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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 2 March 1924

MARK 4 v 40

"And He said unto them, Why are ye so
fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?"

The Lord Jesus had told His disciples to go over to the other side of the lake and, as they were going, there arose a great storm. The wind came and lashed the lake into violence and the waves were beating on the little bark but He, the Lord of life, the Lord of all power, was asleep, and the angry waves dashing against the ship did not disturb Him, but His disciples became greatly alarmed and awoke Him and said to Him - "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" and He arose in all the majesty of His Person and the irresistableness of His power and in mercy and spoke to the wind and spoke to the waves. If He had spoken only to the wind it would have been some considerable time before the waves had ceased to be rough, but He would have a great calm immediately and so He spoke to the waves to calm them. Immediately they were as if there had been no wind disturbing the water. Then He turns to His disciples and asks the double question of the text - "Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?"

To enter into the spirit and scope of the text it seems necessary that we should first of all notice to whom these words were addressed. They were addressed to the disciples of this great Master. He had called them, sovereignly made them His disciples. They had seen His power, His Godhead breaking forth in wondrous acts of healing sick lepers and doing wonders, God being with Him, and doubtless were solemnly impressed by what they saw; He was their teacher; This chapter is full of His heavenly instruction. And they had with them Him who could, and doubtless did, make His words to them spirit and life, so that they were not like a little company of men totally ignorant of Him who was with them in the ship - whom they disturbed, as it were, by calling unto Him: "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" - but were men who had been, and were, greatly favoured.

Their eyes had been opened; He told them in this chapter it was given them to see the mysteries of the kingdom, but to others He spoke in parables lest seeing they should perceive, and hearing they should understand and be converted. They were distinguished men; ignorant, yet taught of God; blessed with mercy and with grace. Do notice this because it gives to their alarm a singular significance and makes it, one would say, much more guilty than such alarm would have been in men who had had nothing to do with Him and with whom He had had nothing to do, whom He had not taught, and who had not seen His working. And may we hold for a moment by this and speak to each other, those of us who, as we hope, have been taught of God. Have not we seen Him? Have we not felt His power? Have we not known something of His great wonders in our souls, heard His mighty voice, felt His holy touch, realised something of the greatness of His touch when turbulent sins like storms suddenly rising have been quelled and there has been a calm. Have we not some such privilege as was given to the Apostle Peter when He made that noble and wonderful confession - "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God" and Christ told Him whence He had received the knowledge of Him.- "Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven". Has not the Lord appeared to some of you in His great Person, in His glorious redemption, in His sufficient righteousness, in His tenderness and pity and mercy? Have you not, in some measure, seen Him so that you, for yourself, could use the Apostle's words - "Have not we seen Jesus Christ our Lord". Has not His eternal Deity appeared to us? We have believed Him to be, and do believe Him to be, the very Son of God Almighty. And has His holy and wondrous incarnation been made known to us that we have believed, and do believe, that He was born of the virgin Mary? And have not we seen Him dying, seen Him on the cross and heard that important, that wondrous word - "It is finished"; a word containing heaven, a word of the utter removal of sin, and guilt, and all disobedience from God's Book; a word meaning entire justification and meetness for heaven. And have we not in some way seen Him in providence working, got answers here and there? Have we not had here and there, something in answer to prayer? and now we have said, we shall not doubt again. "Now know I that the Lord saveth His anointed" Said, perhaps, this is an Ebenezer; we will keep it in view. This is one of God's doings; we will remember it. This is an answer ever to be before us on which we will look when trouble comes

