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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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LUKE 21 v 28

And when these things begin to come to pass
then look up and lift up your heads
for your redemption draweth nigh

This chapter and the chapter in Matthew and a chapter in Mark speak, in the first place, of the destruction of Jerusalem. That city and nation had rejected and despised, and with wicked hands had taken and crucified the Lord of glory, and God took vengeance. No man will be permitted to reap other than he has sown. If we here sow to the flesh of the flesh we shall reap corruption. If we sow to the Spirit of the Spirit we shall reap life everlasting. God chose Israel for His glory and told her that if she walked in His statutes she should be a peculiar treasure to Him, a nation of priests. He gave her good laws and His Spirit but it is written in Hosea, (Ch.6 v 7) we like Adam have sinned. Adam fell. This favoured nation fell. They were always looking to the promised Messiah and especially desired Him when they were brought, for their wickedness, under the yoke of the Romans, but they were looking for what was not promised. They made a mistake, a grievous error. They looked for a king to deliver their nation and when the Messiah came, a poor man, they despised and rejected Him, and they said "Away with Him, away with Him. He is worthy of death", and they crucified Him and rejected the Prince of Life, and God punished them. He sent unparalleled troubles, judgments, anger, burning indignation, such as had not been before and such, He said, should not be after, so great and so terrible was the punishment inflicted on that Christ despising nation. And He foretold in this chapter the coming destruction of that city. God has foretold the coming destruction of all who die impenitent. If any here so die there is no question about it, the end must be terrible. When the wedding supper was prepared and the people, the guests, were gathered, there appeared among them a man without a wedding garment and the King came in and looked at the guests and came to this man who had not a wedding garment and said to him - "Friend how camest thou in hither". It did

not seem much - one would suppose that it was not much to the man - but it was a great offence, and the Lord said. "Bind him hand and foot and cast him out into outer darkness. There shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." And some of us may be in a profession and have not the wedding garment. We mingle with the visible church of God. We mingle with the bidden and favoured guests at the table, but, having no grace and no justification and no wedding garment, very solemn will the end be. God distinguishes where we cannot. He has the altar measured and all who worship therein and He leaves the outer court to be trodden under foot. So this nation, this Jerusalem. And those of you who are acquainted with the full history of the fall of Jerusalem, its utter destruction, will know what matchless sufferings were endured by that city. And He says to His disciples, who would be likely to be very grievously depressed at the prospect before them, and before the city they loved, when these things now foretold you shall begin to come to pass, before they are completed, when they begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads for your redemption draweth nigh. The destruction of Jerusalem may be taken typically to express the awful destruction of Babylon and Sodom, where our Lord was crucified, and the dangers and the evils and the plagues that are to come upon the great whore whom God will judge. And to His people, in the Scriptures, He says "When these things begin to come to pass", when judgments foretold shall begin to be seen, when the vials are poured out and the sixth and seventh are poured out and the troubles which thou begettest and the evils and the punishments, then look up. Let not the threatenings altogether overwhelm you, let not the coming things, the coming troubles sink you altogether but, as you see, as you are able at all to read the signs of the times, look up.

So I think that this text has two particular points in it. First, the fact that trouble is coming, that judgments are coming, yea have commenced, that judgment must begin at the house of God, that Rome Papal will partake of all the threatened plagues, and that the people of God, when these things begin to come to pass may be aroused out of their sleep and they shall find themselves in a sore case, many, many of them. Churches, asleep; wise and foolish virgins, all alike sleeping. Then there shall by a cry and it shall awaken them and the wise will have understanding in things and trim their vessels

and the foolish will have alarm and look at their lamps which have gone out. And the wise will apprehend trouble, they will see it coming. Then, says Christ to them, look up. If you look to the earth, as it is in Isaiah, you will only see dimness and darkness of anguish, but look up, lift up your heads for your redemption draweth nigh.

