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La P812

Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham
on Sunday morning, 5th. December 1926

Text: Philippians 1 v. 12

"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that
the things which happened unto me have fallen out
rather unto the furtherance of the gospel."

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Paul was a prisoner. He dwelt as a prisoner in his own house in Rome for two years, fastened to a soldier who had to keep him, but he was allowed to preach, and his preaching was of God, and the things which happened to him as a prisoner, but also, and more, as a servant of the Most High God, God used to further, to advance, and set out the glory of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and this is the intention of this word, - the text, "The things which happened unto me have fallen out," been turned to a good account by the Lord, "unto the furtherance of the gospel," the setting up of the kingdom of Christ in many sinners' hearts; the overthrowing of Satan's kingdom and dominion in many; the gathering of sinners to Shiloh: the setting forth of the person and grace and glory of the Lord Jesus. It shows the wisdom and the goodness of God and the accomplishment of divine purposes wherever God is pleased to send a servant of His. Providences that may seem adverse, shall be turned to a good account. Difficulties shall be made useful; mountains shall be levelled; valleys exalted; devils defeated: sinners quickened and converted and brought to the Lord Jesus. What a God we have to do with. What a God has had to do with us, and what a blessed thing it is to be brought under the influence of the Word of God, to know and feel its power, and find, that the circumstances that afflicted us, the difficulties that wound us often with a sense of our helplessness, the adversities that press upon us, the tribulations that squeeze us; to find that these things are used by the Lord, for the furtherance of His good will in our experience: the setting up more and more distinctly and powerfully, the Lord Jesus, and for gathering our often gadding spirits to Him, of whom it is said, "the gathering of the people shall be." And this would say to us - watch the providence of God. Not only in the happenings, not only in the things of it that come to you, - watch the effect. See if trouble is useful to you, if difficulties are put as wind into

your back to help you to Jesus Christ. See if the things that wound you, annoy you, greatly depress you at times, are useful, in the hand of the Spirit, to make more room for the Lord Jesus, and, if He comes to you. If it is so, then you will be able to say, "the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel" - 'in my soul.' I think, if the life of every child of God were written, this verse would be a very beautiful, and suitable thing to ascribe at the very beginning; that the child of God might say, 'I have had many things to encounter, I have felt many temptations, have been the subject of much evil and have a law of sin in my members, but God has kindly used providences and inward experiences for the furtherance of the gospel in me.' O to prefix to your lives, in your own minds, this so beautiful word, 'I would have you know, I would have you understand, my brethren,' says the Apostle, 'that these things have not fallen out by chance,' - there has been a time to every season, and God has made everything beautiful in His season. The time of life, of love, the time to build and the time to throw down. The time for embracing and the time for refraining from embracing. A time to gather and a time to scatter and throw away. All these things ordered by the Lord, have turned, and they shall turn, to the furtherance of the gospel in the soul's experience.

Now I would like, as enabled, just to put several things before you in a distinct way. First of all, let me speak about internal things which are experienced and are, if I may say so, the common knowledge and experience of the Lord's people. Now there is, according to the Apostle Paul, what he calls the "law of sin" in our members. This is worthy of close observation. A law is not a thing of chance, nor of a day. It does not rise and fall, it is there. A permanent thing. A law, rule, statute, precept. You may not, as it were, go outside of it, not break it, not trample it under foot. It is a law. The "law of sin" in our members, is that, just that, which orders every natural man in his affections, his desires, aims, and ends. When grace comes, and the kingdom of God is set up in a sinner, there is another law set up in him - the law of God, proceeding from Zion. The law proceeds from the mouth of our High Priest, whose lips keep the truth. Now between these two, there is a conflict. Neither of them will give way. The law of sin, which is a painful thing to every child of God, asserts itself and

