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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Friday evening 8 May 1936

Matthew 16 v 24

Then said Jesus unto His disciples, if any man will
come after Me, let him deny himself and take
up his cross and follow Me

This chapter, like all the Word of God, is full of divine instruction. The caution, the instruction, against leaven is worthy of all our attention and prayer. Leaven, in the Scripture, is used in a bad sense, corrupting everything it enters into; mixing - and God forbid that to His people. When they were to be delivered from Egypt the Lord said unto them: You shall have no leaven in all your coasts; no leaven in your houses; the soul that uses leaven shall be cut off. If we mix, or attempt to mix, anything with Christ, that is leaven, and that is the ruin of the soul. When God will bless His people He takes trouble with them to teach them and bring them off from that leaven of self, of sin. O, but it is difficult; it is impossible to us naturally. All the religion of the world is leavened and therefore corrupt, and we have it; we are full of it, and we need the teaching of the Spirit and His mighty operations in us to preserve us from mixing ourselves with Christ. O, my brethren, take very particular heed to this instruction. Leaven is a corrupting thing. Bring your will into religion, that is leaven. Bring your goodness into it, that is leaven. Bring your determination to do right, that is leaven. Mix self in any matter, in any measure, that is leaven. O, but is it not difficult? See, we are stuffed with it, and we need the mighty operations and teaching of the Holy Ghost to save us from that.

Then we have in this chapter the various speculations of men concerning God, God in Christ. "Whom do men say that I am". He knew, but He would have His disciples confess it, and be separated from it. If we do nothing more than guess, speculate, about Christ, it is an evidence and proof that, for the time, we are just in the darkness of the fall, in the ignorance of fallen nature. Men are all talking about Christ. Christendom is full of talk about Him. Many people in

Brighton are talking about Him. Modernists talk about Him, criticise Him. Are we better? No, by nature we are no better. Do we know better? Yes, if we are taught of the Spirit. Who is Christ? Have we any knowledge given to us by the Spirit whereby we shall return a gracious, a God-honouring, Christ-honouring, Spirit-honouring, answer? "Whom do men say that I am?" Who do you say that I am? Who am I to you? It is not difficult to say out of the Bible, O He is the Son of God; He was born of the virgin Mary; He became the Surety of His people, and all that. That is quite easy, because we have the Bible in our hands. But when you come to heart matters, when you come to close quarters with yourself, when you realise, if you do, the ruin of your nature, the sin of your heart, and the sin of your life, and the corruption of your spirit, and also that you are dead without Christ, guilty without Him, polluted without Him, and then have some sight given to you of Him, then you can say "Thou art the Christ". Some said, as you have it, "Sir we would see Jesus". Some said "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and in the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth". You may be making many mistakes about Him, but when you get a manifestation of Him, then you will have a sweet certainty as to who He is. You may doubt your interest, ah and you may be tempted about Himself, but when you are in the light as He is in the light, you say "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", and we know and are sure that Thou art that Person of whom the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth. And the Lord told His disciples whence that knowledge had come to them. My Father has revealed Him. And from that time Jesus began to show His disciples what was immediately before Him. He was going to Jerusalem to suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised again the third day. And then Peter, that favoured disciple, Peter, rebuked Him. Peter's nature leavened him, leavened his speech, and the Lord turned to him and gave him the severest rebuke that you read in the whole of the Bible to any disciple - "Get thee behind Me Satan". This may show to you, to me, that if we enter into any controversy with God, if we have any daring unbelief reigning in us to contradict Christ, if we have any kind of interference with the will of God in our spirits, this may be spoken to us - "Get thee behind Me Satan". A very solemn word and it should teach us this, to open not our mouth when we are troubled, when the Lord's ways toward us are difficult for us to understand, and when He is under a cloud, when He

hides Himself, when He suffers. O, a very solemn thing it was for Peter to rebuke His Master, and not less solemn for us in any way to rebuke God, to rebel, to fret and to contradict Him. Some of us may have done it, and though the Lord may not have so severely rebuked us, He has taught us and rebuked us. "Get thee behind Me Satan, thou art an offence unto Me." It would be a great grief and pain to you and to me if we got such a rebuke from Christ. "Thou savourest not the things which be of God". That man, whose soul had just been favoured with divinely given knowledge of Christ, that same man got this awful word to him. He was full of the savour of God a short time before. Flesh and blood did not this. The Spirit of God gave him that full knowledge and it filled him, and now he is filled with this wickedness. Satan, the devil, was in him and he is in us when we come to rebuke, to fret, to rebel and try to straighten the crossed hands of God.