Now I think, I believe and feel, that it is incumbent on us - as we may be enabled it will be a mercy - to endeavour to read the signs of the times. The Lord told some they were hypocrites because when the signs of a wet day came they could see and when the signs of a fine day came they could see, but the signs of the times they saw not. May not we be asleep. There are signs of the judgments of God upon us and about us. Look just only at our own nation and see what there is. No true protestant can do other than grieve over the advances of popery, perhaps especially in the Anglican, the national church, with popishly inclined Archbishops who, if they were permitted, would ignore church government altogether, and demand that they should be the arbiters of that church and do as their will is to do. If we look at the Bishops who are with them, almost every one, and then think of the thousands of beneficed clergymen who are with those Bishops and Archbishops and if, turning our eyes in other directions, we see the modernism, evolutionism in pulpits, in the colleges of the land, and look then at the terrible profanity of the nation, can we do other than believe that God's judgments will come upon us? And if we turn a little more, and wider, to the nations of the world, and consider that, in spite of all that the League of Nations may have attempted to do, we have now China and Russia at war - and who knows how that war will spread - we have every reason, I think, to expect that the day is not distant when grievous judgments will fall from heaven upon men. They will come in some form to the professing church. Judgment must first begin at the house of God. They will come here. In some form persecution of the saints will come. Whether we, whether you young people, will escape, God knows. I do not personally expect to live to see the fulness of these evils, but you who are young may, and I think will, enter into the awful cloud and come under the grievous judgments of God and that will put religion to a test. There is an Altar and therein are worshippers. The Altar and the worshippers therein, God has measured, that is to say, He knows them. But there

is an outer court and that is given to be trodden under foot of the Gentiles. Now what shall we say? I desire to be clear of the blood of all to whom I speak and to speak to you as a church and congregation and tell you that I believe the evil days that are threatened in Holy Scripture are not very far from us. I am not entering at all into any precise thing in saying that the times and the seasons God has kept to according to His computation. Holy Scripture says that the times are not good but evil and that judgment will fall upon us. Now, says Christ, when these things begin, when you see them in their commencement, rumblings of a thunder storm, dark clouds portentous of trouble, of rain, when you see vital religion at a low ebb, when you see the ministry all but silent in respect of power and truth, and when you look round at the dealings of God with nations and with this nation, giving us over to the counsels - more or less distinctly leaving us to these counsels - of perjured, wicked men in high places, what can you say? I deliberately use the word "perjured", for if I make a vow to do such and such things and then deliberately, year after year, to the utmost of my power, do exactly the opposite, what am I? A perjured man. If a Bishop and Clergyman says vows solemnly to do his utmost to banish from this realm the blasphemous mass, and we see him and know him, without any controversy or doubt, doing the very opposite, bringing in that mass, what can we say? He is a self perjured man. "Shall not God be avenged on such a nation as this?" It is not a question simply of private opinion. Here is the Word of God, here is the very kernel of Protestantism, here is the very life and soul of godliness, and men, according to Paul to Timothy, have turned away and the great apostacy is with us and trouble is coming. Now a poor, afflicted, fearing child of God may say, what shall we do. Looking at his weakness, he may say I am afraid I shall not stand. Looking at and feeling the treachery of his own heart, he may say, O will this heart be allowed to deceive me and turn me away? And seeing what a poor, inconsistent profession he has made, inconsistent in his spirit if in no other way, he may say, how shall I stand? I have turned, and swerved, and backslidden in easy times; if troubles come how shall I stand? Now the Lord Jesus, our merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, meets cases and says now when these troubles begin, when they appear and before they break out in their fulness, look up, lift your head up. A very great word. It seems to me to be a very kind and merciful word to weak people.