seeks to be obeyed, and this brings every subject of it into a painful experience. It is expressed distinctly for us by the Apostle Paul in the seventh of the Romans, "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." He could not be what he desired to be, and he was, what he would not be, and this was an experience painful to him. It is, to you who have the same grace, in a different measure; the same life and the same law of love from Jesus Christ in your souls. It is just the same thing. It hinders, it stops, it objects, it lusts, it works, it struggles, it attempts to deceive; it would take by assault. All kinds of manoeuvres, all kinds of ways of working, this law of sin has, and it is known, it is felt; every one feels it. You cannot attempt to pray without this, in some measure, some form, asserting itself. You cannot go forth in one act of faith in Jesus Christ and this law of sin not object. You cannot go out in pure desires after the Lord and this law of sin not say you must not do it. There is a perpetual opposition, more or less felt, and more or less resisted, - more or less complied with, and it does not seem possible, as you view it as working in you, and defiling you, and bringing guilt on you, that it should have any good result. You may have felt that it does not seem possible that anything good can be connected with this evil, this bitter thing - "the law of sin," - "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," - but if you attend to the Apostle's experience as he describes it, you will see that in him, it did turn to the furtherance of the gospel. He cried out in his pain and grief, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Now good came, because his faith was raised up by the Spirit who wrought it in him to such a degree of strength that he said, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." - 'I thank God this has made room for Him, - more room for Him. I more need Him, and I more apprehend Him. I believe He is not far from me; I believe that I shall get the victory; I believe that I shall rejoice, yea I do rejoice, and I believe also I am instructed to make an important, a vital distinction between things that are in me: between the law of sin which is in my members and the law of my mind with which I serve God. I make, I am enabled to make, this important, this vital distinction!' - Was not that good? Did it not increase his love for Jesus Christ? Did it not make the power of Christ more wonderful to him; more desirable? Did not it bring him to say, 'I have a Man in heaven who will take care of me;

He will give me the victory.' Did it not make him feel, that even his defeat brought out that cry which was good, and was heard, "O wretched man that I am!" So with every child of God, this will be one result, and if we have wisdom to observe the exercises of our minds, God will enable us to make distinction, where sometimes in our confusion we cannot make distinction, In confusion, we seem just to be one mass, and there is nothing good, nothing distinct, nothing that would enable us to say, 'Now I know I am one of the Lord's people.' This confusion is painful, but the Holy Spirit graciously teaches the exercised person to make a distinction between himself and himself. Between sinful self and godly self. Between the law of his mind, - the new man, the hidden man of the heart, the true Christian, the new creature to which all things are new and old things have passed away; - between him, and the law of sin which is in his members. The Puritans used to make a distinction that has a word in it, not apparently acceptable to us sometimes; they used to speak of the "remainders of sin" in the people of God, and really it is true, because something is taken away, and what is left is the "remainder." What was taken away? The dominion of sin, the love of sin, the practice of sin, the walking in sin with delight; this is taken away, and what remains very powerfully and painfully, Paul calls, "a law." A law that insists on respect; on obedience; a law that drives: a law that threatens, if not obeyed. Now, the hidden man says, 'I am not in subjection to this law,' and he resists it. You know you do, who have the two, - you resist. He that is born of God sinneth not, His seed remaineth in him, - he is not a willing person in this. When he falls, he is not a willing person in it; when in captivity, he is not a willing captive: so he finds that this works for good to him. His love for Christ grows, his obedience to Christ increases, and he says, 'I serve God, I delight in God in the inward man, - the hidden man of the heart, - I delight in Him.' My brethren, as you grow in grace, you will grow in knowledge and understanding, and in this growth there will be a distinction in your minds between yourself and yourself, - and you say, "it is no more I that do it." 'No, I with my mind, born again, blessed with some knowledge of, and love to, Jesus Christ; I walk before Him and fear Him and I would not displease Him, and as I hope He is my Father in Christ, I would be an obedient son always, and have Him walking in me and with me.' "So then with the mind I myself

serve the law of God." That is a beautiful law. Isaiah says it proceeds from that house that is built on the top of the mountains - that house to which all the nations, as converted, flow. From that, proceeds that law in which a saint delights. "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." - 'I serve the Lord. I, a quickened sinner blessed with faith, serve the Lord.' Now as you may be helped, be very particular dear friends in this point. See how it will turn to the furtherance of the gospel in you when this law of sin wriggles, works, commands and insists on obedience, and you resist, and pray and fear God and dread lest you should be left to obey that wicked principle. That will make Christ greater, more desirable, sweeter, more attractive to you, and, to Him by faith you will go in your conflict - "Lord help me!" 'I would,' says Paul, 'that you should know how that God has wrought well by my troubles.' And he would say that you godly people at Galeed should know that your exercises under the presence and power and insistence of this law of sin in your members, should observe very narrowly and see that that works for you. See what resistance there is, and see how that, that is in you that resists, is God's work, and that it makes Christ more desirable, greater, sweeter, more blessed to you than He would be if you had not that law of sin in your members. I do not think I need add anything to this by way of saying you understand I do not mean living in sin. I do not mean, "---- sin that grace may abound." No, God forbid. I think you know that I suffer from sin, that I hate it at times, but there it is, and what Erskin says is true, "Sin for my good shall work and win, but 'tis not good for me to sin."

