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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 27 March 1935

PHILIPPIANS 3 v 20/21

"For our conversation is in heaven from whence
we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus
Christ, who shall change our vile body
that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body
according to the working whereby He is able to
subdue all things unto Himself"

This is a remarkable conclusion to a remarkable chapter. Two things are clear to me in this chapter. First, the utter worthlessness of human nature, fallen. Its best is bad; that the Apostle proved in his own case and set it before these Christian Philippians. It is good to know what we are; I would be thankful for myself that conviction of my sinfulness and of my dreadful sins lives in me. It is not an occasional feeling with me now; it lives in me and by that I am fitted - a solemn thing to know and feel and own - I am fitted for the Lord Jesus Christ. The measure of our felt ruin will be the measure of our fitness, experimentally speaking, for Jesus Christ. May I say, He leaves an empty place; He makes it in His people; He loves sinners; He makes them sinners in their experience. And when, in a measure, He discovers Himself, and His Spirit discovers Him, then He is highly prized. O, we do prize a Saviour when we are lost. He fits into our ruin; He fits into our weakness. and He is suitable to our ignorance. I should like to feel myself, and exhort you to it, not to be afraid of weakness and of poverty in spirit, yet I am afraid of them, and no doubt you are. But the weaker we are, and the poorer we are, the more room there is in us for Him, in whom all the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwells. Tyndale says something to the effect that He sends to hell all that He will take to heaven, and it is written in the Scripture: Whom He kills He makes alive. He wounds to heal; He brings into ruin that He may build the waste and desolate places. He condemns so that He may justify us. He brings us under the law that He may bring us into the gospel. The way to heaven is by hell felt and feared in the conscience. Yet how slow we are to believe these

things; they are set forth in the Scripture, but we are very blind as to the Scripture teaching. But God has His end, and He accomplishes it. Why are you afflicted child of God? You say, because of my sins. Very true, but that is not all. Why are you afflicted? Because He will magnify in you His grace; because He will show you His glory; because He will bring you into a felt union with Himself; because He will grant you to have communion with Him. His strokes may seem unkind, but they are not. His frowns may seem like hell, but they are not that. His dealings are strange; His way is in the sea, His path in the mighty waters and His footsteps are not known.

But let us look at the text a little. "Our conversation is in heaven". Conversation here means citizenship, not talk, though that, when gracious, may be a good part; but really the word itself means citizenship. There is a city then, yes, which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. A city in which God tabernacles with His people; a city where He shows Himself very gracious to people; a city that shall not be destroyed by wind, by wave, by trouble, by affliction, by devils, for "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;" God will help her in her troubles. Therefore this is a great matter. Our citizenship is in heaven. And I have been thinking today that I am not a citizen of the world, and I hope it is true of a good number of this little congregation, that we do not belong to the world. "They are not of the world", said Jesus of His disciples. They are in it. Keep them, O God, My heavenly, eternal Father, is His prayer; keep them from the evil of the world. "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world". Then, having a being, they must belong to another world; they belong to this heavenly city.

First, a remark on the mercy of it, the wonder of it, that we, poor, vile, wicked, dead creatures in sin, should be born again, should be translated, removed from one kingdom into another kingdom. Think of it; we did not want it, did we? We did not want grace; we did not want God - "I am found of them that sought Me not" - and yet this has taken place, citizens of another country, even heaven. It is wonderful to belong to the Church of God, to belong to God. A Church; why, the universe, apart from the Church considered, is nothing. He does not dwell there in the sense that He dwells in His Church. "This

is My rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it". So, as many of us as have a real hope that we are citizens of this divine city, built by God, inhabited by God, glorified by God, should bless God for the distinguishing grace, the wonderful mercy, of being translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, of life and of glory.

Think of the privileges of it, in the next place. Privileges? Yes, privileges. One, might say - one includes two - but one is this, that the citizens have audience of the King. There are some societies in London whose members have, by ancient right given them, access to the king. For instance, the John Baptist Union has, by an ancient gift, a right of audience to the king. They have a right to go; I do not know that they ever exercise it, but that is their ancient right. But O, the wonder, that a poor, guilty creature, a sinner, should have, and sometimes enjoy, the audience, the presence and access. O, to get to God sometimes, and the wonder that He is not so offended with our sinfulness and our sins and wandering from Him as to say, I will have nothing more to do with you. I am amazed at it in my own case. O to think of it. And what does this mean? It means this, that you may go and confess your sins. He is not ashamed to be called your God. Christ is not ashamed to be called the Elder Brother of His people, and He says to them: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". Do you get this access? If you have been days and weeks without it, and some new trouble comes to you, and new convictions are wrought by that new trouble in you, and you should find yourself drawn to this blessed King, King of kings, Lord of lords, and be enabled, sweetly enabled, to confess your dreadful sins, that is a privilege; a high privilege given to the worst of men.