First of all, look up, lift your heads up, and this would bring us to notice an Object up to which these people may look, to whom they may lift up their heads. A great mercy this, and wonderful. When you see trouble coming, coming to your house, to your business, to your person, to the church of God, to the ministry, to the nation, dismay may first seize your heart but, says Christ, look up. Look then first of all at the Object. There is an Object for faith. The faith of the operation of God, the faith of God's elect, has an Object. It is this first by Isaiah - "Look unto Me all ye ends of the earth and be ye saved". Says Paul to the Hebrews - "We see Jesus". To the Galatians who had been bewitched and turned away, he says - Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth among you crucified. This is the Object. Strength for the weak, light for the blind, constancy for the inconstant, mercy for the miserable, and forgiveness for the guilty. Look up. May God the Holy Ghost help us to walk in this holy direction, for there is no hope for us elsewhere. The great Object of faith is the only Object, the only Helper, and the Redeemer of His people. Look up in several particular ways. That is, let faith, by the Spirit's direction and grace, look up first of all to a full Christ, full of blessing, as it is written of Him in the Psalms "Men shall be blessed in Him". And as the Father promised Abraham "In thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" and that meant the Seed, the Seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus. A full Christ, full of mercy. It is a beautiful passage in the Hebrews of the High Priest. It is said He shall be merciful, a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, who shall be able to have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way. There is no comfort, no strength, no help anywhere else. You know, who are exercised, what it is to be weak, as you look at your troubles. What it is to feel, if you believe judgments are coming, to feel how shall I stand? This worthless, this faithless, this deceitful heart of mine will be my destruction. Then says the Lord Jesus, when you see trouble coming, when it is beginning, look up, look to Me, look to My fulness of forgiveness. Ah there is a meeting place between Christ and sinners. By Moses, God said if they made an altar of earth to Him, erected an altar on which no human tool had been, He said where I have recorded My Name, that is, where the altar is, there will I be, and I will bless you. And in the Hebrews the word is - "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in

time of need". So when we are in trouble, and when judgments are hanging over us and when conscience says, now you have walked badly, you have walked badly, you have been sleeping, you have not watched at all, you could not say in some particulars that you watched for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning, Christ takes pity and has mercy and says, now look up. "I am God and beside Me there is no Saviour." Then, O believer, God the Holy Spirit give you power to obey this Word, look up and see Jesus Christ, full of mercy. And see Him next full of power. Respecting a weak believer the Apostle directs the saints to receive him without doubtful disputation. He says he shall be holden up. God is able to make him stand. He shall be holden up. Does that meet any case? Does that meet any case here? A sinner who does not know how to stand. No standing ground he may sometimes think he has. He may be destitute, exceedingly weak in faith, weak in knowledge, weak in all that is right, and good and desirable. Says the Lord - God is able to make him stand; he shall stand. What is this standing? It is having the Son, it is cleaving to Him with purpose of heart, it is deriving strength from Him to hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering. It is leaning on the arm of your beloved and coming up out of the wilderness so leaning. Let him look up. The man who does not know how to stand - Says Christ, look up and I will preserve you. In the hour of temptation let him look up. "Because" says Christ "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation that shall come upon all the earth to try them that dwell therein." What is it to keep the word of Christ's patience? You feel perhaps sometimes that you do not keep the word at all. What is it to keep the Word of Christ's patience, but to hold fast, as well as your little faith can do, to Him who came to save the lost. To hold to His righteousness in the face of all temptations and troubles. To hold to His blood in the midst of your guilt and your wanderings and evils. To hold fast to His grace, that you may be sanctified and saved thereby and to keep that word - "In your patience possess ye your souls". That is to keep the Word of Christ's patience. And then there comes a wind. It blows upon you and you are afraid of

being blown away. There comes a storm and it beats upon you and you are afraid of being washed away. Now Christ says, I will keep thee, I will keep thee. He shall be holden up. My power can keep him and it shall keep him. How often have people prayed, with respect to their own weakness, "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe". "Hold up my goings in Thy paths that my footsteps slip not".

Let him look up to this. Says Christ, lift your heads up, look up to My faithfulness. "God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son", and He shall stablish you and confirm you in the testimony of Christ. God is faithful. And wherever He has made out to any sinner His word and given a promise, in that promise is involved the character of God. A remarkable word was used by a servant of God to Him when God threatened to take away the nation. O, said Moses: "What wilt Thou do unto Thy great Name?" (Joshua 7 v 9). Lord, if Thou shouldest destroy this people, what will become of Thy character? Thou hast promised and made a covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and now if Thou destroyest this people, what will become of the promise, of the covenant and of the oath? "What wilt Thou do unto Thy great Name?" Faithfulness in any man has respect to an engagement. No engagement made by you, there can be no unfaithfulness in that particular, but if you make an engagement, a promise, undertake to do a thing, and then break through and break away, and take no notice of what you engaged, then unfaithfulness attaches to you. God has made promises; God has undertaken certain things; God has taken an oath; He has confirmed His promise by an oath in which two things it is impossible for Him to lie. O then, look to this, you who have had the mercy made over to you, to whom God has spoken, look up to this, the faithfulness of God.

