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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 17 July 1921

PSALM 102 v 27

"But Thou art the same, and Thy years
shall have no end"

This word is a contrast; something has gone before - the Psalmist's mortality. First he appears to have been afflicted and he deprecated an early death. A good man may do this though he has a hope of heaven, and especially he will do it if he is under the anointing of the Spirit in prayer and his time to depart has not come. It is quite consistent with a rich experience of the love of God, and with a bright prospect of eternal blessedness. One may feel a real willingness, as well as experience a true readiness, to go, yet, at the same time, deprecate that which, in itself considered, is part of the curse. The death of the body is a part of the curse. And though, by union with Christ, and His eternal life breathed into the soul, death becomes a gain to every believer, still there is that lawful desire to live, strengthened, as I have said it may be, by the operation of the Spirit giving fervent prayer for that which the Lord has designed to bestow. "He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: Thy years are throughout all generations." Thou wilt add nothing to Thyself by taking me away now; therefore, "Spare me that I may recover strength before I go hence and be no more".

The second point in the contrast is the view that the Psalmist had of the perishing of all created things. "Of old Thou hast laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish but Thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed." Is not it folly, folly natural to us in our state of sinfulness, to build

on anything here? One would say that Rutherford had this before him when he wrote these words of godly advice to a child of God - "Build on no tree for all the forest is sold to the fire". All must pass away. The soul is no better for what it possesses here. What a person has of temporal good can never feed his soul. You cannot feed the mind with material things. God, and God alone, is sufficient for His people. Christ asks a question - "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" My hearers, we must leave this world soon. You young people, you have perhaps before you in your minds many projects; some promise perhaps, promise of good by the exercise of your ability, by the use of your ordinary faculties and daily powers. But then, in whose hand is your breath? Whose are your ways? Who has fixed the bounds of your habitation that you may not pass? God give you to think of this and give you mercy to consider your latter end, however young you may be. May the Lord teach you to pray the prayer that is in an earlier Psalm - "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom". And if you are taught to pray that prayer, and God answers it, this is the wisdom to which you will apply your heart, even to Christ. To find Him will be your business. You will beg for Him as for hid treasures. You will call on His great Name for mercy; you will want Him. That is applying the heart to wisdom. We express it in a hymn which sometimes we sing

"Give me Christ or else I die"

That is true application of the heart to wisdom.

Then come the words of the text "But Thou" - the maker of heaven and earth; Thou, who of old didst lay the foundation of the earth, whose handiwork are the heavens; who, in Thy own appointed time shall remove them, take them away; shall make them as if they had not been - "Thou art the same and Thy years shall have no end". We cannot comprehend eternity, but we may comprehend that there is an eternity. We cannot comprehend God, but we may apprehend that He is, and more, that "He is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek Him." He is incomprehensible to

us. He "only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see." And yet it pleases Him to give His children some sight of Him. Where? Why, in His Son. He has veiled that glory which in itself is unbearable to all creatures, in the ~~human~~ nature that His beloved, eternal Son assumed at the incarnation. So that God is bearable, is seeable, is knowable, and can be loved. What a mercy it is to apprehend the truth that there is a God. I wish you people, young and old, every one, if it may please the Lord, may come to have an apprehension of God. That is, in my judgment, the foundation of all true trembling at the majesty of God; of all true knowledge of sinfulness and of sin; of sinning; of doing unrighteously. God, in His nature; God, in His word, is the rule and the standard in His law, and He alone has a right to us. And if we then do, in the Spirit's light and grace, apprehend this God, we then know what the Scripture says of us to be true - "We are less than nothing and altogether lighter than vanity". We live in a frivolous day, a day of heat and hurry, and rush and excitement. But there is one thing that will sober a sinner instantly when he apprehends that; that one thing is Almighty God. May God make us sober by giving us some apprehension of Himself. So I do not take these words absolutely. I do not understand them to set forth an abstract, absolute God, incomprehensibly dwelling in unapproachable light. Rather, God in relation to a creature. God, in relation to His creation work. And, that while all about us is dying, creation itself is dying, He remains. And if it is so, if we may take this word as relative, then we may, by the help of God derive some instruction and comfort from it. A child of God surely will be led to do so at times. He sees everything about Him to be decaying and passing away. He knows his health will die. He knows his substance will one day be of no service or comfort to him. He knows his family will pass away, or he from his family. He knows that all earthly support will be of no use to him; that external forms of religion one day will be of no help, no use. He knows even that his eyes that look on the Bible sometimes with a sacred pleasure, will be closed and see that Book no more. All these things are apprehended, felt, believed, by a child of God.

