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

PSALM 103 v 13

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

The Psalmist, in this Psalm, rises as high in praises as you will find in any other Psalm in the whole collection. He had been the recipient of unspeakable mercies, and they culminated in the forgiveness of his sins and the healing of his soul with all its diseases, and his sense of this that had been done to him and in him was such as to move him to the deepest gratitude, to the highest praises, and he solemnly charges his soul to bless the Lord. "Bless the Lord O my soul", which means, speak well of Him; whatever you may lack, do speak well of God; He has done so much for you; thank Him. He has blessed you in so many ways; bless Him. His blessing is the impartation of real benefits; your blessing of Him is giving thanks to Him, speaking well of Him. If some of the mercies, a measure of the mercies, of which the Psalmist had such fulness, should be our portion, then surely we shall rise, in that measure, in the spirit of gratitude with the Psalmist and bless the Lord. "All that is within me", all my powers, all my affections; the subjection to Him of my will, the moving after Him of my understanding, the giving to Him of the whole of my spirit; "All that is within me, bless His holy Name". Who else is worthy? Look across the wide expanse of the heavens, and see the sun and the moon and the stars, which God has given to enlighten and cheer all nations; these are not to be bowed down to; the Maker of them is. And here is a poor, sinful creature, who has committed sins innumerable, done evil, as he could, with both hands, and now the Lord has come to him. He has heard the voice of God out of heaven and he lives. The Lord has come to him and made him understand that He is nigh unto all that call upon Him. What people is so great, what nation so blessed, so nigh unto God, as we? He is nigh unto us for all that we call upon Him for. Therefore says the individual, yea the whole of the spiritual nation, "Bless the Lord". O, all our powers of mind, all our warmth of love, all our spiritual subjection,

everything in us, bow down to this God, and rise up to praise Him. Do you follow this spirit? Do you admire this spirit? Do you wish to imitate it, walk in it? It is praise that is in this Psalm, and praise is comely for the upright. Well, look at your conscience; what was it once? A burdened conscience, having a load of dead works on it. Look at your affections; where were they once? On self and some idol and vanity. Look at your understanding; what was its condition once? Darkened. Look at your will; how did it move once? On self, on self-gratification, self-indulgence. Against God it moved, against submission, against the gospel, against Christ. Now what of these faculties today? Have they been subjected to God's grace by the work of the Spirit? Has the conscience been purged from dead works? Have the affections been allured by the beauties and glories of Christ? Has His love melted our hearts? Has His authority in the sweet gospel subdued our wills, and brought them into unison with the will of God? Have we been brought to submit to the will of God in affliction and in His providential dealings with us? And is it so, that we have heard the voice of God, and live? That He has been nigh unto us for things which we have called upon Him for? Well, then, what shall we say to ourselves? How shall we admonish our own souls? What charge shall we lay on them? Shall it be as in this Psalm, that we say: "Bless the Lord". We live in Him, we move in Him, we have our being in Him; from Him we derive our well-being, and He is better to us than the whole world. And shall we say that, though we are guilty, He is good, and has washed our sins away by the Saviour's blood and therefore we are His; unto Him the praises of our lives belong. "Bless the Lord". We mourn - some of us mourn a good deal - and have much to mourn over. Who has not? What child of God can take a back look for half an hour and not be utterly ashamed of himself, and see unspeakable and immeasurable reason for perpetual mourning? What child of God does not wish, from time to time, to afflict his soul before God in the atonement of Christ? But nevertheless there is that spirit of praise waiting for God, waiting for an utterance, waiting to rise up to praise, to thank Him for a good hope through grace, for the Holy Spirit in His merciful teaching, for the sensation of the love of God and, above all, for the unspeakable gift of His dearly beloved, His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. This Psalm celebrates the Redeemer's mercy and power. "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee", encircleth thee, "with

