

38
400
1360 u
La 1812

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Friday evening 4 May 1928

LUKE 3 v 21/22

"Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven, which said Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased."

If our eyes were turned away from creation, from sun, moon, and stars, from angels holy, and angels foul, and from providence and from all the mighty doings of God in the whole world and, for the moment from our most corrupt, foul, wicked selves, and turned to the one Object who is named in the text, it would be well with us. Sin has made us eccentric. We have got away from the centre. It has blinded us, it has turned us into enemies, aliens, fools, wicked, guilty persons. It has turned God to be our enemy. It caused Him, when expelling Adam and Eve from Eden, to close and bar the gate and defend it against all who might presume to approach unto it with a flaming sword. And when He would cry death upon all created glory and power, even before the eyes of the elect nation, He descended upon Mount Sinai and the mountain quaked, and the lightning flashes, and the terror of the thunder terrified the Israelites and they fled away as who would not have done. And we have to do with this same God, and some here have known His terror, the terror of His justice, of His holiness, of His majesty. But we have to do with Him, mercifully, in another way. It has pleased Him to reveal Himself in another manner, different from the manner in which He spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets; even He has been pleased to speak to His people by His Son whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom He made the worlds, and who, when He had purged our sins, sat down at the right-hand of the Majesty in the heavens. And this God was baptized of John in Jordan and when He was baptized and came up out of the water, He was praying. Do we pray? Are you praying people?

Christ was a praying man. He was to enter now upon His ministry for He began to be about 30 years old and passages in Holy Scripture, relating to His public ministry may well have been before His mind at this important moment, as it was prophesied of Him the Spirit of the Lord should come upon Him and He Himself, speaking in the Prophet Isaiah, said "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me" and He knew that He was to meet enemies. He knew they would contradict Him, that they would disesteem Him in every respect, denying all His claims, imputing to wrong motives and agencies His good works. And with this before Him, this word "praying" may have a relation as in the prophecy of Isaiah we are told that it would please the Lord to bruise Him; that He would be the Man whom nations would abhor and kings despise, and that they would say to Him, even His own nation, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him." And He, being a Man, and His human nature, not deified, but dependent on its creator, the Holy Ghost, prayed. He sought the promise. He said later: Glorify Thy Name. I have glorified Thee on the earth. And Jesus, being baptized and praying

O Thou by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way!
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod;
Lord, teach us how to pray.

He had much need of prayer for He was to be a poor and broken-hearted Man. He was to have His judgment taken away in the day of His humiliation. They were to say of Him, He had a devil and was mad. And while they said of John the Baptist that he was a strange man because he did not eat and drink with them, now when the Son of Man came and was sociably entering the house of a Pharisee and so on, they said "Behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber and the friend of publicans and sinners." He never pleased His own nation. He went into the mountain and prayed all night

Cold mountains and the midnight air
Witnessed the fervour of His prayer

and if it should be proved that that Lord Jesus had us in His heart when He was praying, had us before Him, and with Him, when telling

Peter that Satan desired to have him and sift him as wheat, but that He had prayed for him, how safe, though tried, our lot is. All depends on His goodness, goodness rising in eternity. Goodness, purposed of God to be given to some people, none deserving it. Praying. He prayed to His Father and you, O new born people, when you pray, you pray to your Father. You may not be able to say "Our Father which art in heaven" but, being partakers of the divine nature, being born again without your knowing it to your comfort, the truth is, God is your Father in that respect even as He is the Father of His Son, Jesus Christ, and