Then, if there is nothing beyond, if there be none unchangeable, everlasting, what a poor life this must be. The Apostle expresses it when he says "If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable". I do believe that this is what the people of God from time to time enter into, and a view of it, a feeling of it, enhances the great value and blessedness of God, as He is made known. The blessedness of the truth that is expressed in a Psalm a little earlier on, thus, - Thou art from everlasting to everlasting. Thou hast been our refuge in all generations. Of old Thou hast laid the foundation of the earth. These shall pass away. Thou shalt have no pleasure one day in all Thy creation work. The earth shall melt with fervent heat, says the Spirit by Peter. The elements shall be rolled up as a scroll to be seen no more. But Thou art the same.

Now by the Lord's help let us look at this comfortable truth. In the midst of our changes and circumstances that are continually changing, there is a comfortable truth, a blessed truth. For instance, in the first place, God is the same in His purposes. This comforted Job and in the midst of his trial it was to him a solace. Said he "He is in one mind" I have many thoughts about my pains and losses and my conditions of trouble. I have many thoughts, and have expressed some of them petulantly, as he was convinced, later on. I have many changes in my poor body. It is afflicted with sharp and strong pain, in the multitude of my bones, and I do not know what a day may bring forth. I am in the furnace of affliction. But his faith had this brought to it - When He, who is of one mind, and whom none can turn, when He hath tried me, done what He has intended to do by this great affliction and sorrow, I shall come forth from it; yea, I shall be as gold tried in the fire. This was his comfort - that God remained. His cattle, his camels, his oxen, his asses, his children, were all taken from him. His wife was even worse than if she had been removed, for she gave him wicked advice. His body was afflicted and covered with sore boils. There was in him, there was about him, as a man, nothing at all to comfort him. His friends were miserable comforters; they could do nothing for him. Now there was just one thing left to

him, and that one thing outweighed all other things; was to him a comfort in the midst of all other things; and that was, that God's purpose was the same. "He is in one mind and who can turn Him". And when He brings me to His throne, as I earnestly desire Him to do; when He opens my mouth, as I long that He should do; when He fills my mouth with arguments of grace and of love and of mercy, then I shall stand before my Judge. Then, whoever might accuse me, I shall be acquitted. This was Job's comfort. Now it may be a comfort to some today. Some may be troubled, troubled on every hand, especially troubled by indwelling sin. You may be afflicted. God may have caused men to ride over your heads, may have brought you into fiery trials. But if He comes to your faith and enables you to say - when He hath tried me; when His purpose in this affliction shall be manifested to me; when He comes to me with His comforts; when He, who changes not, who is not like men, today in one mind, and tomorrow in another; who seeth not as man seeth; when He shall come to me, then I shall find comfort. God in His manifestations, in the manifestations of His divine purposes of love and grace, is the support of His people. And you find the Holy Spirit applying these words to Him who is our hope and our only foundation, even the Lord Jesus. They are applied to Him by the best commentator we can ever know, even the Holy Spirit. He caused Paul to quote these words in the Hebrews. My dear friends, if earth recedes, if your friends die, the blessed Lord Jesus remains. And when He comes and reveals Himself to faith and says "Behold Me; Behold Me" what more can we want. What can you want beside. It is written - "Because I live ye shall live also" His power is called "the power of an endless life". His word is - "I give unto My sheep eternal life and they shall never perish". He is the same, the same in His purpose. "I am come that they might" - that is my people, my sheep, "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." I have come to rescue them from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear. I am come to save them from their sins. I am come to deliver them when they see no deliverance possible. I am come to help them when their strength is gone and there is none shut up or any left or any helper; I am come. May the Lord come to troubled people. And if there be any here who

