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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 23 March 1921

PHILIPPIANS 3 V 13/14

Brethren I count not myself to have apprehended
but this one thing I do, forgetting those things
which are behind and reaching forth to those things
which are before, I press toward the mark for the
prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus

These are the words of an exercised, satisfied and dissatisfied child of God, an eminent saint, blessed with a most wonderful knowledge of Christ, favoured above many with communion. Perhaps no other saint was ever so indulged with intimacy, such intimacy with God, as Paul was on one occasion. He tells us of the time when he was caught up to the third heavens, when he saw sights and heard things which were not lawful for him to utter. And yet, that eminent saint was very troubled at times. A body of sin and death hampered him, sickened him, weakened him, drove him into things which he would not do, kept him from doing things which he would do, made him a groaning sinner. "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death". Think of this, dear exercised people of God, this eminent saint, this indulged child of God, who had attained to so much, reckons himself not to have attained to that which was before him. You, myself, must say as we know ourselves and our short experiences, and the little we know of God, that we indeed cannot reckon ourselves to have attained or to be perfect. We must say that. Indeed sometimes you may think and feel that you have received nothing, that you have attained to nothing. There is such uncertainty in your experience, such darkness in your mind, such fear, such guilt, such powerful working of sin, such prevalence of sin, such lack of God's testimony in your souls, that you think often it may be - Hardly sure can they be worse, who never heard the Lord's Name. But the Scripture encourages such. It is written of the High Priest that He is able to have compassion on the ignorant and them that are out of the way. Christ Himself has said: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out", and the Holy Ghost has said that Christ

died and by dying destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil, that he might deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Here the Apostle in this chapter relates something of his condition of mind, opens his mind with regard to himself. He tells us of his natural advantages, that he was a Jew, that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the purest of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin, as touching the law, a Pharisee. He was in a good condition naturally, one of those to whom the Oracles of God were committed, and as to his attainments they were very considerable. Touching the law, he was blameless; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless; a religious man, a Pharisee, a strict observer of God's commandments, a strict worker until Christ and His despised followers became known, and then this Pharisee became a persecutor of the church. What he was under the law he believed was all to his advantage, but this self-righteousness came into collision with the Lord Jesus. If you have any righteousness of your own, it will come into collision with Christ and one will go down and the other up. If you belong to the Lord, down will go your righteousness till you esteem it to be filthy rags. Then Christ will go up and be to you "the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely". Depend on this, Christ will brook no rival; He will have no partner in the work and matter of salvation. He will have you, if you belong to Him, a partner of His throne, but not in His work. It is a solemn thing to be against Christ in anything, and nothing is more against Christ than a legal spirit. It opposes Him, it resists His righteousness, it determines to establish its own righteousness, and will not submit to the righteousness of Christ. It will seek righteousness, but not by faith, by works, and if you are of that spirit just now, the Lord, if He be your teacher, will just beat it down and bring down your heart with labour, and you will find none to help, and then you will cry unto the Lord in your distress. This is what the people of God have to come to. They must be lost. O it is hard to perish but it is easy to die at the cross, and lose yourself, but till you are brought there, dying is very hard, very difficult, impossible to us, but possible with God, for He makes His children die, and the Apostle was brought to this decision in his mind, and judgment and conscience, that whatever things were gain to him as a man, a Jew, a Pharisee, was loss, all loss. Whatever things he had were just no more than dung

and dross, to be despised, to be abandoned, given up. Some may think that not very difficult, but if any here should think that I would say to you, it only manifests your ignorance of yourself. Whoever thinks it easy to esteem his own righteousness to be filthy rags, and everything he could attain to, by any possibility to be nothing more than dung, does not know what he is saying. O it is hard to die, hard to lose your own life, but Christ will bring you to this, that you must lose your life if you must save it, that you must hate it if you would love it. You must sink as it were into a felt hell in order to reach after a blessed, grace given, heaven. Christ does not barter with people. He does not give them something, for something they give to Him. They must have nothing in their hands and nothing in their purses. No money to buy with, no merit to barter, no righteousness to offer; just to be poor, helpless, dead things, and that, not once only, O no, right to the end, and being brought to that, brings him to another point, to certainty about his disposition with respect to two competing things, for Christ and sin, Christ and creature righteousness, seem to be in competition, and Paul's heart was brought to a point, with regard to these two things; they could not co-exist; one must give way. They could not occupy the same heart at the same time, each having its own sway. No! So Paul says, without doubt, "doubtless, I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in Him." How do we stand in regard of these things? How do we stand with regard to our own salvation? Are we a piece of dross? Are our best things dung? Are our attainments nothing but sin in our own judgment? Do we feel that we can unite with the Apostle and say, that we count these things that we naturally esteem, to be but dross, but dung; and do we see that there is an excellency in the knowledge of Christ, that so far transcends all the things that we may have and esteem, as that we are willing and more than willing, deeply anxious and earnest, that these, our own things, should perish and be removed from us, that we may win Christ. What think ye of Christ? And I would say, what think you of yourselves? If yourselves are high, Christ is low, and if He be low, O what a state we are in. But, says Paul of himself, "I have suffered the loss of all things" and there is a way in which every child of God has to come to this. You may not have to lose, for the sake of Christ, what Paul had

