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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 18 July 1923
Proverbs 16 v 20

"He that handleth a matter wisely shall find
good, and whoso trusteth in the Lord,
happy is he"

The Lord's people have many matters which they cannot cast away, which they must handle, about which they get very tried, tried as to their presence, as to the effect of them, as to the issue of them. Touch them, handle them, they must - they are part of their life - but how to handle them, that is the question. The text is a very important and beautiful one. It is a direction, a direction in the spirit of it. It, as it were, tells us that the matter we have to handle can only be handled wisely in a certain way. It contains a promise, you "shall find good" as you may be enabled to handle the matter wisely. We have our matters; we have brought them with us this evening. Some have brought the family, some the business, some this, some that trial or affliction or matter. No leaving it behind. There is no casting it off, even for an hour. It is with you, and what God intends by it, is with you, perhaps, a very serious question. Why has He sent it? What does He mean by it? Now may He help us to notice some of the matters which do affect us, which cleave to us, wake with us, go to bed with us, rise with us. There is, first of all, the soul matter, the matter of the immortal soul, whether it be saved, whether it is bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord God, whether interested in the atoning work of Christ, whether the Holy Ghost is in one, whether His teaching makes one know sin, or whether what we know of sin is really just natural and nothing else. Where we shall be through eternity, what our company will be. A soul matter is a great matter. A caseless religion is a very serious religion, a solemnly awful religion. A religion that does not take you to the throne of grace, that does not exercise you before God in secret, does not interfere with everything that you have to do, that you have to feel, that you have to go through. O, such a poor religion is very solemn, but if we are born again, we have a real case, the case of our soul - "Pause my soul and ask the question, art thou ready to meet God".

Is the religion I have worth having? Whence did it come? Where, in the exercise of it, does it lead me? What does it do for me? What does it accomplish? Does it make sin real, bitter, loathsome? Does it make Christ necessary, desirable? Does one feel that without union with Christ, without His atoning blood on the conscience, without His righteousness for justification, without His grace for sanctification, one is just utterly wrong? Does religion such as we profess take us to God, make Him necessary? O what a wonder it is if we have a real case for God, if we cannot rest without Him. If we again and again feel not only full of sin but also full of warm desire to be right, to be in union with the Lamb. To be at His bleeding side, at His cross, wrapped up in His mercy, embraced in His love. This case - if it is our case, may we thank God - this case has to be handled. If it is a natural case we handle it naturally. If it is nothing but nature it will end only in nature. Nature's remedies will be sought after and applied and nothing else. But if it be spiritual, what then? Why the Holy Ghost will tell us how to handle this matter and dear friends O what a mercy it is for us if we are led to handle it in, and through the Mediator, the great and dear and blessed and glorious Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. A touch of absolute deity will sink us into endless ruin. A touch of incarnate deity will land us in heaven. And while here below, as led by the Spirit, all God's dealings with us and all our dealings with Him must be and will be, through the Mediator. And when a sinner handles the matter of his soul by confessing his sins, by deploring them; by seeking grace, forgiveness, sanctification, wisdom, redemption; by seeking to have a smile of God, which, coming in, would make heaven; a blessed touch felt to dissolve us into repentance and genuine humility; a look of Christ crucified which would infallibly attract us to Himself, gather us to the cross, notwithstanding the many, many difficulties and obstructions and obstacles that will ever be standing in our way, he handles it wisely. O to handle a matter thus, to go to God and beg of Him to give us these blessings, to go to Him humbly confessing that we have no religion of our own, at least if we have, would He kindly take it away from us; that we have no ground of hope in self, no hope of help in self, no single thing to plead before Him, not a rag of righteousness, not a speck of goodness. Well, he that handleth a matter wisely at the throne of God's heavenly grace through the Mediator shall find good. Let us just hang about