are troubled, who see earth receding, feel themselves fading, realise that their strength is withering, and believe and know that there is no earthly prop will stand them in good stead in a short time, then, in such a case, may the dear and blessed Lord Jesus Christ come and show Himself to such and say - "Because I live ye shall live also". I have prepared for you a mansion; no decay that you experience, no shame you feel, no guilt that depresses you, no sin that distracts you and no temptation that perplexes you; no darkness that confuses you, no burden that weakens you, shall alter this, my purpose. Where I am you shall be. I will come and receive you unto Myself that where I am there shall My servant be also. There is solid comfort in this, the purpose of God. He worketh all things after the good pleasure of His will according to His own divine purpose for the glory of His grace. Blessed be God for that. No change of circumstances can change the purpose of God. So, when we read in the Scriptures that the Lord repented either of doing evil or good to certain people, it does not argue a change in His mind, but only in His manner of dealing according to the condition of a person, to which condition God had brought him. So will the dealing of God be. If you are froward, you will find God froward; if you are meek and lowly, by His grace, you will find Him lowly. "With the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward" and with the humble and lowly He will show Himself gracious. It is not a change of mind that is expressed but of manner of dealing. His hand does sometimes that which seems to say His heart is against you, but it is not so. The one mind, His mind, is to purge the dross from you. That is His purpose. O you say, Lord reveal Thyself to me. Now how does He do it? Why He puts you into a fire; He puts you into a furnace. Well, says reason, this is strange. I have begged with all my heart, as I thought and felt, that God would bless me and would bring me to a conformity to His will and walk with me and cause me to walk with Him, and now all I have got is this affliction. And when He hath tried you you will know that He was answering your prayers. When He has tried you then you will know that He received your prayers and did not turn away His mercy from you. Afflicted

saint, affliction is no sign of God's anger. You cannot argue and know either love or hatred by all that is before you. Thou art the same though Thy dealings are strange. Though one day they are this and another day they are that, in complication and in feeling very different, Thou, the author of these providences, the God of this furnace, the watcher over the crucible in which the good metal is, Thou art the same. Blessed be God for an unchanging God. In His Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle Paul would have the saints remember all ministers with a proper remembrance and obedience. And why? Do ministers exact of people more than they should? Not if they are right. Do they exact an unquestioning obedience? No. Why then should people obey them? Because of the great subject of their ministry, the theme of their teaching - "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and for ever." Now go for a moment to Jeremiah's prophecy and hear what the Lord says by him. The Lord showed him two baskets of figs. One basket had good figs, very good, like the first ripe figs. The other basket had naughty figs; they were so evil they could not be eaten. Now we should say, reasoning after the flesh, that these good figs, the people represented by them, would be very particularly cared for by the Lord and no evil would come to them. Now you listen. He said, these I have sent into Babylon for their good. These ripe figs, these good people, I have sent them into Babylon for their good, that they might be delivered. And if we are enabled by the Holy Ghost to follow this teaching it will tell us this - we must accept what Christ has promised - tribulation.

Know whom the Saviour favours much
Their faults He oft reproves
He takes peculiar care of such
And chastens whom He loves

It is no sign of God's love never to get trouble, but it is a sign of His love to be dealt with. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten". "Thou art the same". He intends good my friends, yea He intends good. O give not up this blessed truth, that when the Lord sends you into captivity, or sends some affliction to

you it is the same merciful purpose towards you that it was when he comforted you on every side.

Secondly, Thou art the same in Thy love that can know no change. It may know many suspensions as to its powerful operation and sweet comfort and melting influence, many. You may live many days without a sense of that precious, unalterable, eternal uncaused love in your own heart, but

If once the love of Christ we feel
Upon our hearts impressed,
The mark of that celestial seal
Shall never be erased

Think of it sinner, never be erased; always the same love. Bless God for the unchangeable love of Christ. Now it is called everlasting love. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Eternity is spoken of as past and as to come; it has no parts. But to poor creatures there is an intervening time. Time is a succession of parts; eternity is one glorious whole. And eternity God has designed to be inhabited by His dear children to be with Himself. Love has fixed their abode; love has determined their way to it. Love has weighed their troubles; love has ordained their cross and made it. Love has done it all. Love sent the Redeemer to die; love brought Him to the cross; love took Him to the grave; love brought Him from the grave, and love took Him to heaven. Love is there with Him in heaven; love is in His intercession; love is in His word and love is in His dealings. Love is in His Spirit. It is love from beginning to end. If you are arrested by the law and are a vessel of mercy, love has sent that; love has caused that arrest. Yes, and love will bring peace, the peace of God which passeth all understanding. "Thou art the same". What do you feel? A poor changeling; no well pleasingness in you to God naturally, is there? And if today you be sincere and tender and warm in your affections; if you be fervent in your petitions; if you be humble in your mind; if you feel you can lay your body as the ground to all who would go

go over it; what about tomorrow? Immutability does not belong to us in any feeling, even as it is not ours by nature. There is no immutability in us beyond that which God has fixed, namely our standing in Christ from eternity to eternity. But in self it is all change. In His own style Berridge has expressed it

Hot and cold in half an hour
Sometimes sweet and sometimes sour,
Sometimes grave at Jesus' school,
Sometimes light and play the fool

