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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 5 November 1922

PSALM 103 v 13

"Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord
pitieth them that fear Him"

The fear of the Lord is a wonderful and beautiful and powerful grace; by it men depart from evil. It is a fountain of life whereby the possessors of it depart from death and happy he who is blessed with that spirit of godly fear. It is clean, it endures for ever; it is an unctuous light in the understanding; it shows what is right, gives strength to follow it. It is a bar to all that is wrong, forbidding in the conscience the doing of evil. God here takes to Himself, as it were, a human relationship, adapts it to His own pity, that like as an earthly father pities his children in difficult cases, cases where they need it, so the Lord has that compassion and tenderness to His children as that He, seeing them in distress, hastens to their help. And this evening, for a short time, as I may be helped, I shall speak of this in two or three particulars only.

First of all, in respect of sin; the Lord pities His people who fear Him. Sin in two regards; first, sin unpurged, unremoved from the conscience. This will ever be, to all who fear the Lord, an intolerable burden. The fear of the Lord in them will tell them that, although they seek that blessing, they have not received it. Helps, they get; comforts they receive sometimes; touches of mercy. The attractions of Christ are set before them so as that they follow after Him if haply they may lay hold of Him and of eternal life which is in Him. Scriptures sometimes help them, preaching helps them, hymns help them; they get helps in various ways but conscience will continually say to them, there is one thing you have not had - your guilt, as you are convinced, remains on your conscience. Do not I speak the state of some here? How you long to be pardoned; how you long to be pardoned. How you pray for that clear evidence, that indubitable proof of the love of God to you, the removal from your conscience of the guilt of sin. Mercifully you cannot say you are

what you are not, that you have had an experience which has not been given to you, but it is a burden to be moving about with a guilty conscience. A guilty conscience is the worst companion you can have, the most troublesome thing you can have. It will often go to bed with you and sometimes keep you awake. It will rise with you and mar your life. It will cause you to mingle your tears with your drink and to eat ashes like bread. The Lord sees these people, sees their distress, feels for them as a father seeing a child in trouble feels for him. He looks on this poor, afflicted, sin-bitten and sin-burdened creature, and pities him. The pity is effectual pity, omnipotent pity; it flows in through the blood of the everlasting covenant; it comes into the conscience by the power of the eternal Spirit; it removes that sense, keen, painful sense of being entirely under the curse of a broken law. It is an indescribable sensation, palpable to those to whom it is given, but it is indescribable, when suddenly it comes, and the prayers of years are answered, and the groans, and the tears of this sinner now are dried up and removed, and he and his God are together. Can we, who hope that we have received that inestimable blessing, ever forget the time when it came? O, the happiness, the solid peace, the brokenness of heart, the thankfulness, the contrition, the tenderness, the comfort, the solid comfort, as it were, coming down from heaven into the heart. No tongue can adequately express what this is. It is a sinner taken up into Jesus Christ. It is God comforting the soul with the blood of God. It is the voice of the Spirit, the voice of the Trinity heard in the land, the singing of birds. Not only the Springtime, but the Summer suddenly come, the relief of a burdened heart, the ease of a troubled conscience, the entrance of a sinner into the peace of God which passeth all understanding. The soul reclines on the bosom of incarnate Deity; it basks in the smile of a dear Redeemer; it reclines itself on a everlasting bed, the gospel of God's grace. The soul is built on Jesus Christ; it has a world now, that it never had before, of delight, and pleasure. The view of God is such as was never had before; the enjoyment of God, who can express? This is God's way of pitying those who fear Him. You who fear the Lord, who have never had this blessing, have awaiting you a heaven of delight. As you seek, you must find, for God is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent. And when the blessing comes, probably, if you remember this service, and anything I said, you will say, well it was