Prayer was appointed to convey
The blessings God designs to give

The covenant was made with Christ, and promises were given to Him. Exceeding great and precious promises were given to Him. "I will help Thee". "I will uphold Thee with the right hand of My righteousness" "I will put My Spirit within Thee and My Words which I have put in Thy mouth shall not depart out of Thy mouth" and O, mercy divine "nor out of the mouth of Thy seed, nor out of the mouth of Thy seed's seed from henceforth and for ever saith the Lord." There is a pointed and beautiful connection between the Lord and His new born people and they come into a gracious and living contact with Him by faith when they pray, and this exercise of prayer is the inward work of the Holy Spirit, who maketh intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered. Happy the man who finds that he is caused - it is a beautiful passage - caused to approach unto God. "Blessed is the man whom Thou chooseth and causeth to approach unto Thee". Trouble will drive, sense of sin will depress, guilt will sink the sinner down, but the Holy Spirit, making intercession, uses these very trials and sore feelings to bring the soul to the throne of God's heavenly grace. We shall be well if we are found in the footsteps of the Saviour. We shall come out well if we go before His Father, who will show Himself to be our Father sooner or later. Praying. This is very attractive. Think of it. He said to His Father "I knew that Thou always hearest Me". Can you follow Him in some measure in that? Can you say the Lord has heard you, that He gave you power to come, gave you a burden to go with, gave you earnest petitions, faith, access through the blood of His Son, and then heard you? Why, you are happier in that experience

than millions of gold and silver could make you without it. O happy man who can follow His Saviour and say, the Lord has heard me; who can say with the Psalmist: "By this I know that Thou favourest me"; who can say, the Lord is good, and even turn to his enemies and say "How say ye to my soul flee as a bird to your mountain?" The goodness of God endureth continually. Therefore all you say against me, all you speak about me, will have no effect in respect of my destruction, for the goodness of God endureth continually. How much more we look at trial than at the God who helps to bear it, and who has promised grace in time of need. Well, this was the blessed exercise of the Lord Jesus - praying. And while He was thus exercised the heaven was opened - His Father opened it - and the Holy Ghost, a divine Person in the Godhead equal with the Father and the Son, came down in a bodily shape like a dove upon this praying Person, upon the Lord Jesus Christ. What a mercy for us; He received the Spirit without measure; He was made by the Spirit of quick understanding; He had the Spirit of might and of power given to Him. This great One, the Lord Jesus, was thus favoured with the Holy Spirit without any measure and if we belong to Him that same Spirit will descend from Him and come upon us, and enter into our hearts and whatever painful experience we may have of sin, of its deformity, its foulness, loathsomeness, however we may feel and suffer from hardness of heart and other things, this will be true, we are one Spirit with the Lord Jesus, one Spirit with Him. The same good Spirit who descended without measure upon the Lord Jesus, He sends in measure to each of His disciples, and so each one is baptised into Christ, baptised into the likeness of His death and raised again in the likeness of His resurrection. And when this was done then His Father spoke, spoke to Him, and this was what He said to Him: "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased". This was spoken to the Man Christ Jesus who is also very God. Now dear friends, I wish we might be truly carried away for the time being into a gracious contemplation of the Person addressed. The Father addressed Him; His eternal Father spoke to Him and said this great thing to Him: "Thou art My beloved Son." The Sonship of the Lord Jesus in the first place relates to that ineffable union and relationship subsisting between Himself and His Father. It is a mystery, an everlasting mystery, not propounded for human understanding but for living faith. Never attempt to grasp this truth by your own mind and intelligence. Never expect to be able to

explain it to yourself or to any other person. It is just a mystery, divinely revealed, clearly stated in Holy Scripture, that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, the natural, proper, true, eternal Son of God in His divine Person. This is stated: "This is My beloved Son; hear Him." Jesus called God, His Father, and the Jews well understood how He said that, for they were incensed, took up stones to stone Him because they said He had made Himself equal with God. Claiming to be the Son of God, they said was the same thing as claiming to be God, and that was the truth of the matter. And this blessed Person, Jesus Christ, in His divine Person is the very, immediate, only begotten Son. God has myriads of sons by regeneration, He has some in this chapel, His own dear children, but no child of God will ever stand in the pure, eternal, beautiful, ineffable, inscrutable relationship that the Son of God stands to Him in. This mystery may we receive, may we hold. I conceive, respecting it, that it is necessary to the integrity of the Trinity; that if you deny the eternity of the Sonship of Jesus Christ, you of course deny the eternity of the Fatherhood in the Trinity, and so also you touch the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son and there is one remark I would make here, because it has been made a good deal to me. A Unitarian might meet you and, hearing you say that you worship the Lord Jesus, might accuse you of idolatry. But now, if you receive the eternal deity and Sonship of the second Person in the Trinity as dwelling in the Man Christ Jesus, you worship God. Verily,

When we live on Jesus' merit
Then we worship God aright
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Then we savingly unite