What child of God cannot subscribe to that as expressing his own mutable condition? To changes ever prone. Sober in the morning while you are dressing, and drunken and surfeited with care when you have read your morning post. What changes we are liable to. O when it pleases the Holy Spirit to bring the changeless love of Christ to the soul; love that knew no cause; love that was not procured and bought by anything in the creature; love that could not be repelled and kept from the sinner by any untowardness and sin; when that love is again and again and yet again brought near, yea shed abroad, then says the sinner, I can do without this creature; I can do without that comfort; I am supported with no prop of a creature; underneath me now I need none. We would be thankful for what God gives us in the creature, but He will be sure, if He loves us, to make us know that the creature is not sufficient for us, even as we are not sufficient for ourselves. Then says the creature, with God's love in his heart, I am happy; I have sufficient; I have as much as I need here; I have God with all, and God under all, and God after all. The man is rich who has this love, this precious love, set upon him that can never be taken away. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love". Probably some of you, all of the Lord's people of any standing in experience, have felt at times, if anything could change, alter and remove the love of God from a vessel of mercy, it would be the sins and the provocations and the unthankfulness and the unholiness which have so often prevailed. I have felt that many times. Well, we have got a reason then to praise the Lord for unalterable love. Ah it wont

affect us as the world says it will; it wont make us say - let us live in sin; let us do as we like. No, the effect of it is exactly the opposite. It says, when we feel it, the Lord help us to live according to this; help us to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith eternal love has called us; help us to live as those who are alive from the dead. It brings a sinner to enter into Peter's language in spirit when he says - Christ suffered for us in the flesh. "Who Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree that we should be dead to sin and alive unto God". That is certain to be the effect, always, where the love of Christ is known. That is the same then; hang about it my dearly beloved friends in the Lord. Nothing will stand you in good stead short of God; nothing will comfort you short of love, love expressed in some way. Love, eternal love, tender love, wise love; everything love has in it. It is tender love, it is wise love, it is Fatherly love, it is everlasting love. It has a most sweet effect when it is felt, a most wonderful effect. All the bigness of our proud nature flows down; all the hardness of our wicked hearts melts away. It sanctifies the soul; it makes God everything; it brings the man of God to know what Paul means in that word - "Christ is all and in all"; everything. It does make the sinner little in his own eyes; it makes him understand the feelings of Ruth when she said to Boaz "Wherefore have I found favour in thy sight?" Lord, how couldest Thou look on such a sinner? And you know where to put the emphasis, such a sinner as you. Why, O blessed God, why me? Paul speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ and in the same Epistle, that to the Ephesians, he prays that the Ephesians might know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. The height and the depth and the length and the breadth of it, he desired them to know. Its fulness can never be known. In measure it is known; the Spirit makes it known. Precious love; it goes before sinners, it follows sinners, it surrounds them. It is like the pillar of fire by night and the cloudy pillar by day. It is that banqueting house; it is the banner in the banqueting house; it is the flagon that stays the soul; it is the apple that comforts it. It is the arm that sustains it; it is the wisdom that guides. It is everything. It makes one, when it is felt, say of

it

On such love my soul still ponder
Love so great, so rich, so free,
Say, whilst lost in holy wonder,
Why, O Lord, such love to me?

It brought Christ from heaven; it brings Him from heaven still; it visits sinners. It took Him to preach the gospel to men in prison. It brought that reproving, loving look to Peter's backsliding heart, and sent him out, weeping bitterly. It brings a poor sinner to feel he is but dust and ashes, yet it emboldens him to ask the greatest blessings the Lord has to bestow. It is a wonderful love, a sanctifying love, a satisfying love. So we may say - may the Lord help us - in the midst of our changes and of our sinning, sinning of which, blessed be God, we can say we are ashamed; in the midst of our fallings and failings; "Thou art the same" in Thy precious, eternal love. O beloved friends what better thing can we pray for for ourselves and all the people of God than this, that the love of God may be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. It comes and stamps its own image, so to speak, on trouble; it fills a reproof and rebuke with sweet mercy. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten". It puts life into everything when it comes. May the Lord help us then, viewing the changing scenes around us, feeling the changes that come to us, and believing that the great change is soon coming - that we must needs die and be as water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again - may we, I say, with these things before us, be constrained to say to God with regard to His purpose, with regard to His love - "Thou art the same and Thy years shall have no end". And therefore, nothing He has said in His word; no purpose that He has revealed in us; no love that He has shown to us, shall ever have an end.

AMEN.