to lose literally, for he had to lose, in a sense, His Hebrew condition and standing, and that was not little to him. He had to lose whatever he possessed under the law. He suffered the loss of his character and of his name, and of his standing with his brethren, his kinsmen after the flesh. We shall lose something; we may have lost something in our families; they may have despised us. We may have lost something in business or in some connection. O but when Christ is put first, when in the light of the Spirit, the teaching, the unction that teacheth of all things, Christ is invested in our eyes and judgment, with a beauty and glory and desirableness, and preciousness, and fulness, that no tongue can express, and only a God given faith see, then down goes self, and down go the things of self, and up rises Christ and stands first, prominent, above all the creation, brighter than the sun, better than massiness of gold, better than the gold of Ophir. O what a Christ, the Spirit does bring to poor sinners. O what a Christ He opens to their view at times, and that makes them willing to let all else go. The Apostle knew, because he was a sensible sinner, that if he stood alone before God in his own rags, in his own name, he was lost for ever, and so he proceeds in the chapter to say "and be found in Him". As the branch is in the vine, to bear fruit, so must the soul be in Christ to be righteous, to be holy, to be godly, to walk uprightly, to please God, to do His commandments. Works done without faith are but sin, and all things done out of Christ are but sin. If you pray rightly, you pray in Christ. If you hunger and thirst spiritually, you hunger and thirst in, and after, Christ. That is to say, the very hunger comes from His life in you, and to be found in Him experimentally is to be united to Him, as you receive Him by faith, a revealed Christ; mind that. If men tell you that you ought to believe, and it is living below your privilege not to believe, that Christ died for you, why they go upon universalism at once. It is no wonder that a man who believes in universal redemption should say you ought to believe because Christ died for all; nobody needs a testimony that he has an interest in that which is universal and common to every man. But if there be a particular redemption, if, as the Spirit says in the Acts, Christ purchased the church with His own blood, then for you to be properly assured that Christ purchased you, you must have the witness of the Spirit. I must. He must tell you, in the language of Peter, or some Scripture, or a witness, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible

things as silver and gold from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot and without blemish" The Spirit's testimony in a sinner's conscience will bring him to an assurance. Before he gets it, his soul may be often enabled to rest itself, as far as it can go, on the atonement of Christ, but an assurance of an interest must be given by the Holy Spirit. "And be found in Him". Found by God in Him. Yes, God will look for people. He will look for His treasures, His jewels, and He will find them all in Christ. "And be found in Him" When He counts up His jewels, may He count up us. O what a great thing it will be to be reckoned and counted and found a jewel in Christ. All God's jewels are in Christ. All His children are in Christ, and they all want to be in Him, and seek to know that they are in Him by the witness of the Spirit. "Not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith". That is Christ's righteousness imputed to every believer, to every one for whom the Lord Jesus worked, and bled and prayed and died. Ah, seek to know this by the witness of the Spirit in your hearts. You who seek shall find, and when you find, you will find yourself in Christ. You will find Christ in you; you will find the witness of the Spirit in your conscience, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding. O the riches of grace here, the riches of God's grace in a sinner, the riches of a full assurance of understanding in a sinner, the riches of Christ dwelling in a sinner's heart, of the peace of God pervading his conscience, of love warming his affections, bringing them forth and of light giving him to see how he stands and where he stands, and a power enabling him to say, surely I am the Lord's. My friends it is all wealth, all God's goodness, the riches of His grace, the riches of His glory, the riches of Christ's blood, and the riches of the Spirit's power. It is all wealth. Gold, the gold of grace, tried in the fire, and given to a sinner who has been plucked from the fire of wrath. "And be found in Him not having mine own righteousness". Having been stripped of that now I have another given to me. Mine own, - O what rags. Christ's - O what beauty and glory. Christ's righteousness is all beauty and all glory. Do you pant for this as Paul did? Not in his measure, but in the same spirit of faith. True faith's the life of God, and it is a panting spirit. "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks so panteth my soul after Thee O