In the next place, temptation is a matter of pain to the people of God; compliance with it is a matter of guilt and shame to the people of God. You know, some of you, that I speak the truth. O the bruising heel, the bruising devil; the deceiving devil; the defiling devil: the arguing devil. Now an infidel; now a believer; now an angel of light: now a worldly spirit. He does afflict the Church of God. The Romans had him. These Christian Romans, they had him, and Paul said, by the Holy Ghost, "God ---- shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." If you are his friend, if he is not your open and sworn enemy, it does not look well for you. I would be thankful for any evidence that he hates me. He does hate me, because he knows I am his enemy, and he hates my preaching, poor as it is,

because I exalt the Saviour, who will one day bruise him for ever under the feet of His people. But, - this devil..... I am now restricting my observations on temptation to him. Temptation is used in the Scripture in other ways, as afflictions and tribulation, but I am just now restricting myself to this one thing in temptation - the coming in of this enemy and setting up banks against the city, the shooting arrows at the city, at every poor pilgrim. The temptation to evil, infidelity, the stirring up the mud of your fallen nature. Do thank God if the devil is your enemy. You wont always distinguish perhaps between his temptation and the working of your own nature. But, whenever you find there is something of a distinct kind in you; a voice that is not your own; though, in the matter, you wont know your own from his perhaps, but, when you have no indication that it is the voice of the devil in you, when something comes against the distinct wishes and longings of your hearts; something that diverts your attention in a moment and without your consent; something that hardens, or seeks to harden your heart against Him whom you may be wishing to know and fear and love and whose society you are craving; then make this remark to yourself, "An enemy hath done this" - 'an enemy is doing it!' But now, if this is so, one may say, 'Where is the good of it - what can come out of this?' Well, I will tell you as well as I am able. This will be the good. This will be the use, wont it, - does not it drive you to Him - Master and King and Lord? Does not it press out cries, "Lord help me." 'Against this mighty foe I have no might; I cannot overcome him; O do assist my soul; keep me praying. He would make me an infidel, - keep me a believer. He would move me to blaspheme on my knees, - keep me worshipping. He would move me to limit Thy power, - help me to hold fast to Omnipotence. He would move me to say there is neither wisdom nor goodness in this trouble, - help me to believe both in Wisdom and Goodness Divine. Thus the enemy misses his mark and you will get good out of the temptation. It will be to the furtherance of Christ's glory in your soul; it will lead you to Him; bring you closer to Him; closer to His cross, to His blood, to His wisdom, to His power: it will enable you and move you to cry continually, 'Hold Thou me up, keep me a believer, keep me praying, worshipping and fearing God all the days of my life.' So you will be able to say one day,

"Meantime, that foe can't boast of much,
Who makes us watch and pray."

There is an instruction in this. May the Lord enable us to receive it and observe it very narrowly. It shall turn to "the furtherance of the gospel." Temptation does happen to us, - come to us. The tempter wont leave us alone, if he is permitted to touch us. The body he will touch, if allowed; circumstances he will ruin, if allowed, but all shall turn to the glory of God in His dear saints.

Take in the third place providences, - circumstances. It is said we are creatures of circumstances. I do not believe it. We are creatures greatly affected by circumstances; we are moved this way and that way by circumstances, but we are not creatures of circumstances in the sense of being ruled entirely by them. They come as God's creatures to affect us. They are God's creatures. Troubles are God's sending. "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?" Things do come. Now the Scriptures do afford us abundant proof that circumstances are under God, and used by Him for the good of His people, and the glory of His name, - the furtherance of the gospel in their hearts. My friends, circumstances make emptiness sometimes. It is very striking in respect of Israel, how that their wilderness journey was for the furtherance of God's goodness and the opening of His faithfulness and wisdom and power to them. No water for their thirst, was the furtherance of His goodness and power in smiting the rock and causing the water to flow to them all their journey. They could not grow wheat and make their own flour and bread, and that was for the furtherance of God's power and mercy in raining manna every morning for their hunger. They were exposed to hostile nations all about them and that made way for the protecting power of God. They did not know which way to go except as told, and they were nightly and daily protected by the cloud and pillar of fire. Oh, circumstances God uses. He does make use of them to His peoples' good. A threatened and inevitable shipwreck made way for God's glory in the Apostle, and by means of him, to the eyes of all those who were with him in that doomed ship. The things that fall out to the Lord's people are for their good, and the furtherance of the gospel in them.