this for a few minutes, The rest - well time will end everything else, but this, time wont end. If we have a timeless religion, that is to say, the religion of Jesus Christ that He works in the soul, O how happy it was for us to be born into this world. O the blessedness of being, if we are to be in Christ for ever and ever. And it does not matter how far we may have got on the way, there is this certainty in every child of God, He cannot keep alive his own soul; he does need communications; he does need touches; he seeks them, for he cannot get on well without them. Why what are we, apart from Christ? What are we without His righteousness, without His blood, without His Spirit? We are nothing but pieces of sin, obnoxious to God, to His holiness, to His justice. If we believe this, and we do, some of us, we have believed it for years, we have felt it often, well then the only thing that can be good to us, save us and bring us through honourably, is union with the Lord Jesus, cleansing by His blood, justification in His righteousness, and sanctification from Him. Well dear friends you have got this matter some of you, and a very solemn matter you feel it to be, because the people of God do not, cannot, expect rightly to get through the mazes of their corruptions and their wickedness, and their sinning, their indisposition Godward, and their insubmission to His will, without His effectual grace. And so they have to handle this soul matter before the Lord in and through the Mediator, Jesus Christ. No end of justice in law, no end of mercy in Christ, no end of severity to those who fall into the hands of a just God who is not to them a Saviour, no end of kindness, lovingkindness, kindness lovingly expressed to sinners, who need, and needing, seek the Lord Jesus. O the Mediator! Look at this sight. One says

Look ye saints, the sight is glorious

and I would say look O sinner at the Mediator, the sight is glorious. The God Man, the dear Lord Jesus, full of pity, full of mercy, full of merit, infinite, and gracious to sinners. O how gracious, unspeakably gracious, and what a mercy when we feel that we can sorrowfully say, with Newton, "Marks of grace I cannot show, all polluted is my breast, yet I weary am I know, and the weary long for rest". And the rest is in the Mediator, in the Lord Jesus, nowhere else. Well, blessed be God, there is this way of handling this

matter. And the good that shall be found, what is that, but the good of a purified conscience, of the peace of God which passeth all understanding. Why sinner, this is before you. If one should say he is expecting to inherit a vast estate, and yet has no grace, he is a very poor man, but if one says, my hope is built on Christ, and I do look for grace and salvation and mercy in and from Him, and sometimes I hope He will kindly come to me and bless me, he is not a poor man. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled" O what a good thing it is to have a soul case, to say with the Psalmist "Heal me O lord for I have sinned. Heal my soul". A sick soul and Christ fit well, yes they fit well. A weary soul and the rest of Christ suit well. A wicked person in his own estimation and feelings and a gracious Saviour when they meet together do fit well. He that handleth a matter in confession of his sins, in pleading the blood of Christ, in looking to the grace of Christ, he that handleth a matter wisely, shall find the good of God's salvation, shall find this promise, shall find that to be true that is written in Isaiah, "They that wait upon the Lord shall not be ashamed." "Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee". Ah the enemy will try to frighten us away from the throne of grace, he often does frighten us, and many things come in to hinder our going there or to distract us when we are there as we feel, but he that handleth all this wisely shall find good to his soul. That is the first point and may the Lord make it the first point and last point in us, because whatever else there is, and there are many things that come in, the importance of this is like Aaron's rod that will swallow up all other rods. This matter, when the absorbing matter is indeed a great matter, felt to be great.

There is a case of ignorance, a case when a person feels very ignorant, very ignorant of God, and ignorant of His mercy. I wonder if you feel ignorant, I do. How often have some of us prayed to the Lord to take away our ignorance of Him, our unacquaintedness with Him. We read the Scriptures. How? Sometimes see nothing. Pray, and see nothing. Hear and get nothing, and O the ignorance there is in us. It is part of our sin, this ignorance. "Having the understanding darkened". Think of it. We do not know wisdom's ways, we are ignorant of them, and there may come some influences on our spirits, and we are ignorant of them at times, voices within us and we may not

