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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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PSALM 102 v 27

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

The matters of this Psalm are, speaking generally, the afflictions and weaknesses and fears and tears and changes experienced by the Psalmist. He was an afflicted man, as penning this Psalm. His heart was smitten, some trouble was upon him; some heavy stroke had come upon him; it reached his heart. Some strokes fall short of that; some strokes reach the heart, and make it wither, and it is a very solemn thing to have a withered heart, withered by trouble. The fear of God in it, the unction of the Holy One, access to the throne of grace, yet a withered heart; as if separated from the root of life, as if no longer could the poor creature live. But there was life, and strong life too, beneath all this, for he cried, he roared in his trouble; he sought his God. What a mercy it is that, whatever troubles come, God makes Himself known as sufficient for them. You will find an adequacy in God, as you belong to Him. In all your troubles you will find, as He will favour you, an insufficiency, both in yourselves and in all creation, but a sufficiency in Him. He was not indifferent as to whether he got an answer or not; he said "I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house-top". He was reproached by his enemies and they were very mad against him, and this made him eat ashes like bread. That is, his sorrow was his food, as it were; his trouble was his drink. "I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping." And there was a cause under all the external causes of his trouble; there was a reason beneath all the things he saw and felt in respect of creatures. He said: "Because of Thine indignation and Thy wrath: for Thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down." Do you find dear friends, in your troubles, that you are led to God and led also to seek for causes of controversy; that your eyes are drawn from second causes and fixed on God and led to ask Him to grant you to know if there be any secret thing with you for which He is chastening you. It is a great thing to be led through your

troubles, to God. So it was with Job. He wondered why God contended with him; he lost sight of the Sabians, the wind and the fire, and, through all of them, he was led to God and said, the Lord did it. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away". You may more easily say the first than the second. You may more comfortably say, when you like and enjoy what He has given you, the Lord has given me all this. But when He takes away, that is different, and much, much, much grace is needed to enable you to say: "The Lord hath taken away". Also, the Psalmist got a sight of the shortness of his life, in the trouble: "My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass." No more substantial his life than this, a shadow. No stronger than this, withering grass. What a picture of life, is it not? and how true it is when people are brought into a solemn consideration of eternity. Days, how swift they are; days, how short they are. Life a vapour, appearing for a little time and then vanishing away. That is the uttermost according to Scripture. "What is your life? It is even a vapour which appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." Jacob said, at the end: "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage", and we shall say the same. However long we live, comparatively, how short is our time; how swift our days, how weak our life. But then, this was not all. No, you will get something more than trouble and this view and this feeling about yourself and your frailty and your afflictions, if the Lord is with you. Your eyes will be turned another way, and you will see God. God in your troubles, in your afflictions; above your troubles, above your afflictions. God ordering your life, fixing the bounds of it. God above your life. O, the sight of God is a great thing. It is a wonderful matter for a man, considering his own frailty and mortality, to get a view of God. Then he had a view too of Zion, and that she should be established; a view of some tokens of her growth and upbuilding and establishing; the favour which His servants, sent of Him to preach, should show to Zion; should favour the very dust of Zion. The least of all saints shall have favour shown to them when the Lord builds up, and it is in Zion that the glory of God is manifested, because the Lord looks down from heaven and beholds the earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner; does not neglect His people. He wont neglect you in your troubles; He wont let you cry in vain to Him. He wont let you say always "I looked for light and behold darkness." You wont always complain that when you go

forward He is not there and backward that you cannot see Him, and on the right hand and on the left, saying He hideth Himself that I cannot behold Him. No, there will be times when He will gather you; He will gather you to worship Him and make you groan when He gathers you, and bow down His ear to hear you, to loose you, set you free from your fears and your bondage and your troubles, as to the spirit. And all this shall be in Zion. My dear friends and fellow sinners, fellow seekers, this shall come to pass; we shall get near God and He wont neglect us. You may say, He has gone. He wont neglect you, He will surely come to you and you shall see Him and know that He hears your prayers.

Then the Psalmist had a view of God's greatness in creation and of the passing away of the work of God: "Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of Thy hands." A great sight his. Infidels, if they had eyes to look into creation properly, would get a view of the invisible things of God there, even His eternal power and Godhead, but their eyes are closed and their ears are heavy and their heart is waxed fat and gross, that they do not see that which creation shows, nor hear the voice that creation speaks with in respect of its Creator.