lovingkindness and tender mercies". Not a mercy on this hand, not another on that hand, not a few mercies sparsely scattered, but mercies encircling, mercies crowning, mercies everywhere, mercies all over. Can you find a place in your heart, in your life, O child of God, where mercy has not reigned? If you look closely into things, surely, you will say, mercy and goodness have followed, and faith will rise and say "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life". The Redeemer's power, His love, His pity, His kindness, have been manifested, and they have been triumphant here and there and everywhere in the people of God. Mercies in providence. O, how sweet have some providences been; how sweet have some bitter things been made by mercy. How light have some heavy burdens been rendered by mercy. How safe have our feet been made by mercy. Even when we said, our foot slippeth, mercy then held us up. "And crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies". Love kindly expressed, love kindly made known both in the soul and in all circumstances. I think when you read God's dealings with you in His own light - not in your light - you will perceive that lovingkindness and tender mercies have followed you, encircled you, been in you, done you good, have turned captivities into good, have turned chastenings into blessings, strokes into healings and the darkest things have been made light and the crookedest things have been made straight by mercies, by lovingkindness. Well, we owe God an everlasting debt. To us belong shame and confusion of face, because we have sinned against the Lord. To Him belong mercies, and praises. The praises of our lives. To Him belong our best thanks, the sacrifice of our lips, being praise unto God. And for this end God is pleased to call His people priests, that they may offer sacrifice unto Him, the sacrifice of praise, even the fruit of our lips. Can you, any of you, belonging to the Lord, rise up in your spirits at this time to thank Him, to praise Him. What do you owe to the Lord Jesus Christ? What do you owe to the Father in His electing love and for His goodness? What do you owe to the Holy Spirit for His quickening and reproving and convicting and delivering mercies? What do you owe to Him for turning your eyes upon yourself till you could not bear the sight and then turning your eyes to Christ till your very heart broke and melted in contrition? O, we owe everything to the Trinity. We owe every mercy to the Trinity, and a prospect of heaven is alone due to His goodness.

And not only this, but also, can you not say with the Psalmist in your measure, "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's" There was a day when every child of God longed for the world, when the heart of each one was saying: Who will show me any good. Not the end of good was in the thought, but simply good as it was thought good by a fallen heart. Who wrought the mighty change that came about in these people, when each one could say: "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us", and who satisfied the appetite that was created, the appetite for God, for Christ, for the Spirit, for forgiveness, for righteousness, for justification, for sanctification? Who created the appetite for these things? God did. And when He brought them, when He brought them, when your souls were united to Christ by a living faith, when you embraced a revealed Christ in the arms of a living faith, and when you were drawn into a communion with God in Christ that you could never express, and for which you cannot be thankful enough, who did all this? "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things". Good things! Who is the judge of good things? God is. Is there a judge of good things in this chapel? Yes, a goodly number I trust. Good things! What are good things? The things of the gospel, the very Person of Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the grace of God the Spirit, the promise of life in Christ, the communications of goodness from God in Christ; the sweet speaking home upon the heart of mercies, of promises; are not these good things? To some they are. Others of you may say, we are tired of hearing, but some say, No. Some say with the people of old when they heard of these good things either by reading or hearing, let us hear the same things next Sabbath. Good things are Christ and His mercies and His fulness. Satisfied, yes satisfied, and with the satisfaction has always been an increase of the appetite. You know I speak the truth; some of you have felt it. Whenever you have had a mercy you have wanted another mercy. Whenever you have had a revelation of Christ you have wanted another revelation. Whenever He has drawn near to you, you said, O abide with me, and when He has gone, come again. It is a great thing to be satisfied with substance. You, who are in the world, are satisfied, as far as ever you feel satisfaction, with shadows. You have nothing more substantial in your mind than what may be called a shadow. Your own life is nothing better than a vapour; it is said so in the

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Scripture. James said, your life is a vapour, and you have no thing more substantial for your mind, than your life. Poor people! The Lord look on you; the Lord give you a new heart and a right spirit. All your reaching after things in this life is but reaching after a shadow, running after a mirage. You will never get substance in this world. But a sinner, blessed with grace, he gets substance. O, says he, Christ and Christ alone for me. And Christ says, I have durable riches and righteousness and I will fill the treasures of those who love and seek Me. "Durable riches and righteousness are with Me". What blessed people we are if we are seeking these good things. Satisfaction must follow seeking them, for "they that seek shall find", "unto him that knocketh it shall be opened". So the Psalmist blesses God. It is a very full Psalm, a very attractive Psalm to one whose mind is put into a frame for it. There may be times - there may have been many times - when some of you have just passed this Psalm in your reading. Knowing it, knowing its contents, you have said I am not in the state for that. At other times you may have said, this Psalm attracts me and I would fain live in it, and praise a good God and bless His holy Name always, for the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. How beautiful this is to one who often feels deeply his need of mercy. "Merciful and gracious", and these things He communicates. Remember that God is a communicating God. A miser keeps all he has and is ever wanting more. A liberal God "giveth liberally to all men" who ask Him. Says James: "If any of you lack wisdom let Him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." He left of His fulness, all His fulness, unto Christ and Christ has grace poured into His lips that He may pour it into His people's hearts. Merciful and gracious, longsuffering, slow to anger, abundant in goodness and truth. This was declared to Moses when the Lord passed by him. The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, slow to anger and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, and this is our God; as some can say: "This God is our God for ever and ever. He will be our Guide even unto death". Do you get searched? Are you tried? Do you search and try your ways at times, until you are ashamed of yourselves. All this work will be a good, though painful, preparation for this plenteous mercy, fulness, rich mercy, mercy to overflowing, mercy lasting from everlasting to everlasting, mercy that, bless God, cannot be sinned away because it