know their nature. We are ignorant, and this is a case, a real case with some. How would you handle it? If you go to Dr Gill he will tell you a good deal. If you read Wittsius on the Covenant, he will tell you a good deal. If you read good men's experiences they may stir you up to say, Lord give me this, yet for all that you may put the books down and say there is no impression made on us, there is no writing on our minds, we feel as ignorant as before. You do not handle the matter wisely. When I was young I read Warburton's Mercies, and they had a great effect on me. The reading did something but I did not handle it wisely. I would come before the Lord sometimes after reading and say Lord nothing less than this will satisfy me. Well that was not wise. If you feel ignorant it is not wise to go and take up somebody's experience and measure yourself by it. I am not as big as this, Lord, make me as big, or else I will never be satisfied. That is not wise. Read them if you have them, read these books if you have them, but do not measure yourselves by them so as to form a judgment of yourself. What is wisdom in this? What is a wise handling of this? Why, this, "That which I see not teach Thou me" "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law" Fulfil in me that promise of the Holy Spirit "He shall guide you into all truth". That will do my friends, that will wear well, that will issue well. Depend upon it, if you can, with your ignorance, go to the throne of God's heavenly grace, you will find good. He has promised to be a teacher, He has promised His Holy Spirit, He has promised to guide with His eye and as we are enabled to handle all our matters wisely, and this matter of ignorance, which I may just open, we shall find the good of His promise. He that handleth it wisely, that has an understanding of His own ignorance, and in the knowledge of that ignorance, kneels before the Lord his Maker and asks for the Holy Spirit, asks according to Christ's Word, "If ye, being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him"

What will you do with your corruption case, when corruptions dark and foul as hell shall blacken all your soul and mar your peace, destroy it, as it would seem? What will you do with this case when all manner of evil shall be working in you, when passion, when lust, when pride, when vanity, when self dependence and wisdom shall come and make a claim on you? When they shall tell you it is bemeaning

yourself to go as if you were a worm. What when you bemean yourself in this way, what will you do? Why says nature, religious nature, be more watchful, be more careful. If you are hasty of speech, try to restrain yourself when you are provoked. If your spirit is very hasty try to repress the feeling that comes up in a minute. If you are given to passion do not yield to it, and all that kind of thing. Yes, and I will tell you what will crown it all - failure. Shameful defeat will crown it all. Shall I let these things have their way and take no notice of them? That is impossible. What then? Can you cry to God to come? Do you find yourself enabled to go to the throne of His heavenly grace, to ask Him to pity you, to have mercy on you and say with the Psalmist "As the eyes of a servant look to the hand of his master and as the eyes of a maiden look to the hand of her mistress, so my eyes Lord wait on thee" in this painful matter. I do not know what to do, I cannot manage my heart, wilt Thou manage it. That is labour that is profitable labour. "In all labour" of this kind "there is profit". Corruptions dark and foul will blacken your soul again and again but O if you have this faith of God's elect, to take you to the throne of His heavenly grace and ask Him to put forth His gracious power, to fulfil in you His heavenly promise to subdue your iniquities, you will find good. You will find the promise good, "Sin shall not have dominion over you" This is the way to labour, this is the way to look for a good end to your religion, at the throne of the Lord, looking to the Mediator's grace, to His precious blood, to His justifying robe, and to His good Spirit. All will end well with one who thus handles the matter of his corruptions. It is no cure of corruptions to say you have not got them. It is no cure to say, well I have, but I have no power over them, I must let them alone. That is no cure. The cure is the coming in of Christ, the communication of His grace, the operation of His Spirit, the leading of His Spirit, that is the cure, and you will know what good means, when you thus handle this matter.