God"

Blest soul that can say, "Christ only I seek,"
Wait for Him alway; be constant tho' weak;
The Lord whom thou seekest will not tarry long;
And to Him the weakest is dear as the strong.

Then Paul says he wants to know the Lord. "That I may know Him". But he did know Him. Yes, but not as fully as he wanted to. Whoever is satisfied here. No child of God here now would lift up his face and say he knows as much of God as he wants to do. We have not attained to what is attainable in this particular. It is but little some of us know. I do feel that in my own case, how little I know of the Lord of life and glory. And if you were to ask me to explain how it is that I am so apt to backslide and set up vain things and follow them, I should, I trust, humbly confess that it is my ignorance of Christ, for the knowledge of Christ is a fixing thing; it is a binding thing; it is so attractive too as that when you know Him you are held and attracted to seek more than you know. "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection", lifting me from a life of sin, from a life of unbelief and selfishness, lifting me into that spirit that Paul had when he penned that letter to the Corinthians, part of which I read this evening. "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5 v. 14/15). Follow on my friends after the fellowship of His sufferings which is being a partaker of them. Having an interest in them in your soul, you are brought to have fellowship with those sufferings in your sufferings for sin, indwelling sin. "Being made conformable unto His death", dying unto sin. He died unto sin once, and every child of God in his measure can say, sooner or later, that he himself has died unto sin. Reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God. Dead there, is dead by the death of Christ, and the fruit of that is a death to sin in your own soul as Christ is made known to you. "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren I count not

myself to have apprehended " I am not what I would be, nor where I would be. Christ has laid hold of me and I follow on that I may lay hold of the reason that He had in laying hold of me. My brethren, there is something here to be sought after, to be looked into, as the Lord may give us grace. Why did Christ take hold of you? He left millions untouched, unsought, in their death in trespasses and sins. O why did He lay hold of us? Says Paul "I want to know". He was not doubtful about Christ having laid hold of him, but he did want to be enabled to lay hold of the reason. "But I follow after, if that I may apprehend", or know, or lay hold of, "that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus". What is this for? All for the glory of these riches of grace and mercy and pardon and justification and ultimately of heaven, that God may be glorified in His Son and glorified in His saints who are in His Son. "We know not what we shall be" says John, "but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is". And in the text he says "I count not myself to have apprehended" this - it is before me - "but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind....." What are the things that the Apostle was forgetting and wishing to forget? They could not be the work of God in his soul. No, because the Lord said "Thou shalt remember all the way the Lord thy God hath led thee". You will never be taught by the Spirit to forget anything that God has given you. The disciples forgot Christ's word for a time, but afterward they remembered it. "Then they remembered His Word"; it was brought back to them. And the promise of Christ is this, concerning the Spirit's work "He shall bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you". You will bear your treasures with you; as long as you live, you will take them with you. A promise; O what a treasure. A visit of love; what a treasure. A touch of God's power; what a treasure. A manifestation of Christ, an answer to prayer, a deliverance out of temptation, a guidance through difficulties, and a sweet coming forth out of some fiery trial, O what treasures these are. You won't forget them. They are not given to be forgotten after their first sweet use. No. Says the Lord by Moses, "Thou shalt remember all the way the Lord thy God hath led thee". My friends, treasure up, as well as you can, every good thing God has given to you, every kind word He has said to you, every sweet visitation He has indulged you with. O what blessedness there is in such things. Why, they are more than the whole world. A word