Then also, there is this. When you are near Him He says: "Pour out your heart before Me". Yes, a sinner, pour out your heart. It is troubled; pour out the trouble. It is afflicted; pour out the affliction. It is fearful; mention the many fears you have. It is a heavy heart; pour it out before Me. And it is a real thing; it is not simply in the letter of this blessed Book; it is a real experience. Ah, He knows more about your tears than you know Himself, and He cares more for you than you can think sometimes. He puts your tears into

His bottle, that is to say, He knows what they mean. He knows why you shed those tears in your spirit if your cheeks are dry; He knows why. O, the compassion of the Lord, the sweet compassion of the Lord! O this then is a privilege. Yes, and sometimes He gives hints, if I may use so small and common a word, He gives hints of what He is, of what He possesses, of His love, and His kindness, His intentions of good; that, though you are afflicted, He does not intend destruction; that, though His hand is heavy on you, His right-hand will sustain you; that, though you see your sins, He lets you have a glimpse of His goodness and His glory. And this is a privilege of a citizen. Well, are not some of you citizens? Have you not this mark of being citizens, that you get access to the King?

Sometimes He will let you see His beauty; the King in His beauty, in the land that is very far off. And one of His beauties is this: He is the faithful witness, the true representative of God. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. What God is, is seen in Christ. What His love is, is seen in Christ. What His purposes are, is seen in Christ. And when you get that it helps you. There is liberty in this. That is a privilege, a high, wonderful privilege.

Another part of this citizenship is that you walk the streets of it. Not prisoners, but liberty is in you, and you walk in the streets of this city; in the truth, yes, in the truth. There is more in that word than we have ever known - The truth, as the truth is in Jesus. It is written that "they shall walk up and down in His Name". Plenty of room here; His Name is Jesus, and His people walk up and down in that Name. His Name is the Mighty God, and faith walks up and down in that, and trusts in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. His Name is Love; O, the room there is in that. His Name is Wisdom; O, the room there is there for fools. So you walk in the golden streets, streets paved with gold, the fine gold of Ophir.

One part of the walk is in the covenant ordered in all things and sure. Our covenant with death is broken by the covenant of life and peace. Our league with hell is broken by the covenant of life and peace, and the bondage is broken by the liberty of the gospel in the

Spirit. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty". And there is a glass there in which faith beholds the glory of the Lord, and when you behold that glory, there is an impression of it made on your soul. "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

My brethren, it is a grand thing, an infinitely blessed thing, to have your conversation in heaven. The world is in us; the world is set in the heart of the sons of men, and the tinsel attracts a foolish heart; the wickedness attracts a fallen nature, and pleasures attract a pleasure loving disposition. I know what worldliness is, probably better than any of you do. I hope none of you, not one of you, can say he possesses a worldly mind with all the intensity I have. O, the trouble my worldly mind has given me all my life. But there is a teaching, there is a dealing, there is a power, that will empty the world to you, really empty it, and you will say:

Let worldly minds the world pursue
It hath no charms for me
Once I admired its trifles too
But grace has set me free

You will walk in the gospel in this city, the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God. May the Holy Spirit open this to us; Christ, the Man Christ Jesus. His divine nature is there, and He, even Christ Jesus, is to the Church, and in the Church - to an individual member of the Church - the image of the invisible God.

'Tis no wild fancy of our brains
No metaphor we speak
The same dear Man in heaven now reigns
That suffered for our sake

We are poor Christians, are we not? The best of you is but a poor Christian, when you come to look at what Christ is, what He has. Then, when the citizen walks in this chapter, which is Christ exalted, what a walk it is. O, he says, how foolish, how wicked I was,

ever to think myself worth anything. O, what is the world, compared to the blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Now he says, I forsake all, I abandon all, I esteem all to be just dung and dross that I may win Christ and be found in Him. "Our conversation is in heaven".

There are, in the next place, certain obligations laid on these citizens. Mansoul, Bunyan speaks of a good deal; he speaks of My Lord Will be Will, and other characters there; rebellion, dreadful rebellion. But when one is really translated into the kingdom of God, then the Lord says, "Obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in your ignorance, but as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation". Thomas Hardy, a good letter writer, says in one letter: "It is hard for guilt in the pulpit to reprove sin in the pew." It is difficult for me to speak of this to you because of my untowardness and shortcoming and little attainment, but this is true, God has said it: "Be ye holy for I am holy". Christ said in Matthew: "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect". What? "Christ", it is written "has left us an example that we should follow His steps". This includes a good deal. Forgiveness for injury done; gentleness where you may be offended; tenderness where affliction may call for it; humility, the opposite of that abominable spirit, pride. Pride? Have you suffered from pride? Who has not in the church of God? Who has not found occasions to pray