Let us look at this, it is very wonderful, very instructive and very beautiful to those who have faith to watch the Lord's work in respect of their circumstances. Affliction comes, you cannot avoid it. If a man tries to avoid what he sees, as he believes,

coming, some trouble, he will only get deeper into it, he will only become more involved and afflicted. Sit still when affliction comes, - sit still. It will work well. Now it will do some things very distinctly, as it will make you feel weak, too weak to bear the trouble. You will have to go, you do go, you are led to go by the Holy Spirit, to God in the affliction. No keeping from Him. It sends us, it gives us errands, it makes us earnest, it gives point and edge to the petition. O we are weak. 'Lord,' you may have said sometimes, 'I cannot bear this, I am too weak to carry this burden.' And what does it do for you? It brings good, because He may say to you what He said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee," - 'I will see to it that you shall hold on. This provoking, painful, piercing thorn in your flesh shall do you good. It shall turn to My glory in you, to your profit, your establishment, your growth - it shall do all this.' It was so with Paul. That did turn to the furtherance of the gospel in him and it has been the case with myriads of sinners since. They have had the thorn, and they have had the grace to bear it and a remarkable thing it is, in the victory that is in it over flesh and blood. O it is a great victory for you to say, 'I glory in this trouble. I would not be without it. It keeps me down; it keeps me little; it makes me low in my own esteem; it makes me know I am a weak creature and have no power, but it also makes room for Him who is the Strength of Israel: it makes room for the gracious omnipotence of the Saviour.' Have you not had advantages by your troubles? Has it not been to you good to have troubles? Must you not say to the glory of your gracious God and Saviour - 'I have gained by my trading. I have felt to be in danger and I have fled to Him to protect me. I have felt too weak to hold on and I have fled in my weakness, to Him who is the Strength of Israel.' This, this is one way in which we are to gain by our afflictions. We do not gain by trying to get rid of them, but we do gain by being submissive to them and seeking hourly and momentarily grace to carry the cross.

Some particular want may come to you, - perhaps it is in providence, it may be in grace - some particular want will come and press upon you. You pray about it; ask for a supply and do not get it for a time. Then there comes trouble on that. You cannot pray for a thing and seem to be denied, without being afflicted. Begun and unfinished matters are matters of trouble to the people

of God. Mark that, you do, you must have marked it in the past. An unfinished matter, a matter you thought perhaps the Lord did begin, that has not finished, a matter about which He may even seem indifferent. Now because He does not hear your prayers, as you think, this must be an affliction. Now does it work well? What is the effect? May we be more and more particular about the effect of things. What is the effect of this on you? 'Well,' you say, 'I do have to go to Him. I am obliged to go and I do go to Him about it. Sometimes I cannot get access and then I am more troubled, but sometimes I do get access and then I am hopeful; then I wait on the Lord; then I look to Him to be supplied out of His own fulness.' And this turns to good, does it not, and the good is twofold - good to you, glory to His name. He does supply all need, and it is very beautiful to faith to see how that the Apostle was inspired to pledge God to his people. A very condescending thing this, but true. The Apostle pledges God to His people. "My God," he says, in this epistle, "shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." If it is a spiritual need, what then? Says Paul to the Ephesians, "God ---- hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." All! All righteousness, all holiness, all wisdom, all grace, all mercy, all perseverance, and glory eventually, all these blessings God Has given to you before the world began, in His dear Son. This says:- Do not try to add anything to yourself. If you are weak, do not try to strengthen yourself, - a very natural thing for men to do, but the Lord wont have it in His people. If it is a temporal thing, then what? If I were hungry says the Lord, would I tell you, would I ask you to bring Me offerings? No, but He says the cattle on a thousand hills and the gold and the silver are Mine. All things belong to Me. Call upon Me in the day of trouble. Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. Come to Me with every need and want, with all your poverty. If you have things to meet and have nothing to meet them with, come to Me; if you have difficulties, bring them to Me; enemies, bring them to Me; all things in your house, bring them to Me: and as faith is strengthened thus to do, then the troubles truly turn to "the furtherance of the gospel." How good this is!