and take courage. Yes, but trouble has come and we men - favoured of God as we have believed, favoured to see that there is nothing too hard for Him; to see that He loves, that He will not give up any object of His love, that He pardons iniquity and transgression and sin; to see that He is faithful to His promise - here we stand, without Him weak; without seeing in His light things go from our view. These were the men and we, like them in measure, are the men to whom the words of the text may be addressed as they were addressed to them - "Why are ye so fearful? why is it that ye have no faith?" Well it would be easy - would have been easy for these men, so perturbed - to say, But Master, till a moment ago we were threatened with death, the wind was boisterous and the waves were rough and angry, and they were beating against us, were filling the ship, dost Thou say, "Why are ye so fearful?" There was reason for this fearfulness. So they might have spoken and we may have said in our cases; Why are we fearful? Why, look at the condition we are in. See these untoward providences, see how we are tossed about; there is no rest for us. Why are we so fearful? Why there is an inward storm of sin, a raging wave of infidelity, terrible feelings of distrust. We are distant, we are dark. Why are we so fearful? Why, the Lord seems to take no notice of us. We cry and shout but He seems to shut out our prayer. Some people get answers; we get none. To some He comes; to us He is far, far away. Why are we so fearful? We have every reason, apparently every reason to be fearful. What did they fear? A watery grave. What do you fear? Sin's mastery. What do you fear? The devil's conquests. What is it that makes you fear these things? The power of evil. The tempter with his hellish rage and subtlety. Sin with all its deceitfulness and subtlety; sin coming against us so powerfully at times that it seems no use trying to resist it. It persists, it insists, it works. Why are we so fearful? Because of these things. Do I speak to any of your cases?

Look at His next question - "How is it that ye have no faith?" Has He gone who is the Object of it? Does He hide Himself that you cannot see Him? Does He seem to shut out your prayer? Does He leave you without any intimation that He notices you, that He cares for you? Does this affliction increase, and your confusion, does that grow, and does the Lord seem to have poured, or to be pouring, out upon you some displeasure? Well but "how is it that ye have no faith". You did

believe; you believed in Me, in My power; you saw Me working; you saw that there was nothing too hard for Me. The leper came to Me and I cleansed him. I went, as if He might say to Peter personally, I went into your house and there was your wife's mother laid sick of a fever. I took her, I took her by the hand and the fever immediately left her. "How is it that ye have no faith?" Have I changed? Is My power broken? O, if the Lord were to say this to some of us what could we say? In Luke it is in this case - "O ye of little faith". There is a little but the actings of it were suspended; its power was no longer felt; it did not triumph over the evils that were working and the storm that was raging and the waves that were dashing against you. Little faith. My dear friends, we judge the Lord by feeble sense. We judge Him very often by some passing providence, some transient dispensation, some sickness that seizes us, some temptation that comes upon us. We judge Him by these things and the result is that we are fearful and have little faith, scarcely enough to hold on. And yet they were not without faith, these good men, and they showed it. How they cried to Him - "Master". And if you have faith the troubles will certainly not kill prayer but be a means of quickening it, and many and many a time when it may seem to you that He has left you, there will be this cry - Master, Lord; "Lord help me". Come to my help. Help me to pray; help me to leave myself and commit my circumstances and the salvation of my soul to Thee. Do help me.

Let us then, as the Lord may help us, look a little closely into these great things. First of all there are seeming reasons for our fear; seeming reasons for our apprehension of a death, and these reasons may be classed into two classes. First, outward things, untoward providences, as when this storm, suddenly coming upon the lake which, a moment or two before, had been perfectly calm; the lake shut in on both sides, on one side by mountains and on the other side by hills with many gorges through which the wind would blow and suddenly raise up a storm. There may be some storm upon us of a providential kind. It is too much for our faith; it threatens us severely, threatens us sadly, threatens us with destruction. This is a case, a seeming case, apparently a just case, for alarm. Why should we not fear? We are not stoics and if faith is not in exercise we soon show that we are fearful of heart and full of unbelief. Nature

asserts itself in this form very often with the people of God. Storms come and we are often unprepared for them. They come suddenly and they sweep down upon us and our powers of resistance are very feeble, all but gone, and so we have this before us often, a grave. How can we live through this? How can we overcome it? It may be an inward storm and I believe inward storms are far worse than any external storms. A storm of unbelief that would obliterate God, that would deny His right. Unbelief that denies our right, unbelief that limits God, unbelief that says to us - There is no help for you in God. Unconscious it may be oftentimes we are of it, but this wicked thing - this strong limb of the old man as Philpot calls it - unbelief - this chief sin as Hart speaks of it - unbelief, O how powerful it is, and how it will, like a thick and black cloud hanging over us obliterate from our view the rays and beams of the sun.