Then next he got a view of the passing away of all this: "They shall perish" - they were never created to be for ever - "but Thou" - the Creator of them - "shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed"; they shall be no more; the man, whose life is a shadow; all shall pass away. Now to the saints of God there is following that which, as opened and applied to them, is an unspeakable comfort: "But Thou art the same and Thy years shall have no end." We are changing creatures and providence changes with respect to us. To-day there is a bright shining of the sun; to-morrow the clouds are heavy and threatening, full, it may appear to us, of evil, but there is one thing the Holy Ghost will make out from time to time, and that is, that these changing scenes, changing circumstances, decaying bodies, vanishing earth, do not, cannot, affect Him who is their hope, their life, their end. We may well be thankful if God has made us know that this life is not our end; that we are not our own end;

that there is something beyond all, all that we are in ourselves, and all that we have; something beyond all, and that something is the great God, the infinite One.

Let us look a little at this eternal truth, this rock of ages: "Thou art the same". Thou, Jehovah manifested in Christ. Thou, without beginning, without end, the eternal God. Thou, subsisting in Three Persons - Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Whatever changes come to creation and whatever changes befall us, whatever death comes to us, this remains. We have changed, we die; God remains. Now if we be made spiritual people, if we are acquainted with God in the gospel, this will become a solace, a support, a peace, a strength in our souls. And we will, as enabled, speak of God in respect of His purposes. God has purposes, purposes concerning us individually, collectively; purposes which cannot be overturned. We scheme and plan and have projects, but it all depends on God, whether they shall be realised or not. "Who is he that saith and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not." So we are reprov'd, when we are in that spirit, by the Holy Ghost in James: "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away". It is a solemn reproof for us when we are in a wrong spirit, when we are projecting things, and thinking this will be and that, and we will do this or that. O, if we had grace to be content. O if we had the grace to live day by day. But it is a seldom thing with some of us that we have that grace to live by the day. The Lord forgive this, our grievous sin, of looking into tomorrow in the spirit which He forbids. "Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Job found that God was in one mind and could not be turned. He said: "He is of one mind". He has put me into this furnace. I have so much dross and He intends to purge it away; it hurts, it seems as if I must be consumed. And yet his faith held fast: "Thou ^{Though} He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." I will trust His power, I will trust His goodness, I will trust His faithfulness, and when He hath tried me He will bring me forth as gold. Job knew this, that God had a purpose, and was not to be turned. The father wont spare the rod for the cry of the child who needs the

rod, and God wont turn away from the purpose that He has to do the man good because that poor, weak, ignorant man thinks that the Lord is doing him evil. May the Lord help us to believe this, that God has a purpose; He has fixed the bounds of our habitation, fixed us in everything, so that we have need to look to Him, that He would bring to pass His own strange, great work, for the glory of His Name in us and the profit of our immortal souls.

The Lord is the same in respect of that wondrous redemption which He wrought when He sent His only begotten Son into the world that His people might live in Him. The centre of the gospel is God Incarnate; the sum of the gospel is the work of Christ; the glory of the gospel is the Person of Christ, and the testimony of the Holy Ghost concerning Christ is this: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." O my dear friends, seeing this by faith, you wont wonder at Paul's spirit and feeling as he shows them when he says: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach the unsearchable riches of Christ." Says he again, of that blessed One: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty, might be rich." And the poverty there spoken of is this - He was made sin, and being made sin, He had not where to lay His head. And there was a moment when, in His solemn experience, He had not the bosom of His Father, He had not the smile of His Father. He cried out: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Now this wondrous Man, this true, almighty God, went through His sufferings and is at the right hand of God - "The same yesterday, and today, and for ever." The same in the past, the same at present, the same in eternity; the same Person. We must die; O, but if we have union with Him, we live, and shall live. These poor bodies now sensitive and warm with animal life must die, but the immortal spirit within, if redeemed and quickened and justified and sanctified, will fly away, as from a person, into the bosom of Him who is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." And now, view all this when the Holy Ghost gives it and brings a sacred feeling of it; what an easy thing it is to bear trouble. How content you are to live in the path of tribulation. "Tribulation worketh patience", in this way, "and patience experience" of God's faithfulness, "and experience hope", for the Father comes, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by