What will you do with your stubborn will, the case of your will, with My Lord Will be Will, when it thrusts the trouble away, when it not only says, I will not drink the cup, but I wont look at it, when it says I wont walk in that path. What will you do? O says the poor afflicted soul with this affliction, there is only one outlook for me and that is at God's footstool. There is only one way of hope for me

and that is the grace of Christ, the blood of Christ, and there the man handles his own will, there he handles it with wisdom given to him. There he says now Lord I would drink this cup, I would submit to this dispensation, I would humble myself under Thy mighty hand. If weakness is to be my lot, O for a willing mind. If perplexity is to attend my steps, O that I may be willing. Do give me grace to walk in perplexity, give me a willing mind, a will to say "Thy will be done". This will of ours is a real thing, captivated by sin, allured, warped, made stubborn by sin. This great faculty of our soul has to be dealt with and he who would deal with it himself will be conquered by it, but he, who through the Spirit's grace, flies to the throne of grace by prayer and makes known all his wishes there, respecting this matter, he shall find the good of the grace, the efficacious grace of Christ and shall find himself following his dear and suffering Lord Jesus. He shall say, in his measure, what his Saviour said with such infinite grace, "The cup which My Father giveth me to drink shall I not drink it"? He shall say from his heart "Thy will be done". There is no harder prayer in some circumstances for a child of God to pray than that that the Lord Jesus puts into his mouth "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven". God's will will be done. O but when you can say it from your heart "Thy will be done" that is wonderful. That is grace, rich sovereign grace. My friends we are more careful of this old nature than is good for us, and more tender of self than is healthy for us, a good deal. If I were to speak in the first person, I should speak the truth, but then it belongs to all of us. We are more careful of this fallen nature than is good for us. And the Lord sees this so He comes right across our path, touches us where we like not to be touched, takes away what we want to keep, and then nature proves itself. O yes, but God comes and says, now come to Me. "Cast thy burden on the Lord". And you may say Lord I have got a burden of unwillingness, a burden of insubmission to Thy holy will, and what I want is to say "Thy will be done" Handle it here and you will find good. Now what about temptation, the case of temptation, when the devil who walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour comes near you, hurls in some fiery darts, casts into your mind suggestions of the most painful, terrible nature, tempts you respecting your interest, the origin of your religion, how you got it. Tempts you respecting your hope, and because that comparatively is little, though really very great, he

comes and hurls in to some people - not all God's people - hurls in the most fearful temptations respecting the Being of God. Now what will you do? I thought when I was young that I must argue, try to argue the case out, but I found I was not logician enough for the enemy, and you will find the same. Your arguments will be very very futile. You have no armour except that that God gives. Now to handle this matter wisely is to look to Him of whom this is said "God shall bruise Satan shortly under your feet". That is the way my friends. Plead that promise, God has said He will punish Leviathan that crooked serpent and the dragon which is in the sea. He has said it and He will fulfil it. Put on the armour of God. Yes specially in this case, the weapon of all prayer, for we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and against powers. It is a great thing to come to God with this matter, the roaring lion. True vigilance is here when you can pray. True watchfulness I say is here when you can go to the throne of God's heavenly grace, and cast your eye there, and say with one of old "Lord it is little with Thee to help with many or with them that have no might. Help us O Lord our God, for in Thy Name we go against this great company." Or with Jehoshaphat, Asa's son, saying "We know not what to do but our eyes are up unto Thee." I say this is your vigilance, this is your labour, this is handling the matter wisely, the matter of temptation. O dream not of faith so clear as will shut out all temptation, but when you are tempted fly to the throne of grace by prayer and beg of Him who overcome, who spoiled principalities and powers when on the cross, and ask Him to come and overcome in you.