from God in your heart, why it is more wealth than all the world. Mountains of gold and silver are not to be compared with that blessed thing - God's word in your soul. What did it do for you? Set God before you, and set you after Him. Is that little? You won't forget your sinnership - "Look to the hole of the pit whence you were digged, the rock out of which you were hewn" says the Lord. He would have His people remember. An Ammorite was my father, a Hittite was my mother. Remember you were a slave in Egypt. Remember the iron furnace out of which I brought you. You won't forget, no. Says Paul to the Ephesians, "And you hath He quickened". Wherefore, remember that ye, being in time past Gentiles according to the flesh, remember that you, being Gentiles, did really walk according to the course of this world - a sad compass to steer by is that. Remember that was how you walked. The devil was your guide, the devil was your prompter, and never forget it, never. And you won't forget the troubles you have had. O, said Moses to the people, remember how the Lord brought you through that terrible wilderness; forty years you were there; never forget it. How that you were fed, how that water came to you from the flinty rock, how that your shoes did not wax old and your garments did not wear out. Remember all that. Remember the morning, sweet falling morning by morning of the Manna for you. Remember those things, the dangers and the mercies, the difficulties and the guidance. Remember the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud all that long long time; remember who was with you. These things are not to be forgotten; they are to be carried by us. They are in our hearts as God has given them, and sometimes they are in our memories as we are reminded of them by the Holy Spirit. And sweet it is to look back to the day when you were quickened, to the day when you were convinced, and the day when Christ came to you. The sweet moments you had at His throne, the smiles you have had from Him. Remember these things. But some things are to be forgotten. The world, the world, your father's house and your own people. Hearken O daughter and consider, forget thine own people; forsake them. Look at them, my friends; Christ and the world are not to be put together. You have been brought from a dark world. What communion hath light with darkness? The devil was once your leader and commander. Now, what union is there between Christ and Belial? What concord is there? You once flattered yourself that you were righteous. Now you know that you have left those filthy rags. You once thought you were wise. Now God has made you willing to

be a fool that you may be wise. You once had a purse, a bag for your wealth. and God made holes in it and you have lost all your wealth and now you are a poor sinner and know that you are poor and miserable and wretched and blind and naked. Paul, in a sense, forgot the things which he had had because he so earnestly desired the things that were before him. "Forgetting those things which are behind", not noticing them, nor valuing them, nor living by them, nor carrying them with me. He said "forgetting those things which are behind". Is the world behind you? Is it behind me? Are our own rags behind us? Is our wisdom behind us, our strength, our goodness? Are these things behind us? Forgetting them, says Paul. Let them be as if they had not been to you, as if they were not now, because there is something set before faith which is infinitely superior. "Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth to those things which are before" Reaching forth, stretching out; expressed by the Psalmist in those memorable words "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee O God". When one feels dark, what does he want? Says he to God "O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me;" - let me not be my own guide - "Let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy" . Reaching forth after Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; after revelations of Him; after sweet manifestations of Him, of His Person and of His work; and of an interest in Him, my own interest. Reaching forth after the Holy Ghost, that He may come and dwell in one; and after the Trinity, that the Three Persons in the One God may dwell in our poor hearts; that we may be separated unto God and be for His praise and glory, and have that motive that the Apostle Paul expresses in the word I have before quoted - "The love of Christ constraineth us", to leave all things behind. To leave death and the world and vanities of that sort; to leave these things by a judgment, a gracious judgment, that they which live should not live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them and rose again. Dear friends, what riches God has; what riches in the covenant of grace, what riches in the mighty moving of the Holy Spirit on a sinner's heart. What riches of light to enlighten one's understanding; what riches of love to melt a heart that is hard as a stone and make it love the Lord. O the riches of grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ which Paul was anointed to preach.

Unsearchable riches of pardon, of justification, of sanctification, of union, of mercy, of peace, of comfort, of joy, and Paul had these before him. "That I may win Christ and be found in Him". "Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus".

This pressing is what Paul calls in another case "labouring". "Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him".(II Corinthians 5 v 9). And again, in the Hebrews "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest". This is the soul panting after union and heaven. After union with God in Christ and all that that includes, and it includes a great deal more than we can understand, and a great deal more than we have experienced. Even if we have an experienced union, we have not fully experienced all it means and includes. "I press toward the mark". Ah, and my friends, the consummation of it all is heaven. That I may reach that place that Christ has prepared for me. Says Paul to Timothy "I have finished my course..... Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." Is this panting yours? If you press, you have got difficulties before you; many. The man who runs a race may have much against him, but he forgets things. He has been enabled to lay aside those things which would impede his progress, and one thing is before him - the goal, the prize. Says Paul, many run in the race "but one receiveth the prize. So run that ye may obtain". (I Corinthians 9 v 24) May this word, very feeble I know, on a subject so mighty and so rich and so wonderful, be useful to us. "Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

AMEN.