the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Christ is the same; may the Lord help us to believe it. We do need grace to believe what we believe; to hold fast what we have heard and received of this divine truth, because when we are in trouble and things are, as it were, slipping away, and the ground seeming to be moved from under our feet, and we know our weakness, and get withered hearts, and withering feelings and hopes, O then if there be not a Rock of Ages beneath us, what a sinking there is. The Rock is always there, but we do not always realise its presence, nor realise our being built upon that Rock. God is unchangeable. Whatever changes you go through, O saints of God, you have to learn this, and do learn it, that you have One who changes not. Your sky may be lowering, dark, threatening, portentous; your troubles may grow, your afflictions may increase, as Job said of his afflictions, but, having God, what can you need. One sings

I must have all things and abound
Since God is God to me

Well, that will do, wont it? It will when you get it. It will do in your feelings, it will do to live by, it will do on a dying bed. If God is God to us, what can we lack? Now He is the same, this precious God, for God is in Christ; God is in Christ. And let me name in passing that wondrous word: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father also". You have never seen Christ and not seen the Father, although, as to experience, I think God's people often see the one and not the other, as to realisation. Christ seems just the only One who is seen, but the truth is the same: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father also". Well, with regard then to this, He is the same in His love. "I have loved Thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." And poor Jeremiah was drawn into a good deal of mire, of mud, of trouble, of sorrow. No more sorrowful prophet is there in the Scripture than Jeremiah. Taking the whole of his prophecy, you find probably more complaint and trouble and grief and desertion there than in all the others, and yet, said the Lord, I have drawn thee with lovingkindness. Sometimes your afflictions may make you say, I do not see lovingkindness; I only see severity; I only see what I deserve, justice. But when your misty sight is cleared and when the fearful unbelief of your heart is subdued, and

faith graciously given, the spirit of real faith is drawn into exercise, and God is revealed to you in loving you when you were loathsome and dead; loving you so as to wash and clothe you; loving you so as to give you grace, the gold of grace, and the wine of salvation; O then you will say, I have been drawn with lovingkindness. And when you see that He has used this providence for your good and that trouble to humble you and to give you errands to the throne of grace, where He has let you see Him and spoken to your heart, and touched you in your feelings, in your innermost soul, then you say, He has drawn me with lovingkindness; that trouble was lovingkindness; that affliction was lovingkindness; that necessity was lovingkindness; that grievous change was lovingkindness; and it is the same. May I turn aside for a moment and say how we have tried this love. Do you not sometimes hide your blushing face with shame as you think of, as you remember, your base treatment of a loving God? We do treat Him badly; we treat Him basely. He knocks at the door and we are so comfortable in carnal self that we cannot open to Him, and we never should move if He did not move us. But He puts His hand in by the hole of the door and leaves such grace behind that we begin at once to move after Him. Shame on us, and shame we take to ourselves, as we view our treatment of Him whose love is the same. We test it and it stands the test. We pray for it and it comes sometimes into the soul, and we then can say: "On such love" - eternal love, unchangeable love, love kindly, lovingly expressed; "on such love" as sent the Saviour, such love as brought Him to us, such love as brought the Holy Spirit - "my soul still ponder". "Thou art the same". When the world passeth away, this wont change. "God is love" That is His Name, and He is unalterable.

"Thou art the same" in Thy infinite merit. What would you do, poor, convinced, sinking, guilty sinner, without the infinite merit of Christ to plead. But the Spirit does give sometimes views of that merit, of the extensiveness, and the depth, and the height of it; that it goes deeper than all our sins, and rises higher than all our guilt, stronger and wider than, and lasts longer than, all our wanderings. It goes to the uttermost of every child of God. O, the merit of Christ; the Spirit wont let you hope in anything else. He will take away all other ground and give you this to stand on. He will close your mouth with respect to all other pleas and give you this to