quite true, but it was not half of it. Who can tell half of the beauty and the blessedness and the glory of Christ crucified as revealed to the soul? Who can express the greatness of that broad, pure river of life, bringing peace and satisfaction into the soul. God smiling, the sinner melting. God speaking, the sinner listening. The Lord opening and the soul opening and these two come together. The God of grace comes into the soul and the soul enters into the God of grace, into Jesus Christ. The soul wounded now has healing, healing through a wounded Saviour. The heart broken by love enters a little into the brokenness of the Lord Jesus. The great cost of redemption is, in some measure, entered into. You are well alone, glad to be alone; thankful to have this peace in your conscience which passeth all understanding. Ah, sweet tears are shed now, sweet rest is enjoyed now, solid comfort felt now. This is God's mercy and pity powerfully expressed and, as an earthly parent would go, with full love and open arms and a pleasant smile to a troubled son, so this good God, this blessed Trinity, comes with open arms to embrace, a heavenly smile to comfort, a full forgiveness to save and cheer. Do you want it? Some may say, we wish we could get it. Well, you are not told to go over the sea to fetch it, to descend into the deep to bring it up nor ascend into heaven to bring it down. You will find what is written to be true when the set time comes: "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach" (Romans 10 v 8), that if thou shalt believe with thine heart and with thy mouth confess unto salvation then thou shalt be saved, and that will be found to be exactly the truth. This happy person is on the way to heaven. He looks for good; he has not a thought of evil. He has no expectation at the moment of a change. He is with his God; happy; happy in His God; happy in salvation. The high praises of God are in his mouth. He is near to His Lord; Jesus Christ is dear to him; He embraces Him wholly, takes Him fully. "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord". I tell you, and you, some of you, know it, that this is true. And some of you may be saying if only we could get the blessing we should quite believe that we, poor sinners, should no longer have trouble, but be happy. And if anyone in the enjoyment of that mercy were to come to me, I would not for anything say to that person, you will have trouble enough in the future. Let it come; let him sing while he can; let him praise God as long as he can. The change will come to him soon enough; let him praise his God while he

can. O, happy sinner, happy sinner. One remembers one's own time, how happy, how satisfied, how blessed, how ready to go to heaven, how anxious to go there. But this state does not continue; this experience is not for very long, ordinarily speaking. A change comes, not a change in God, not a change in the gospel, not a change in respect of the person's state and standing before God, but a change in feeling. A sad change, a change not understood by the subject of it, so strange a change that the enemy may be permitted to come and get fast hold of the mind and say to the poor, tried person, well what you had was only excitement. But you cannot give it up; only you are cast down.

Now I come to speak of the pity of the Lord with respect to another state with regard to sin, and that is, indwelling sin. A sad subject, a grievous subject, a constant burden when the soul is at all healthy - indwelling sin. And let me draw your attention to the Apostle Paul's case. Sin was in him. Happily he did not live in sin but he did sin; he says so; "The evil that I would not that do I", but it was not his delight, not his element. O, if in our confession, we could, at times, have this distinction made out to us; sin is not our element, thanks be to God; it is not our element. It is a grief, a burden, and the defeats we sustain are a shame and a trouble to us, the cutting off of that dear fellowship, the removal of the soul from that sweet nearness to God, and the drying up, for the time, of that stream of heavenly communion and good; these are grievous experiences, and indwelling sin takes a very wicked advantage of them, and so the good that we would we do not and the evil we would not, that we do. Many a soul sighs as he goes about day by day to his work. Many a child of God can honestly say as he moves about: Lord, I wish it were other with me than it is. I am sorry my heart is so hard; I grieve that I am so prayerless; I wish my heart did not depart from Thee as it does. O, take this heart, this worthless heart, and make it wholly Thine. Why the fear of God is there. If one should say it to you, you might say, O no; but it is there. Why the grief, if there is no fear of God? Why the panting after Him? Why the opening of your mouth and panting for the word of God if the fear of His majesty were not there? But the Lord God pities this person. As a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth this sinner in the unequal conflict, for it is an unequal conflict to all appearance. A little grace and