In another regard, look up. It appears to me to involve exercises of mind, desires, strong and warm sometimes, to be kept. And shall the exercised person look unto himself and say I am resolved never to give in? I am resolved to hold fast and keep my integrity? Any man doing that is the most foolish of men. But what shall the exercised sinner do then? Let him open his mouth wide and God will fill it. "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it". "Call upon Me in the day of trouble. I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me." "Roll thy burden on the Lord and He shall sustain thee. He shall

never suffer the righteous to be moved". So this word looks very kindly toward people who are exercised and who, in their exercises, fly unto the throne of God's heavenly grace. There is no doubt about this, that God does answer prayer, that He does regard exercises and desires, that He has said "The desire of the righteous shall be granted," that He has promised answers and returns to prayer. He says, I will deliver thee, call upon Me. So every child of God has very great encouragement to look to God who meets, in His Word, every case. His Word is full of descriptions of cases, captivities, difficulties, distances, sins. All cases into which the people of God come are, both by type and by promise, met in Holy Scripture. And when these mercies are opened, when the poor exercised people of God come into these various difficulties, then they find God is faithful. Lift your head up, look up, look not to earth, look not too intently on the afflictions which are threatening and the judgments which are hanging over the nation, yea and over the church. Look not too intently on them. Do not turn your eyes away from them, that would be evil. You might go to sleep in that case, and the day come on you unawares as a thief. But, while looking at these troubles and difficulties, which no man can do other than see in a certain way, then, even then, with all the alarms that may be felt and the fears that may creep in upon you, look up to this great God, full of mercy and full of truth and full of power and full of wisdom.

And in the last place, He says, "For your redemption draweth nigh". They were to be delivered, delivered from their troubles and out of their dangers and their difficulties from time to time. Deliverance? Your redemption. Not redemption by blood; that was accomplished on the cross. Not redemption from an unregenerate state; that was accomplished when the new birth took place, but the troubles and the judgment which will overtake others, you, you shall be delivered from. They shall not swallow you up. Your redemption from difficulties draweth nigh. And this may be viewed in two ways with respect to this time state. It was so with the people of God in that day. Many were slain, persecuted, but, speaking generally, they were delivered from their dangers, for the earth was not to be bereft of saints at that time. They were scattered abroad and went everywhere preaching the gospel. And so, today, there are difficulties out of which God delivers His saints. There are

judgments which shall not overtake them to swallow them up. Their redemption draweth nigh in that particular. It shall be so to the very end. But then, more fully, when death comes. Death - awful sound to some people. Perhaps some of you can scarcely bear to hear the word "death" uttered. But whether you are in that state or not, this is a fact, death will come and come to many as a thief. It will be serious to some of you to die - very serious for anybody to die. But for the ungodly, the men out of Christ - no Saviour, no righteousness, no mercy in their hearts - O how terrible it will be for them to die. But for the saints, why death is the best thing that can come to them. "Better", says the Word of God, "Better is the day of one's death than the day of one's birth". Some have gone to heaven through fire. O what a gain death was to them. And however we come to the end, if we be in the Lord, death will be an unspeakable gain, but we must be ready. What is it to be ready to die? It is to be in that case that the Apostle Paul desired - "That I may win Christ and be found in Him." Nothing else will make you ready; that will. The new birth, conviction of sin, forgiveness of sin, justification in the person and righteousness of Christ, that is the preparation, the only preparation for death and when one is in that case and trouble comes or difficulty, there is a deliverance too when death comes. In that case it is indeed a redemption from all ill, pain, grief, sin, weakness, trouble, affliction. A deliverance from all. Look up, says Christ, when these things begin. Look about you dear friends. Do not try to be ignorant of the signs of the times by closing your eyes to them. That indicates, even if you have grace, a bad state of mind. The signs of the times are many, and some are particularly clear as I judge. But when you read them and see how full of danger they are to you, as to others, and how you may be overtaken by them, how much you may fear them, then says the dear Saviour of sinners, now look up. You see these things, look to Me. You see your weakness, look to Me for strength. You see your liability to fall, look to Me for sustenance and support. Look to Me; I won't fail you. He never has failed one sinner who sought Him. He never will fail a sinner. Therefore, may He give us power, as many of us as see the sign of the times, and feel our own cases to be indeed weak. Look to Him, lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.

AMEN.