May we hold fast this Sonship of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But also, He is the Son of God in His human nature, begotten of the Holy Ghost in the virgin Mary. "Which was the Son of God" as Luke tells us in this chapter. Jesus; His genealogy is traced up to Adam. The seed of the woman we have before us and what a favour for us. Who could approach God without this sacred Man, the Mediator between God and men? Who could expect any pity from God, apart from incarnate deity? Who could look for forgiveness of sins, apart from the Lord Jesus and His blood shedding? Who could expect help and sympathy if

He, the Saviour, had not suffered, and therefore was able to succour all tempted sinners? And who could expect supplies from God if supplies of grace were not in the Man Christ Jesus? Who could expect to be enriched otherwise than, in any other way than, this: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich". O the pleasure of God in this Man, this God Man, we cannot fully enter into it. It can be believed. "I am pleased with Thee" said His Father to Him. Of course, one might say, He is well pleased, but this is evidently a very gracious expression. With respect to His eternal relationship it was natural and necessary that the Father should be pleased with Him, but with respect to His human nature, it was not so. It was of grace that there should be the Man Christ Jesus. It was of eternal love that the Man Christ Jesus came to be. It was of the gracious operation of the Spirit that that human nature came into being and so it was a gracious declaration: "In whom I am well pleased". With this Man, baptized now, entering now upon His public ministry, I am pleased; hear Him. My disciples, My people, hear Him. I am pleased with Him. And I apprehend that this pleasure of the Father with Him may be spoken of in several ways. First of all in respect of the position of His beloved Son as the Surety of His people. He stood now, being baptized, in the solemn position of a public person who was a Substitute for His people, a Substitute in the most precise sense, leaving nothing out with respect to the people for whom He became a Substitute. Their exact position in the law, their condition under the law, their relationship to God, their sins, their debts, their corruption, their condemnation, the hell they deserved. The substitution of the Lord Jesus took up all these things. If you could name one thing in the person for whom He was a Substitute that was not included in His substitution, you could name this no proper redemption. A perfect Substitute for a perfectly ruined person who could only escape his ruin by that perfect substitution. O the divine pleasure in this thing, the love of God on His children from eternity, and now He looks on this Substitute and says, I am pleased with this. Here is wisdom, here is power, here is authority, here is ability, here is love, everything necessary to secure the redemption of this people given to Him in this, His Suretyship.

He was pleased with Him because of His obedience. Jesus was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. My Father loves Me, He said, because I lay down My life. The act of Christ on the cross, the act of dying freely, voluntarily, lovingly, vicariously, was pleasant to His Father. His death is called obedience. He was obedient unto death. Grace can make you willing to die but it will never do one thing, it will never cause you to die of your own act. God will take to Himself your breath. O what a mercy that Jesus died obediently. He laid down His life; He offered Himself to His Father. It was His act. The priest, when offering the sacrifices ordained and commanded, was active. Jesus, when offering Himself to God without spot, was active. This pleased His Father.

The fulness of the Saviour was pleasant to His Father; the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwelt in Him. The good pleasure of God, the grace of God, the love of God to the Church, the Headship of the Lord Jesus in all its fulness, its grace, its efficacy and all its blessedness through eternity, were present to the Father, and He was pleased with Him. "I am well pleased with Thee".

And the far view that His Father had of His resurrection and the showing to Him, the Saviour, the river of pleasures at His right-hand and the path of life, all this gave the Father pleasure. That depending Son, that Son obedient, and all that He did and all that He possessed, and all that He was to be and do after His death and resurrection, these being before the Father, who seeth all things and known unto Him are all His works from the beginning of the world, gave pleasure. God would never be without a Son on the throne; never would the Church be without a representative; never would there be a bar now to the communication of divine life and grace to sinners; never would there be a poor sinner hanging upon grace and seeking mercy and forgiveness, sinking into perdition. Prayer shall be heard, blessings shall come. Jesus shall be as the shining of the sun after rain, clear shining. The things He would do, the working by the Spirit anointing Him to preach good tidings unto the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to

give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; all this that Jesus was to do gave pleasure to His eternal Father. In whom God was pleased. "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased." Not a shadow of discomfort or displeasure could ever cross the breast of the Father. No anticipation of disappointment could ever mar this divine pleasure, for the perfection of the Saviour was before the Father and therefore this pleasure was infinite.