There may be a storm of rebellion as when, through some providence, your prospects are blighted, your strength is withered and it seems as if the thing you have most desired is that very thing which God will deny you. Then there arises this impetuous, this wicked thing, rebellion. And O when it comes against a poor, frail, believing child of God it soon makes its power known and he may feel that he must say with Jonah - "I do well to be angry". Neither wisdom nor goodness will appear in the dealing of God that has brought about this, and so a child of God is ready to perish. There may be such a sense of guilt on your conscience as to make your case appear hopeless, your sin so much, your thoughts have been so dreadful, your discontent so great, the hardness of your heart toward the Lord so bitter, and your feeling of resentment against Him because of His dealings with you, so fearful, as that you are burdened with guilt. You understand the spirit of the Apostle Paul when he says, removing a load of dead works from the conscience. Now you say I have just got that load on my conscience; dead works; works of sin are all dead works. And this guilt will make you fearful, very fearful.

Other cases there may be, as for instance, to go into the second class. The heavens, your heavens, may be as brass. You may cry and God may seem to shut out your prayer and that is of all things one of the worst we have. O, when you cannot pray, as you feel; when there is no entrance of your prayer into the ear of the Lord, when you cry

and shout and He shuts out your prayer. When, like the woman that came to Christ about her daughter, you seem, instead of getting an answer of peace, to get only a rebuff - "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs". Such silence on God's part is a grievous discouragement to a child of God; a trial of his faith, and his faith seems at times as if it must fail. O, if the Lord is silent to you, you have a trouble. Any of you who cry out to God and get no return for a time, you have indeed a sore trial. This is one of the reasons of discouragement. Another reason may be this, that instead of answering you peaceably you find as you read the word of God, and even when you are not reading it, there will come into your thoughts some reproofs, some rebukes, as if the Lord, instead of blessing, only calls up to your view and your remembrance, your sins. As if He is determined you should see more and more what you are, and feel what you have been doing, He brings to your remembrance your sins. The sin of Israel, of Judah, is written with the point of a diamond, engraved on the heart, so as that there is no getting away from the impression. It is deep; God has made it so. It is deep and these are reasons. There are storms, strong winds, like Euroclydon, and darkness comes over all; night comes. Now the Lord, speaking to these favoured disciples, asks them why they are so fearful. He may speak to you and ask you in the midst of your fears, "Why are you so fearful?" They might have pointed out to Him what had just happened, that is to say, they had been in a storm. You may point out what is with you now, a storm, inward and outward perhaps, but the spirit of the word will take us beyond this. Should the Lord open it to us we shall see it. The significance of the question is this, not to bring home to them their unbelief and their fears, so groundless, so much as to direct their minds to Himself. Have not I been with you all the time in the ship? Why did you fear? I am the same as when, O Peter, I healed your wife's mother; as when, before your eyes, I healed the leper. I am the same as when you saw Me healing all manner of sicknesses and diseases; as when you saw the people bringing a man palsied, paralysed, and, finding no way into the house, came to Me; they took off the roof of the house and let down the man in his bed. I am the same now as when I said to him - "Take up thy bed and walk". The question would bring the Lord before them, the mighty God of Jacob. Think of what happened to these poor men. They saw the Lord rise and they heard Him speak. That voice, celebrated in

the Psalms so beautifully, they heard speak. "Thou rulest the raging of the sea; when the waves thereof arise Thou stillest them". And that very voice, that mighty arm, they heard and saw, in the effect of it. It wrought for them. And why are we so fearful? Why are we so fearful about sin? Is it not healed, that is to say, removed. When Christ died, did He not say - "It is finished". But I feel it in my heart, one says, and you are intended to feel it there.

Sin's guilt and filth perceived and felt
Make known God's great salvation

No feeling of sin, no feeling of the power of the blood of Christ to remove it. He who is ignorant of sin, is ignorant of the atonement. Be assured of this that if God will bless you with salvation you will first of all feel your utter ruin. That must be

To see sin smarts but slightly
To own with lip confession
Is easier still, but O to feel
Cuts deep beyond expression

But then the people who feel it and who fear it and who fear it may drown them in destruction are the people who cry "Lord save or I perish" Is not Christ above sin? His precious blood cleanseth from all sin and therefore when you feel that terrible thing, sin, may you be enabled to cry mightily to Him - "Pardon mine iniquity O Lord, for it is great". And one may say here that in a sense, if this storm be made a calm by the Lord Jesus, there is no other storm we need fear. You need fear nothing else if your sin be removed. If the blood of Christ cleanses you and removes a load of dead works from your conscience there is nothing you need fear. "Why are ye so fearful?" Because this sin rages, because that lust is determined to have its own way, and because that covetousness or that discontent or that rebellion in your mind will not yield to anything you think or say or wish. "Why are ye so fearful?" there is one who on the cross uttered that all important, all covering word, "It is finished" and if you can, go and plead that blood