plead. He will allow no excuse; no extenuations are to be made by you as the teaching of the Spirit is your happy lot, but He will give you this. This will forbid despair, this will draw you to God, this will fill your mouth with arguments. This will be a plea that the ear of God will listen to with delight. This will move Deity and omnipotence and kindness and pity and draw them all out to your assistance, to your salvation. O Christ's merit; God give me mercy to speak of it as I ought to do, and a heart to receive and believe, and bless you in the same way. The merit of Christ; we cannot properly conceive what a sweet savour it is to God. We are told in Ezekiel by the Lord Himself that when He will bring rebellious people back who have polluted His Name and polluted themselves, when He will bring them into the wilderness to rule over them with fury poured out, and they shall cry to Him, then He says "I will accept you with your sweet savour", and the beautiful reading in the margin is "With your savour of rest" (Ezekiel 20). Who rested in it first? God Himself. He rested in it, and then you will rest in it. You will rest in the merit of Christ. The savour is before the Lord and the most polluted wretch out of hell who lives to feel his need and plead this merit, it is to him a savour of rest and makes him acceptable to God. "I will accept you with your sweet savour of rest". You will never please yourself, but you will be loathsome to yourself, and the more you know of this, the more loathsome you will be to yourself. That is true in real experience. Everyone knows that who gets this mercy. Everyone getting this mercy sings in the spirit of this word

I hate myself, I loathe my sins
O Lord, the sinner cries

and he cannot hate himself enough. The merit of Christ is the comfort of a mourner, the healing of a sick soul, the cleansing of a leper, the justification of the guilty, the sanctification of the polluted. The merit of Christ is the Father's delight and the sinner's hope and the sinner's comfort. It is the Father's pleasure; it is the sweetest savour that Deity can have. All offerings are nothing but a stink in His nostrils but this, this offering is infinitely sweet to Him, and I am sure, as the Spirit is our Teacher and God our Guide, He will make it sweet to us. Not at the beginning only. No, I think I can honestly say the merit of Christ was not to me in my early days - though it was a

great deal then - what it is to me now. O, the fullness of it, and the greatness of it, when you see your sins, when you feel the pollution of them; when you know that the least stain of sin brings separation between you and God; when you feel that sin remaining on you is a bar between you and God; and then you get that precious merit applied to you, so that the bar is removed, and the Father smiles, and you dissolve. The Father accepts you and He finds a sweet savour about you because you are, if I may so speak, enveloped in that sweet incense. It covers you, surrounds you, and you are accepted of the Father in it. Well that is wonderful and a little bit of this real experience will make you value the atonement of the Lord Jesus above everything else. Well, and this is the same, this endures for ever, this will fill heaven with men who were sinners, this will put a song in the mouth of the redeemed in heaven, and each one will join, all together they will sing - they do now in heaven sing who are there - "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain", and we join with them sometimes in lisping, stammering notes, but still we join.

"Thou art the same" in that word: "The Word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you." One promise in your heart ties you up to God and secures heaven and you for heaven. Kept by that word, the power of God in you, you are secured. One promise is as good as a thousand as to faithfulness. The blessed character that is given to God by Paul in his epistle to Titus is - "God that cannot lie". What a mercy, what a blessing! "God that cannot lie". Circumstances may seem to do so; changes may trouble you grievously; emptiness may come where fullness was; weakness may take the place of strength, and confusion may come where order reigned, but a promise in your soul will, if I may repeat myself, tie you up to God, unite you to Him. All the promises are in Him yea, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God by us. You cannot have a syllable, if I may speak so, spoken to your heart by the Holy Ghost and fail. You say, I am always failing, and so you will be while you live, but you wont fail to reach heaven, for He who spoke to you will fulfil His word. Then you will want to be sure of it. It is good to get an experience such as Hart expresses when he says:

And oftentimes, when the tempter sly
Affirms it fancied, forg'd, or vain,
Jesus appears; disproves the lie;
And kindly makes it o'er again

and we want that kindness, some of us particularly, want it made over again because things may come and you say to Him, what is going to happen; this trouble, that trouble; why, things will make an end of me. O, but if the Lord comes and makes over His Word and lets you see a faithful God, a full God, a kind God, then you will be able to hold on. "Hold Thou me up" you will pray, "and I shall be safe". "Hold up my goings in Thy paths that my footsteps slip not." And when you get the promise in your hand again that has been lost, even from your memory for a time, buried underneath doubt and fear and gloom and trouble, when it is resurrected and put into the hand of your faith again by the Spirit who gave it to you, you will get a new start, a new prayer, a new plea, a new access, a new prevalence, a new, sweet feeling of hope and humble confidence in your God, because you will see that He remains. "Thou art the same."