Now if I have been enabled in any measure to properly, scripturally, set forth this great thing before you, I am going to put a question or two to you in conclusion. In, as it were, the hope that I have been enabled to speak the truth, though very feebly, I am going to ask you one or two questions and I do not do it without bringing myself in. I have asked them of myself today in thinking of standing before you as well as standing before God. And the first question is this: Are you pleased with Christ? Are you really, as in God's sight, able to say, you are pleased with Christ? Can you look into the matter and say where God the Father's pleasure is, there also is mine? One says, I must go to my farm; another says I have bought this; another says, I am engaged in this; and one says, I have married a wife and cannot come, do not want to look at this Man. Men do say to Him: "Depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways". Now do we say that? The Psalmist has two words that I will name; there are a great many, but two in my mind. "There", one is, "There be many that say, Who will show us any good?" O, he could see in his mind the whole of the nation saying now this and that and the other good, let us have. Now, said he, Lord - turning from man, turning to His God - Lord, he said, Thou hast put more gladness into my heart than in the time when the corn and wine of the wicked increased. Can you say something like that? And the second passage is that in the Psalm: "O when wilt Thou come unto Me?" Can you take a hungry soul to Him and say, Lord only Thyself can satisfy this hunger? Can you take a keen appetite to Him and say, Lord Thou knowest it is not for the world I am hungry; I want Thyself. I want Thy love and Thy goodness and Thy grace and Thy righteousness and Thy blood. I want Thy presence. Well pleased with Christ.

Now my other question is this: Why are you pleased with Him?

What is it that gives you such pleasure in Him? You will know something about it if you are taught of God. Well, one thing is this, says a child of God, I am in danger, great danger, grave imminent danger as to my apprehensions. I have broken the law of God, I have outraged His justice, I have trampled on His Word, I have disobeyed Him in all things and He is a just God, a holy God. He hates sin and the punishment of sin is necessary to His nature. Therefore I am in danger, but I have seen a refuge. Perhaps you can say with Paul in the Hebrews: "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death". We have seen His Name and we have read it to be a refuge, a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble, and we want that refuge. That is one reason. Another is this. Says a child of God I am polluted, I am foul in my nature and I cannot make it other than it is, but I would be holy, and I see a holiness in the Lord Jesus which I read in Scripture, and hear others speak of it, is given to sinners. He is made sanctification to sinners, and I want Him to be my sanctification. And yet another says, or the same person may say, does say, I see this, that I have got, and I feel it, guilt on my conscience. "There is no man that doeth good and sinneth not", the Scripture says, and I know it is true of myself, but I read that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin and that sinners are justified without the deeds of the law, and that great mercy is in and through Jesus Christ, and I want to say of myself what is written of Him in the Scripture: "Surely shall one say in the Lord have I righteousness and strength." For these reasons and many more sinners find their pleasure in Christ. He looks on them, He succours them when they are tempted; He succours them out of His own sympathy, sympathy which is the fruit and effect of His own temptations. "He is able to succour them that are tempted in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted." How low the Lord of Life sank in order to lift up sinners. O how low He went in order to raise up the beggar from the dust and take him off the dunghill and to give deliverance from the devil's temptations. What a Christ we have. We do not know how low He must sink in order to do us good. In Him we are pleased then. "In thee" said the Father, "I am well pleased".

When David was to be made king over all Israel, certain captains and men went to him and one of them, speaking for the rest, said

"Thine are we David and on thy side thou son of Jesse". Now, dear friends, in conclusion, how many of us, if we had the favour given to us, could go to Him and say: On Thy side are we, Lord Jesus, Son of God, Son of Man, One Person. On Thy side are we, Lord Jesus. We would be Thine; we would stand with Thee, live in Thee, be justified by Thee, sanctified by Thee and brought honourably through our troubles, honourably through our sins. The voice said "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased", and we have reason to be pleased with Him. We have no reason to be other than pleased. If we have faith we shall say that we have no complaint to make against Him. There is every reason why we should be pleased, why we should honour Him, why we should worship Him, and why we should cast our lost souls on Him in order that, of His grace and mercy, we might be saved.

AMEN.