The blood of Christ, a precious blood
Cleanseth from all sin, doubt it not
And reconciles the soul to God
From every folly, every fault

And this will make a great calm. There is no calm in this life that you can have that can, for wonder, for blessedness, for power, be compared to the calm that comes into the conscience when the blood of Jesus Christ is applied. It is the blessing. It is the best of all good things, the sweetest of all sweet things, when the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeps the heart and mind by Jesus Christ. Every question is answered respecting your state before God for eternity. Every doubt for the moment is removed and every fear that you had is taken away in so satisfactory a manner as that there is no reason now to question how it is with you or how it will be with you. Have you faith in this blood? He that believeth shall be saved. If you have faith in this blood you will be praying, as it is written, in the Romans - "Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved." If you have faith you will answer to that - "If with thy mouth thou shalt confess the Lord Jesus and with thy heart believe that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." And the beauty of this gospel is such, and the efficacy of it is such, as that those who feel it can unite with the Apostle and say "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith" (Romans 1 v 16 and 17). Come then repenting sinner, come to this blessed fountain and you will find that it will one day remove all that fearful storm upon your conscience, or, to use Paul's words, the dead works that are there will be purged from it. "How is it that ye have no faith?" Why are you so fearful of the power of indwelling sin? But am I to be indifferent? You cannot be indifferent; if you are a living soul you cannot be indifferent, but there is a great difference between indifference to indwelling sin and despair on account of it. These poor disciples seemed to have been very near to despair when, with the storm about them, and their ship filling with water, their Master was asleep. But still they had one thing left to them and to that they had recourse. Master - they called on the Lord. Poor sinner, if sin threatens - and when does it not threaten? - there is One and only One

to whom you may go and to whom you will be directed and led by the Spirit, that is to this great Master. If - O may we notice this - if by dying the Lord Jesus removed once and for ever the sins of His people from them, that is, from God's account, what is it for Him to subdue indwelling sins that are in our hearts? Paul says to the Romans, "If we are saved by His death, much more shall we be saved by His life." He lives; He lives to conquer, He lives to overcome, He lives to bless and save; He lives in heaven, and He has but to say, and sometimes He does say to this and to that sin, "Be still", and when He does you know it. Be still O lust, O pride, discontent and rebellion; be still. And what sweeter calm in such a case can you have than to lie before the Lord, not becalmed, but at sweet rest; not having no sin in you, but believing and feeling the power of divine grace to overcome what is within you. Resting in Him, not in yourself; not in a conscious victory, not in a feeling, now I have done, I have overcome; not in that, which would be deception indeed, but in this, that He, in whom your hope is, has spoken, has touched your sin, touched your heart, and you can rest in the Lord. Yea, you can not only rest in Him, but delight in Him. Have you no faith in this mighty One? O look at His divine majesty as He rose in that ship and spoke to the wind and said "Be still". The mighty God as He looked on the waves and spoke to them and said "Be quiet". He sat King; He was King; He is King, and all that you need is that He should come and say to all these things that are troubling you, perturbing you, disturbing you, "Be still" and there is a great calm.

But what about these disturbing providences? The same thing. What did you see in the past? Sometimes the past is made a great encouragement for present and future.

His love in times past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink

And you may say now with regard to this or that affliction, it is under the control and management of this blessed One, the Lord Jesus Christ. Affliction cometh not forth from the dust, neither does it spring out of the ground. "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?" Can all the sickness that is come to the land and to this town and to this congregation, can it have come without