Save me from pride, that angel form,
That swells a poor, weak, sinful worm

May the Lord help us to regard this word: "Be ye holy for I am holy". How do men become partakers of this? First, by divine impartation, an implantation of grace. Second, by sanctified affliction. What does God intend when He afflicts a person, a child of His? He intends correction. Is that all? No, He intends that this shall be the end - "that ye might be partakers of His holiness". What is that? Separation from evil. What is separation from evil in a child of God? Separation from the love of the world, the love of this wicked self. Jesus was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and He will have His people walk in His footsteps. "He has left us an example that we should walk in His steps." We need a great deal of

patience in God, and He is the God of patience.

Now, fellow citizens, look at this great matter. Is it true of you - "Our conversation is in heaven"? Do not limit it to talk; there is much talk that is just what Solomon speaks of "The talk of the lips tendeth only to penury". It empties, yea it seems to empty, empty the people, but to walk in the truth, to walk about this city, is a great thing. We are exhorted to do it; to walk about Zion, tell the towers thereof, mark well her bulwarks, consider her palaces. O, a good occupation, is it not? to walk about Zion; look at her foundation - "On this Rock will I build My Church"; look at her towers - Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks"; consider her palaces, where Christ is, where grace is, where righteousness reigns, where goodness prevails, where mercy overcomes - O, these blessed palaces in this, our city - and think this, that you, the people of God. have liberty to walk about this city, and in it, while you talk of it. Yes, one says, come hither all ye that fear God and I will tell you what He hath done for my soul. When you get a touch, if you have got a neighbour, a godly neighbour, do tell him of it. When you have a manifestation of Christ, speak well of Him. O that we could lift Him up more and more.

This is a very poor word about this blessed citizenship; think of the greatness of it. There is a good deal of feeling, of prizing what is called the freedom of the cities given to certain people. This freedom is given of grace, free, sovereign grace. One word in conclusion on this point. If we are citizens here, if our conversation while here in this body should be in heaven, it means this, that when this mortal life ends, the immortal soul will enter fully into this city. When the resurrection day comes, then the body will also be there.

"Who shall change our vile body". The "vile" is really this "humiliation". That is really the word, "humiliation". It will change the humiliation of our body. What is it that humiliates the body? Sin. Sin brought mortality; sin digs our grave; sin works corruption. "Who shall change our vile body". But before that, comes this, "From whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ". People who talk about Christ's second coming in the flesh to

dwell at Jerusalem miss the whole thing. They turn you to certain Scriptures in which the coming of Christ seems imminent, and they misinterpret it. One thing they forget; the Apostle Paul says before that day certain great events in providence shall take place. But the saints do look for this - "From whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ". When will He come? When the fulness of God's love and purpose in the Church shall be accomplished, then will the Saviour come in the glory of His Father and of His holy angels. Time will be no more. He will come the second time without sin unto salvation and then shall come the resurrection. "Who shall change our vile body" - O, the wonder of this truth - "that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body". The Spirit, by John, says: "We know not what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is". "That it may be fashioned" It was created in beauty, in innocence, in purity. It will be recreated at the resurrection and no longer be a mortal body, no longer subject to death, no longer have any humiliation about it, but it shall be like the glorious body, that holy body of Jesus, now in heaven, now the Priest on His throne. What He is, as glorified, His people will then be. How? says one. Yes, a fool asked this question. "With what body do they rise?" "Thou fool", says Paul, this is the way, not by human development, but "according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things....." all this corrupted dust, precious dust, inert in itself. Jesus will subdue the humiliation of death, the humiliation of the grave, the humiliation of all the corruption that the body saw. "Whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself". Why to Himself? Because the city is Himself, comes from Himself. "I saw Jerusalem descending out of heaven having the glory of God". Now these are, if I may use the word, simple truths revealed in Holy Scripture, but they need to be taught us; we cannot make them as our own without the Holy Ghost. Simple in their declaration, mysterious in their nature, and we need to have them opened, explained and applied to us by the Holy Spirit.

Well, dear friends, it is very wonderful to have a good hope through grace. I have had - and I want you to know because I want your prayers - I have had a heavy day, a painful day, and yet a good day, I hope. At 4 O'clock this morning, my daughter was suddenly taken very ill and is seriously ill. They do not know yet what has caused it, but

two doctors were with her this morning and what the result will be we have to wait for. I name this that, if the Lord will, you may pray for us. God has been very good to me. When it first was made known to me, I felt crushed, utterly crushed, but the Lord was most kind and caused me to believe that it was "not in anger", and so I hope, "but in His dear covenant love". May the Lord lay us on your hearts in prayer.

AMEN.