"Thou art the same" in power. O yes, He is the Almighty God. He said to Abraham: "I am the Almighty God, walk before Me and be thou perfect". Cleave to Me, follow Me. No perfection in the flesh is meant there. Be perfect. Believe, follow Me, hang about Me, cleave to My word to you that I have spoken. He cannot, my friends, He cannot fail. O, said Jacob, "My way is hid from the Lord and my judgement is passed over from my God." He had a case and the Lord would not look at it, as he thought. My judgement is passed over from Him; He is neglecting to look at it, taking no notice of it. O but, says the Lord: "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding." Who placed the stars and how is it that not one faileth? "For that He is strong in power; not one faileth". Therefore, though "the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall", this shall be true: "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk", by faith, not by sight, "and not faint", and all because of omnipotence.

If you think to grow strong, you will be disappointed, but if you are led to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, you will get through. Dear friends, look at omnipotence on the cross. Christ was crucified through weakness. O, omnipotence was engaged with death, with law, with curse, with hell, and Christ conquered death and

destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil. And when He ascended on high, what did omnipotence do then? Led captivity captive and received gifts for men, yea for the rebellious also that the Lord God might dwell among them. (Psalm 69 v 18). Now poor, weak sinner, this is a gospel truth - hearken to it if you can - He who got the victory there must give you the victory in your heart.

Christ, who conquered for us once,
Shall in us conquer too

You are not to boast, except in Him. You are to know on whose blessed Head to place the crown and you will have a heart to do it. "Thou art the same." Look then on your changing things and sins; look on a passing earth, look on shaking mountains, look on waves and listen to their roaring, and what then? O, if the Lord fixes you here, even for five minutes, you will say: "My heart shall not fear". You will say: God is my refuge and strength..... therefore will not I fear, "though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Psalm 46) Omnipotence will stand by you if the Lord undertakes for you. Weakness - you will prove yourself to be weakness itself, then you will prove Him to be strong.

Trust to Him, and by thy weakness
Thou shalt prove that Christ is strong

"Thou art the same" in Thy faithfulness. Yes, His faithfulness reacheth unto the heavens. It is higher than the mountains; He says these shall depart. The mountains may depart, the earth may be removed, yet My kindness shall not depart from thee. My covenant will I not break nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips. I will stand by you, I will look to you, provide for you, guide you. I will use My wisdom to guide you and I will use My power to defend you and I will use My faithfulness to bring you honourably through all.

"And Thy years shall have no end." Where is God, my friends? In heaven. Where are His people to go? To heaven. How long will heaven last? "Thy years shall have no end." So, if God, in His eternal election chose us to obtain salvation, He will bring us to heaven, and as long as His years last, so long will heaven last. "Jesus Christ

"the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." Ah, sin wont last for ever in the saints, and their fears wont last for ever, and their doubtings wont last for ever. No, their changes will come to an end, and their expectation shall not be cut off. If you root some of your hopes on the earth, they will all perish with the earth, but if you build, through grace, your hopes on Him who fails not, who is the Rock of Ages, you wont, you cannot, fail.

"Thou art the same". What a stay this is to the soul that receives it in the Holy Ghost. What a comfort to a sinner who fades in himself, who is withered like grass at times; who says now what is to become of me? O, what a stay it is to a poor heart that has no strength in itself, but withers so often that it seems as if there can hardly be life in it at all; yet God comes and puts this into the heart, makes a living truth of it. Not a high theory - blessed doctrine as it is - but makes a living truth of it in the soul, so that the soul says, why I am not a stranger to this. I believe in God; I believe in the Trinity. I believe in the love of God; I believe in the faithfulness of God. And that, I say, is everything that we can need. There is adequacy in God, my friends, for us; sufficient for every case, no matter what it may be. And when the end comes, and soon it may come to some of us, then we hope to prove that God is the same to us that we believed Him to be when He gave the first manifestation of Himself to us. The same to us that we believed Him to be when the first gospel promise fell upon our hearts. The same to us when He came here and there and said "Fear not". "Thou art the same". May the Lord give us to believe this and rest upon this as a great truth. Whatever deaths come, may we believe in the living God.

AMEN.