And what will you do with your circumstances? Your circumstance case. The case of some peculiar trouble that may be with you. Now old nature may say in a sort of false philosophy, everybody has trouble, why should not I have trouble. People bear trouble as well as they can, I will bear mine as well as I can. And so you may, but what good will you get out of that. You will get death. If you be a child of God you will get confusion and barrenness, darkness of mind, and distance from God. That is not the way to handle it. This is the way, "Lord in trouble have they visited Thee. They poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them." That was good, that was wise handling of the matter, and when we, through grace, can do the same, we handle our matters wisely. God means trouble to be trouble. He means trouble to

exercise us. He sends it to chasten, for instruction, He sends it to train us. He sends it to empty us, to make us know there is no help for us but in God. There is no good but in God. He will teach us that circumstances of a painful nature are not of themselves an evil. He will teach us that the only evil is sin. Then He will say "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it." " Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver Thee and thou shalt glorify Me". " Cast Thy burden on the Lord He shall sustain thee. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. " Casting all your care upon Him for He careth for you". Now if any of you are in trouble, may the Lord help you to handle it thus, to cast it on Him. He is compassionate, merciful, gracious, wise, and omnipotent. There is nothing that we need that He has not. What if your trouble be some pressing necessity and you feel that you cannot go to creatures with your case? Now He says to His people, "the gold and the silver and the cattle upon a thousand hills are Mine," "come unto Me". The Lord is full of compassion, knows exactly what we need, and knows how and when and by what means to supply our needs. O cast not your eyes on men, O cast not your eyes on men. If a poor person casts his eyes on the purse of a rich man, that purse may be shut up by God but if a poor person can take his case, his poverty to the throne of grace, and bring the whole matter before the Lord, God may say to someone in his heart, so and so needs something, take it to him. It needs not that you shall speak. It only needs God to work. If you can handle the matter on your knees you will do well. He that can go through his troubles, whatever they may be, on his knees, so to speak, shall find good. Ah many and many a person whose happy soul is now in heaven got deliverances that way. Handle all your temporal troubles and necessities before the Lord and if you can deal with Him, you will find Him full of mercy.

What will you do with your barrenness, a case of barrenness when you say to yourself, this religion of mine it just resembles the barren fig tree, and I am afraid that the owner of it will say to the gardener " Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground". And what will you do? "Ye are God's husbandry." and as the grace of the Spirit comes He will lead you to Him from whom all your fruit is found, and this is the best way of all of labouring, the best way of all that you can imagine of labouring for fruitfulness, to go to Him who says "From Me is thy fruit found". You will find all the good you want at the

throne of grace. All of it must flow to you from the person and the work of Christ, by the grace of the Spirit and no other way. We are but barrenness and death itself, so we need Him to come to us who is life and who only can give fruitfulness.

What will you do with a church case, when you are concerned about the church, whether the Lord will remain or whether you have sinned so as to make it fearful in your heart, a fearful apprehension that He may go away from the Church. You will not say there is no fear of it if you are exercised rightly. You wont say O we here hold the truth, we follow it and we are not afraid of that. That is not a good state of mind at all that is thus expressed. I think a perusal, careful perusal of the seven letters sent to the angels of the seven churches in Asia might do us good from time to time. and I am sure if we feel the wickedness of our hearts, if we feel how poor we are in the church, if we fear that we have a poor influence there, there will be a cry going from us that God would keep us from so sinning as to provoke Him to go away. And what will the officers of the church do if they have got their case? If the deacons say, why how poor we are in our office, how little profit there is from us in the church of God, if any at all. What are they to do? Be more diligent? Yes if they are negligent let them be more diligent but that wont effect the thing. The thing will be for them to be diligent on their knees, then they will be diligent in the discharge of their office from time to time. And to come to the last point in my mind this evening, what about the ministry? What about the minister's case. He has a case if he is rightly exercised. What of His pastoral office? How is He to walk in it? Well say some he must be very diligent in reading, He must be very studious in the Scripture. Very proper; no one would say anything against that, but if he stopped there, what a fool he must be. But if, with all his reading and carefulness in reading, he is led to take the flock to the Lord, and His own case and His office and His responsibilities and his difficulties, to the Lord then he handles the matter wisely. And many a pastor will be often in the night season at this business when perhaps his people are asleep.