Then the text "Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." "If any man will come after Me". Now look at this first. God knows you, He knows me. He knows what our will is. What is our will? Here is a despised Saviour. Here is a rejected Christ to be suffering many things at the hands of His enemies there to kill him. And with this set before them, Jesus said, if any of you will follow Me, if you come after Me, you must deny yourself. This following Christ, coming after Him is a great matter. Sometimes He hides Himself. Can you follow Him then? Sometimes He seems to have left you to unbelief and temptation. Can you go after Him then? Sometimes He is silent to you. Can you then go after Him? Sometimes He makes the clouds the dust of His feet, walks in the sea, has His path in the mighty waters; no tracing of Him, no seeing His footsteps; feet moving in the mighty waters; do you ever go after Him then in that case? "Is His mercy clean gone for ever, doth His promise fail for evermore?" Does He leave you to your own temper, your own will, your own righteousness for a time? Does He leave you to be moved, even to be influenced by the devil, so as to speak unadvisedly with your lips? And when that is the case, can you go after Christ? Have you got a will to go to Him? A very searching point. "If any man will". Have you got a will to go to Him? Can you say with Paul, in your measure, I would do good; I would be godly, I would be justified by Christ

alone. I would be sanctified by Him. I would walk with Him. Well, if you have a will for all that, He gave it to you. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power.". But what when you have your own corruptions choke you and threaten to kill you? What when you are smothered with sin, when you can see nothing in you or about you, nothing that you have ever done, nothing you have ever attempted to do, nothing that is possible for you to do is untainted; all mixed with sin. And then, feeling that, confessing that, can you say, you follow after Christ? Is He still the loadstone? Is He the One of all you would follow, in whom you would be found, by whom you would be saved? Saved, not only from your inherent sin, but saved from the movements, the operations of sin in you. Of all the reasons that the child of God has to doubt and question himself and his interest, it is this wicked thing, self. "Self" one writes, "Self in myself I hate, 'tis matter of my moan". Can you adopt that language as your own, and then say, notwithstanding, I follow Him. I go after Him. I am unhappy without Him. I am lost without Him; I am dark, I am confused, I am defeated on every hand without Him.

"If any man will come after Me". God, in His infinite mercy, recognises the will. "To will is present with me." That brings labour; it brings a righteous labour, a work of faith and the Lord is not unrighteous to forget it. O may the Lord help us, as many of us as can honestly say, insofar as we know ourselves, honestly say, we would be always after Him, following Him, coming to Him. To such one day He will give a gracious answer, a sweet owning, a gracious, blessed recognition of His own work in us. "If any man will come after Me."

Now he has something to reckon with; you have something to reckon with. "Let him deny himself." You might, some day, be so blessed in your soul as to say I believe I could part with things for Christ. You see a poor child of God and you feel sympathy with him and feel you would do your utmost to help him. You look on the church of God and say O I am thankful to be a member of that church. I am thankful when I can pray for the church, when I can love the members, one and another, when I can feel I am the least of all saints, when I am willing to wash the saints' feet, to let brotherly love continue; to love the brotherhood, to fear God and honour the King. And you may

be quite honest in all that, yet there is something more here than that, more difficult. This subtle thing self, pervading everything in us, corrupting us, this wicked thing self, to deny that. Ah we are told that, though we give all our goods to feed the poor, though we have all knowledge, though we have all faith, yet if we lack charity, we are nothing. Deny self? Proud self, self-seeking self, self that will never, if it can prevail, let you do one single act of kindness to any man, although for His sake (our Father God), if it can prevent you from it. This wicked self; you have got some predominating sin, you have got self-righteousness, you like to be thought well of by your friends. Deny that. Can you deny self when you pray? Deny self with regard to your experience? Deny self with regard to your knowledge of the Word of God? Deny self when you talk comfortably and freely with some of the Lord's people? You will find, if you have a spirit of discernment, this wicked thing self mixing, interfering, corrupting. O you may have an escape of gas in your house and you close up that chink and you close up another place, and you think you have done what is effectual, but you find in some way that subtle thing, gas, has insinuated itself, You have not got rid of it. And you may think you are right there, you are gracious there, you have true humility there, and yet there is self. Do what you will, it haunts you still, and keeps you from the Lord. Self may make a very humble person of you among your friends. O it is very difficult to be honest in this matter. Let him deny himself, hate himself, hate his life, hate his own words, hate the spirit that prompts him here and there to speak; proud self.

Against it preach, it prompts the speech

Be silent, still 'tis there

"Let him deny himself". No difficulty that I have so difficult as this. Nothing so subtle, so deceiving, as this wicked self, this self-seeking self. As many of you as have a real and proper understanding of yourselves as fallen creatures, you will perhaps be saying to me, you have not half described it. I could not. The subtlety of it I know; the pride of it I know; the constant presence of it I know, and alas the frequent prevalence of it I know. This proud self, this independent self. Independent? Yes, and if it could have its way with you you would very soon say you are independent of