God? Can our friends who are laid aside and not able to be with us, can they have got this trouble without God? Yet some of us are very fearful; I am one of them. I am fearful of what the Lord may be about to do with this nation, yea and with the churches, for judgement will first begin at the house of God. But then, who sits at the head? Who is God over all, blessed for ever more? Why the Lord Jesus Christ. So may we have faith in Him and look to Him to do two things. First to give us grace to hear His voice, "Hear the rod and who hath appointed it", to humble ourselves under His mighty hand, confessing personal sin, and church sin, and national sin, and then to wait for His healing power. There is nothing too hard for Him. It is a great mercy to believe that, and I do believe it, and it will keep you if you believe it. It will keep your heart and mind stayed on Him. It will direct your prayers to Him. It will tell you to hope in Him. It will cause you to cleave close to Him. Faith in Christ is a staying influence on the mind. It directs the eye to the Lord of life and glory. It brings one to say - "Whom have I in heaven but Thee." Thou alone art able to control these things. How is it that we who have had evidence of God's goodness, tokens of His mercy and love to us, how is it that, when new storms arise and new troubles come, that we are so fearful and have no faith, or so little faith? It is because we have so much unbelief and are so guided and governed by our senses. Things come of a natural kind and nature rises up at once and says, now the thing we have feared is coming upon us. O but says the Lord, Why do you disbelieve? There is a penetrating question that the Lord asks of Moses respecting Israel - "How long will it be ere ye believe Me?" And might He not put it to some of us who have had such tokens of mercies and blessings for many years and still, when the least storm rises, any contrary wind blows, we are just as before, ready to give up and say, "Master carest Thou not that we perish?" Didst Thou call us to come, to this end. Didst Thou bring us away from our home and from our father's ship and mending of nets; didst Thou tell us that we should be made fishers of men and all just to be drowned, to be ended so quickly, even before it all began? O the folly, O the wickedness of this. Hart says of unbelief it was his chief sin, and we may say the same. "How is it that ye have no faith?" Has He deceived you? Has He broken His promise? Has He left you? Has He denied you any good thing? Has He not, even in this trouble, made good His word - "In the world ye shall have tribulation". Is He not the same great and true

God, the same compassionate Lord, the same unchangeable God, as when He called you, as when He blessed you, as when He told you that He would never leave you nor forsake you, and have you not, even in this trouble, found Him near so that when you cried "Master" there has been some answer, some token, some mercy? How long will it be ere ye believe Him? "Why are ye so fearful?" Because we look at the wind, because we feel the waves. "Why are ye so fearful?" Because we are sinners; because sin rises and works in us and because we have no power against it. "How is it that ye have no faith?" Have you forgotten Him who spoke to you, forgotten what He was like? Have you forgotten the time when He let you look on Him through the lattice, the time when He paid you a gracious visit, the time when He assured you that all was well, that He was your God and Saviour and would never leave you nor forsake you? I say, this word is more directed in the spirit and intent of it to Himself than to the storm and the fears of his disciples. A most gentle reproof, a most merciful reminder of His presence and of His power and of what He has done and therefore may be a wonderful warrant and reason put to the heart for our going to Him again and asking for new help, fresh deliverance, and new, sweet calm after a troublesome storm. "Have faith in God".

To trust Him endeavour, the work is His own
He makes the believer and gives him his crown

And He says, "I, the Lord, change not." I hate to put away. Having begun a good work in you, says Paul to the Philippians (Philippians 1 v 6) He will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. He will not leave it undone. Therefore look to Him; everything that can be needed here; every blessing, every deliverance that you can need from every storm and trouble, this blessed God has in His hand, in His heart and will freely bestow. O think not hardly of Him; deem not hardly of Him. He is too wise to err; all He does, He does in infinite wisdom. He is too good to be unkind; He intends good. I will do thee good at thy latter end. Yea, He says, He will greatly increase our latter end and make it better and larger than the beginning. You will find this in the issue of your affliction and the quelling of your doubts, and the reviving of your faith, you will find this - "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof". Better is God at the end of a dispensation to us than He was at the beginning. We may remember how

it was with Job, of whom the Apostle James says - "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy". The end of the Lord there was the end of that peculiar, painful dispensation of God with His servant Job, the end of that particular time, and it proved God to be very pitiful and of tender mercy. May we watch Him. May we cry to Him and if, for a time, He is silent and appears to take no notice of us, may we not be discouraged thereby, but be enabled to cry and shout until He be pleased to say, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt" May the Lord reprove us where we need reproof for our groundless fears - I say groundless, though they may appear to be well grounded - in providence and in inward troubles, and bring us to believe in Him in whom is all goodness and all mercy and all life and all power.

AMEN.