"He that handleth a matter", whatever the matter is, relating to eternity or to time or to both, "he that handleth a matter wisely," that is on his heart, "shall find good". He will find the good of

answers to prayer. Answers to prayer are amongst our best blessings, our clearest evidences of having a good God, and a gracious Saviour, and the Holy Spirit in us. Answers to prayer are great confirmation to faith, and they are sweet brightenings to hope. Answers to prayer make the Lord precious and encourage us to go on still praying. "I love the Lord", said the Psalmist, "because He hath heard my voice and my supplications, because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live." Go on praying my friends, you who have prayer in your hearts, and you will find good. You will find the good of an answer. O Hannah's song will be the song of many of us, we hope, from time to time ere we die. O what a thing it is, good and wonderful, to have a spirit of prayer and then to wait on God. "Wait on the Lord be of good courage and He shall strengthen your heart. Wait I say on the Lord."

And also he that handleth a matter wisely shall find good, the good of God's presence sometimes. That is wonderful, God's presence with a person. Well the glow, the humility, the love, the reverence, the confidence, the sweetness of God's presence, produced by God's presence, can never be expressed. He shall find the good of the fulfilment of the Lord's word, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will answer thee and thou shalt glorify Me." You shall sing the praises of the Most High one day. Every tear shall be followed by a song, every sigh shall break out into some triumph where the Spirit is. There shall come in God's own time the most abundant answers to the humble petitions that are sent and preferred before the Almighty.

And whoso trusteth in the Lord happy is he. Sinner where is your trust? One may say, my trust is in the Lord alone, in His blood for forgiveness, in His righteousness for justification, in His Spirit for all the sustenance I need; in His promise, in His mercy, My trust is in the Trinity, may I say at times. Happy is that man, happy in his state, for he has the faith of God's operation, the faith of God's elect in his heart, and what state is happier than that, for by that faith he has union with the Lord Jesus. By that faith the world is turned out of his heart from time to time and God comes in and by that faith the Lord Jesus is exalted exceedingly and is made precious. "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious". The state is a

happy state. O what are kingdoms of this world to the happy estate and kingdom of a true believer in the Lord Jesus, one who hangs about Christ, hankers after the knowledge of Him, and cleaves to the cross as it is revealed to him. The state of that person is happy. But also he is happy from time to time in his feelings. Yes, you may have heaven for your estate and yet sometimes be like a poor sick person unable to take of one crumb of all that is possessed. One might possess thousands and not be able to eat one bit of bread or take anything that all those thousands might purchase. So one may be an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ and yet be so unhappy, so sin sick, so dark, so troubled, tempted, guilty, burdened, distant from God, as not to enjoy one minute of peace for a season, but this is not to last. As the days of a tree are the days of my people. It is not winter all the year round with the tree or anything. There comes a spring when there is a moving of the sap, when the bud appears, when it bursts into leaf, when the fruit comes, and there are seasons of happiness in soul feeling with the Lord's people when the Spirit comes, when He brings Jesus Christ, when He brings the atonement to view, when he applies some mercy. Thus happy is that person in his feelings. Yes, blessed be God some of us have had happiness indeed. "Happy moments when King Jesus is in sight." Happy moments when the atonement is felt, Happy moments when the Spirit works sweetly and brings the love of God.

Happy in His prospect is the person who trusts in the Lord. Why my friends, heaven is before some of you, is it not? Really a blessed eternity is before the saints of the most high and they enjoy the prospect sometimes. Yes, time like a speck, like a moment, is just between them and heaven, who trust in the Lord. And now and again this appears; the land which is very far off is seen, and the King in His beauty is seen, held in the galleries. "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is He". May this happiness come to us, and may the Lord teach us how to handle every matter that comes to us, every trouble, and burden, and affliction, wisely, so as that we may find the good that the gospel contains, the good that the person of Jesus Christ is, the good of the Covenant of grace, the good of the Spirit's gracious work.

AMEN.