God; so vile is this spirit. O I would be glad if I could get it under my feet; this independent self. What is it at the root of your prayerlessness? This wretched self. What is it at the root of your neglect of the Word of God? This wretched, independent self. What makes prayer a task, a burden? What gives any child of God an entrance into these solemn charges that God brings against His people in Malachi? Who would open the door for nothing? Who would reverence the table of the Lord? Who would walk comfortably in His ways? Self says, these ways are contemptible; that table is contemptible; that service is a weariness. Self, my friends, this wicked self, this independent self. Can you deny it? Have you ever had an hour without it? Have you ever walked feeling this wicked thing, this independent self under your feet; this lustful self? "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit", always hankering after something that is wrong, always. You would widen the way if you could after self. You would make a corrupted way for you to heaven if self had its way. There would be no cross if self could have its way. At the best it would be a few straws as William Tiptaft said. This lustful self, hankering after what the Lord has not given. "Covetousness which is idolatry". Something God has not given, you want Him to give. O my friends, you may think I am drawing a black picture. It would be a thousand times blacker if possible than I have set out. Human nature? John Wesley said the heart of a child was like a piece of white paper. You can write on what you will." The child of God says, my heart was born black, full of sin, and it has grown blacker and more full of sin since I have been grown up. And still worse, what you perhaps did not know or feel before you were called by grace, now you are full of. I would not have believed in unregeneracy that there was in my heart what I painfully know there is there.

"Let him deny himself". Let him deny himself when he prays. Can you?

Now I will stop at this. You may say, that is quite enough. We have heard quite enough about it. You have not heard half of it and if God is your teacher you will say I am very ignorant of myself, and I am very loath to part with myself. Happy the man who can honestly say, "Self in myself I hate", honestly pray,

O crucify this self, that I

No more, but Christ in me, may live;
Sometimes a child of God can very honestly say it and pray it.

Take up his cross, the cross of tribulation promised by Christ. "In the world ye shall have tribulation". The cross of your own vile nature. "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Must I carry it? Yes. Must I be troubled by it? As long as you live, yes. "Let him take up his cross". Contradictions of sin, contradictions of the devil, seeming contradictions of providence. "Let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me". Follow substance. I love them that love Me and I will fill them out of My own treasury. I will fill them with substance. The substance of grace, of justification, of sanctification, of communion with Myself. I will satisfy them. "I will satiate the weary soul and replenish every sorrowful soul". And, dear friends, when we follow Christ, what do we do? We follow righteousness. "Hearken to Me ye that seek the Lord, ye that follow after righteousness". "This is the Name wherewith He shall be called the Lord our Righteousness". Follow Him. And when you follow Him you walk in the light as He is in the light. "I am come a light into the world that whosoever believeth in Me should not walk in darkness but have the light of life". You do not follow fancy when you follow Christ.

Let him follow Me in prayer. "My soul followeth hard after Thee". Is it not wonderful that the Lord should give a sinner grace to stir him up to follow Christ. His lazy nature, his corrupt heart, his vain imaginations, all left, and he says "My soul wants Christ; my heart is after Him. None can help me, none can save me, none can teach me, none can comfort me, none take me to heaven but that blessed Christ. "Let him follow Me".

And when for an hour, to put it so, when for an hour you are relieved in some measure from this abominable thing, self, and can say "I follow after God; I seek His face; I seek His strength; I want his presence, His love, His blood, His righteousness, that is good. We do not follow fancies when we follow Christ. We do not follow leaven when we follow Christ. Oh my dear friends, it is beautiful this life of the cross, following Christ. The cross is heavy, but it is very light compared with Him after whom we are following. "Our

light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory while we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal", passing away, "but the things which are not seen are eternal". You look at your troubles - they are seen; at your difficulties - they are seen; at your comforts - they are seen, but they are all passing. O blessed is the man whom the Lord chooseth and causeth to approach unto Him. This is following Him. Prayer, the prayer of faith is one of the best ways that ever a sinner can be walking in, of following the Lord. "Let him follow Me".

I will reward Him with the reward of love and grace and the reward begins here, when you get a smile; that is a reward. When you get a kind word, that is a reward. When you feel the influence of love to Him, that is a reward. When He graciously makes you know that He loves you, that is a reward, and you say, I am full. I have substance for a shadow. "Let him follow". Devil, let this child of God alone; indwelling sin, hinder him not; temptations and troubles, hinder him not. Let him follow Me. Let hindrances be taken out of the way. He has got enough on his back with that heavy cross. He has enough to discourage him when indwelling sin is breathing itself into his mind again and again as an influence. O, but I know those of you know it who fear God. Nothing is worth a thought in this life compared with Him after whom we are following.

Compared with Christ

one who knows Him may occasionally say,

Compared with Christ in all beside
No comeliness I see

And whenever that is the experience, then following after Him is not so hard as the devil and the flesh would make it. The yoke of Christ is easy, His burden is light, and it is known sometimes that the way of the just is a pleasant way. The path of the just is as a shining light. Christ is that light and the ways of wisdom are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace. Let us then, as the Lord helps us, look honestly at this great point. "If any Man will come after Me" If he

will build, let him seek to get down to the Rock. Let him deny himself and come after Me, taking up his cross.

Now may the Lord help us. These hints, no more than hints are they, may lead you by the Lord's merciful teaching to look closely into the important matter of self denial. Not denying yourself of something you can spare. Not denying yourself of something that does not remove one single comfort from you. You may be able, you might be willing, to give away a sack full of treasury notes and be no better in the sight of God because you did it unrighteously. But if you can deny that wicked thing, that lustful thing, that proud thing that is like a subtle gas insinuating itself into everything, well you are a happy person when you can do that.

AMEN.