to come to it. Mercifully you will be brought to it. "I said, this is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the Most High." So dear friends, we have, as God helps us this before us, that God did, in infinite wisdom, devise a plan of salvation in Eternity. He did, in the fulness of time, send forth His only begotten Son, made of a woman, made under the law, that He might redeem them that were under the law. He did, in the fulness of time, lead men to take Christ, by their wicked hands, and crucify and slay Him, according to His own determinate will and foreknowledge. He does in time come to a man or woman and say you are a sinner, and the pharisee finds his pharisaism dying. He comes to a sinner and says - 'You have not continued in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them, therefore you are under the curse'. And the sinner says - 'I am Lord, I am'. And then He comes and says - 'Behold Me, behold Me, your Redeemer.' " I have redeemed thee, thou art Mine". And He seals forgiveness on the conscience. He sheds His love abroad in the heart and He brings the soul to His footstool and there, for the time, that is made good. "Every thought is brought into captivity unto the obedience of Christ". Think of it. Now says the man 'I am not my own. I am not my own' Then Christ may say, there are two ordinances in My house and you must obey Me in them. One is the ordinance of believer's baptism, and when this is spoken, the sinner says - 'Lord help me to obey' His thoughts that it is not necessary, his thoughts that it is a poor mean looking ordinance, are brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Then Christ says there is another ordinance which follows this, this being the first and the root and the only door. There is another ordinance "My son, this do in remembrance of Me". And the sinner says 'I am not worthy of it' Then He says - 'Your worthiness is in Me' He takes the sinner's unworthiness as it were, and says - 'My worthiness belongs to you. I have taken your badness. I give you my goodness, I have

taken your sins. I give you My righteousness. It is a good song
then is it not - Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth,
peace, good will toward men".