I wish you who are young in the ways of the Lord, may have wisdom to make these remarks to yourself from time to time. 'What

is the effect of the things I have upon my soul?' How much I lost in my younger days from want of observation of things, and what I lose still through the same lack of observation, God only knows, but I have been a great loser by my foolishness. Solomon says, "Much food is in the tillage of the poor! but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment." - "There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise;" says Solomon, "but a foolish man spendeth it up." Seek the grace of God in this particularly, seek wisdom to make observation of His dealings with you in providence. Do you need direction? Go to Him for it. Lean not on the wisdom of a friend, go to Him for it, and as the Lord is pleased to help you in these things, you will be sure to find good, and to say with the Apostle Paul in your own manner and measure, "The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." - 'God has made more room for Himself by these things; more room for Himself in me, than I should have had without them.' Mind these things As God is with us, we shall find all the matters that come, tend to this great point - the furtherance of the gospel in our hearts. You have got affliction in your houses, in your business. You have got affliction here and there. Someone dear to you is laid aside, or some straightness has come, where there used to be fulness and plenty. Now, the Lord keep you from lifting your head up and saying, 'I will bear it as well as I can,' - give you grace to fall flat before Him as an afflicted soul, and as you may hope, a chastened son, and then you will get good; then you will find that the gospel comes in, in sweeter, in more blessed fulness to you than it has done before. Providence! O, it is God's handmaid, God's servant, God's voice, God's goodness to His people. Where would some of us have been, if the Lord had not, in His providence, put bars in our way: If He had not built a wall of hewn stone about us, where would some of us have gone? O the foolishness, O the madness of our nature. 'Now,' says the Lord, 'I will have you to myself, you are Mine; I have bought you with My blood.' So He gathers, He draws, He prevents, He restrains, He constrains; and these dealings of God in providence, are for our observation: and as we observe them in the light of the Spirit, we shall find that they yield good to us. Yes they do! O sinner, more and more you may find the pride of your nature, the nakedness of your soul, the pollution of sin, and then more and more as God leads you, these painful findings

will make room for the goodness, and the fulness, and the righteousness, and the holiness of the Lord Jesus. Then you will say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

Job's case is an instructive one. It could not seem other than unmitigated evil, that he should be at once bereaved of his wealth, and that succeeding that bereavement, there should come a blow on his body, the removal of all his health; what evil this was, - but it did turn out well! O the revelations of God which he got; the speakings of God to him whereby he was deeply humbled and he was hid from the pride of man, from his own heart's pride. He was convinced that he had said many things that were not wise. He said, "therefore have I uttered that which I understood not." - 'I will say no more.' O the revelation he got of God's greatness and glory. So he said, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhorre myself and repent in dust and ashes." God was great in him; he was a little man then, a poor man; but he got a divine commendation. He had said the thing that was right with God. In the main he was just in all that he said of God. Dear friends, we may be afflicted, individually. As a church and congregation we may be afflicted. Now may the Lord give us wisdom to look at His dealings with us; to narrowly observe His providences, and to take note of our own hearts under the influence of these things, and see if we have, from time to time these touches, leadings, guiding influences. That power that will subdue rebellion, bring us to sit in the dust, close our mouths and say with the Psalmist, "I was as a dumb man ---- as a man ---- in whose mouth are no reproofs;" to sit down and see what the King will do to us, who rules in heaven and in earth, and to see whether the Lord Jesus will come to us closer and be more intimate with us, and deal more powerfully with us, and make His precious blood more precious to us, and His righteousness more glorious in our hearts and eyes. If we are so blessed then we shall see after our manner, and in our measure, with the Apostle, the things we now know, the things which happened to us; have fallen out rather to the glory of God; rather help than hindrance; rather than bringing us to be independent of God, they have made us more and more dependent on Him: and we have been brought to depend more and so we shall get good.

There is profit, my friends in trading. There is profit in trading. There is good in exercise, - real good. Watch God's

THE LORD TRAVELED
WITH US THROUGH THE WASTELAND

dealings with you, and if you can do that, you will never lack an object, and the end will be, that God's goodness will shine and His fulness flow to your souls, and I hope also I may say I shall be included. The Lord grant His mercy.

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