much sin; a little knowledge and much ignorance; a little prayer and strong aversion to prayer; a little love and much enmity; a little steadfastness and much wandering and wavering. It is a sad state, and God pities the person who is in it. How does He show that pity? He shows that pity by sending relief. Relief comes in several ways. It came to Paul by a gracious view of God in Christ, of a victory to be given to him, yea, brought to him; then of a discovery that there was in him a law that served God, a mind that served God, and brought him to understand the distinction between flesh and Spirit. "It is no more I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me". I, the Apostle Paul; I, Paul the aged; Paul the Christian; now find this, that when I would do good it is the spirit in me that would do good, but when I do evil, it is the flesh in me, and not myself. And this is no distinction for an encouragement of sin, but for the comfort of a sensible and afflicted sinner. It is greatly to our comfort when God makes this out to us. "What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies," each bent on the destruction of the other, the wicked army at times having the best of it and the poor child of God ready to turn back in the day of battle. God pities this poor child; the child of grace, the hidden man of the heart the Lord comes to, graciously assists, assists by His Spirit and gives a view of a given victory, and some powerful relief comes by that view of a given victory; yea, a triumphing in it. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord". I thank Him I am not now in despair. No, I am not even dismayed. I have confidence in God; I have committed the keeping of my immortal soul to Him; I have rest; rested in His atoning blood which was revealed and applied to me. I have felt my sins forgiven, and now I have cast myself into His mighty arms. I throw myself on His divine protection; I look to Him to supply me with all needed grace and I thank God, through His Son, Jesus Christ, who gives me the victory in the hands of faith. The victory in a comfortable anticipation that one day I shall be absent from the body and present with the Lord. Do you know what that means? O sweet relief is it not? Sweet relief even to think that we, who get so defeated, are often so cut off from communion, who miss the presence of that Friend who once particularly walked with us and talked with us and walked in us, who allowed, and enabled, us to walk up and down in His Name, O the sweetness of looking to Him for a victory and believing that though hell and the gates of hell and all the powers of hell should rise up

against us, we shall have a victory through Jesus Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us. Raise your downcast eyes, O sinner, and see this promised victory, see what God has laid up in store for you - a victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. See no fear of being overcome now; in the pit of endless ruin such a person will never be found, for, as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pities this person who is afflicted with indwelling sin. The conquest of sin will make your religion questionable to you. The absence of God, if prolonged, will make you wonder if your experience of His presence in the past was real. The non fulfilment of certain promises made over to you will make you wonder if you received them from the Lord. But faith wont give in; you will find yourself after the Lord. I tell you, your faith wont give in. It will live and labour under load; though it be damped it will never die. It will be cleaving to Him; it will be panting for Him; it will be looking out for Him; it will be like the watchman who anxiously turns his eyes to the east and says, O when will day break; when will this weary watching come to an end? When shall I get home to rest? So you, by faith, will be looking out for the Lord, watching for Him more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning. And shall you watch in vain? Wont the Lord come? Wont He speak? Wont He deliver you? Yes, He will; therefore hold on faith and patience; hold out till Christ shall come; till the morning shall break; till the singing of birds and the appearance of flowers shall once more cheer your soul; and you will find that the pity of the Lord comes in good time.

Thirdly, the people of God are to have tribulation in this world. We need the flail, my friends. There is much chaff; we need the flail, and God lays it on. Unkindly? No! God forbid that these lips should ever utter a word that would convey the impression that this gracious, loving Lord acts unkindly to any child of His. But it is kind, is it not? Is it not proper that the chaff should be separated from the wheat? Is it not good that God should gather your affections more and more to Himself? Good that you should find your treasure in Him and not be left to grovel here to seek something that can never be a treasure because it is all passing away. Is it not good of God to do this? He knows what we should be after, what we should persevere in if we were left. He knows what vanities would our hands be filled with soon if we were allowed to fill them, so He deals as a

father: "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten". O, thanks be to God for the rod. I thank Him that He has ever taken pains with me to use the rod. Do bless God for chastening. "If ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as with sons". Heaven is at the end of this, yea, and before you reach heaven, the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Does the rod bring the worst out of your nature? Yes, you say, alas. I tell you this also, that rod will express to you the heart and love of your heavenly Father and Friend. It will, and you will say, I did not think it at the beginning, but I know it now. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten". Does your reason, does the enemy, say this trouble comes because the Lord hates you? The Spirit will write love across that trouble one day and you will say, Thou hast in love chastened me. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted". Though the way to heaven be one of trouble, some parts of the way are strewed with the flowers of grace, are filled with the odours of God's mercies and love, and are full also of sweet comfort. O, it is great to be chastened, because by chastening we learn what the Father is, as well as we learn what we are. He pities us when He sees that our strength of endurance is gone, when He sees that our spirit is exhausted, when He sees that we are utterly weary and all but worn out. He sends relief, He commands deliverances. No providence is immutable, so no troublesome providence is immutable. It shall be changed; night is succeeded by morning and comfort follows trouble. New troubles may tread upon reliefs, but reliefs will come and bring up the rear. O, God is good; God is full; full of wisdom, and full of infinite resources, and full of all that is needed by His poor, afflicted people. And sin, that bitter thing, and the devil, that crafty, malicious foe, shall do no real harm because of the kindness and the pity and the love of a gracious God in Jesus Christ.

He pities all their griefs;
When sinking makes them swim;
He dries their tears, relieves their fears,
And bids them trust in Him.

He is a good God. May I be able to say it, allowed to say it. He is a good God. Good in His purposes, good in His dealings, good in His intentions; good, as the issue shall always prove. Good to His poor, tried people. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord

pitieth them that fear Him".

The fear of God will often come out in your troubles, as when you say to Him, do sanctify this to me; keep me from rebellion, keep me from my own devices. Guide me through the mazes that have entangled my feet; establish my goings in Thy ways; keep me in Thy fear all the day long. The fear of God comes out, as well as evil. I like what Rutherford says on this point - "A Christian" he says "is a Christian in the fire". Not a nice place to have any proof of Christianity, but a good place. "A Christian is a Christian in the fire". And sometimes some of you may have found that you could lie down, in the fire, on the will of God. "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good". What solid comfort there is here. And a gracious God and Father does this; it is His doing; He brings this sweet mercy to His poor, afflicted people.

And lastly, when the last enemy comes. He is coming to us; to some he may soon come; he has a fatal dart and we cannot avoid it; it will pierce us; soon we shall enter into Jordan's swellings. Now faith and hope and love, those great graces of the Spirit, will be ^{PVC} ~~to~~ to it and we shall need the pity of the Lord. Strong, O, strong nature, strong fears, strong suggestions, hard questions may be put to us as to the eternity upon which we are about to enter. How we shall meet God; How we shall stand. How we shall behave in the flood; shall we sink?; shall we find the bottom good? We could not allow ourselves to be put into a ferry boat; let us go through as all have gone, but there are strong questions. One looks forward to that day and very frequently thinks about it and about what it will bring. Is there anyone to look after us or shall we be left to ourselves? Shall we be left to any resources of our own? Alas for us if it be so. But no: "Lo" says the dear, faithful Redeemer "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world". I will be with you, I will carry you to old age and to hoar hairs. I have made; I even I will bear you. What a God we have. O, what a God we have. And faith sometimes breaks out into triumph and says: "This God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our Guide even unto death". This God, this crucified God, whom we have known; this gracious Saviour, whose righteousness is upon us and has been felt; this precious Redeemer whose blood is our only hope: "This God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our

Guide even unto death". Do some of you say, now we wish we had that God? Is that so? That God wont let you perish. Toplady says "A wisher for Christ is a lover of Christ". If the beauties of Christ have attracted you so as to put you out of conceit with yourself; if His atonement has appeared to you so wonderful, so desirable, as that you could gladly part with all to find that in your conscience; if the righteousness of Christ has appeared so glorious as to make you say, O that it were upon me, that I might be justified in that wondrous robe, and if the grace of Christ has appeared so great as to make you say, I fain would be under its control and management, and have its kingdom within me; will He who has created those feelings and drawn you out so after Himself, let you perish for lack of Himself? Is He such a God? Does He give a person hunger to mock him with a stone when he asks for bread? No! I will, as long as He helps me preach a good God to you and tell you that if your souls cannot do without Him, He wont do without you. If you would have Him for your heaven, He will have you in His heaven. What a good Saviour He is; He came to save; He came to save the lost, not the good. He makes saints, but He makes them out of sinners. He has no other material on which to work. He gives His own life to the dead and His own goodness to the bad, and takes their badness away. He gives His own light to those who are dark, and takes their darkness from them. "Ye were sometimes darkness but are now light in the Lord". O, He will take His people to Himself; He will take His people to Himself, and happy are we who can say, we want Him; who can break out in the language of the hymn:

Thou O Christ art all I want

Can you say it? Could you enter your rooms and shut your doors and kneel down and bare your very hearts to the Almighty and honestly, as far as you know yourselves, say, each one,

Thou O Christ art all I want

If you can do that, Christ wants you, has wanted you from eternity; that is to say, has determined to have you; has loved you and will encircle with the sweet experience of His love, one day, and crown you with lovingkindness. This will draw you, hold you, keep you from

sinning. This will bring you to your knees, fill your heart with desires, and your mouth with arguments. This will make you follow after Him and earnestly pray that He would really come and take up His abode in you. And all this comes freely out of His own pity and love. May the Lord help us to look to Him and follow after Him and bring this, His great mercy, to us. "Like as a father pitieth His children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust".

AMEN.