prevents sin, it stops sin; it wont let you sin; it will take away the desire for sin; it will fill you with holy longings for God and His goodness. This is what the Lord is - merciful. "He will not always chide" He does sometimes, yes, you must own that. You may say He has chid you many a time, reprovved and rebuked you many a time; now for this sin, then for that; now you have looked at this sin, and that good thing, and your heart has gone out after vanity, and that you have sinned a sin, not literally, but in your spirit, forbidden in the chapter we were reading just now, some pleasant picture you have made to yourself and hung it on the walls of your mind, some pretty imagination you have had, and have gone against God, and for these things He has come to chide with you. But He says "I will not contend for ever". How merciful He is. He will not contend for ever lest the soul should fail before Him and the spirit which He has made. He knows we cannot bear much of His chiding; He knows that the soul soon begins to faint when He chides. You understand me. Now here is a kind God. "He will not always chide". The punished child repents and the father soon relents and turns with double love. Beautiful are Hart's words:

What treatment since he came?

that is the prodigal

Love tenderly expressed

What robe is brought to hide his shame?

The best, the very best

"He will not always chide." He chides enough to make you sorry for your sins, your departures from Him. He chides enough to make you mourn, and come within that word: "Blessed are they that mourn", but the chiding does not continue. "Neither will He keep His anger for ever". He speaks of it as being for a moment. In a moment, and for a moment, I hid Myself from thee, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee. This God is our God. This God I declare to you in a feeble way. This is the God of love, the God of salvation, the God of mercy, the God who forgives sins, and justifies the ungodly.

This, this is the God we adore  
Our faithful, unchangeable Friend,  
Whose love is as large as His power  
And knows neither measure nor end

Chiding is measured. "I will correct thee in measure". Not boundless is this chiding, not everlasting, but "in measure", but mercy knows no measure. "For I have said mercy shall be built up for ever" (Psalm 89 v 2) "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities". Is not it true in your cases? Look at your sins, then look at the chiding. What proportion is there between them? As you cannot measure your sins, so neither can you measure God's goodness. His chiding has been measured; His mercy has not been, cannot be. "He hath not dealt with us". When He has smitten us it has been far, far, less than our iniquities deserve. He has, in His chiding, exacted of us less than our iniquities deserve; nor rewarded us according to our ways toward Him. "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us". When you can bring east and west together, then you may bring your sins and your souls together. You who have been burdened, you see the sun rise in the east in the morning; you turn away from the east and your eye traverses the vast expanse of the heavens and you say in the evening the sun will go down in the west. You cannot bring these two together; never will. And so far as the east is from the west, and so impossible as it is for the east and the west to come together, so far, and so impossible is it that the sins of the Lord's people, being removed, should come again to them. He hath cast our sins behind His back; He has cast them into the depths of the sea; they do not exist to Him. Even as a thing that has slipped from your memory does not exist to your memory for the time being, so neither do your sins dwell before God. They are not, in His sight. O what a wonder this is, that the Lord should put away the sins of a sinner and never rake them up again. "When the sins of Israel are sought for they shall not be found". They are cast behind God's back into the depths of the sea, and though the sea will give up her dead, she will never give up those sins which God has cast into the very depth; so the people of God are in a good state. Not always a good feeling, but in a good state. They are the Lord's and they are His

children and "Like as a father pitieth His children,so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." Like as when a child is in trouble or a family in distress, the pity and love and compassion of the father flow out to them,and every possible effort is put forth to help them and to bring them out of trouble. So God, with no limitation of love or of ability, or of will, or of power, or of resource,pities His children who fear Him. Poor, self-condemned soul, you wont get beyond this; you wont be able to put yourself beyond the pale of this; outside this no poor child of God shall ever find himself. "Like as a father pitieth his children" Now He will pity them in their ignorance and teach them, and sweet is that gospel that reveals our great High Priest as "able to have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way" He sends His good Spirit to teach them; He gives them His good Spirit to lead them in the way everlasting, to lead them in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. This is pity, the compassion of God looking down upon one of His poor, ignorant ones and seeing how apt he is to slide and how ready to turn aside through ignorance, the good Spirit of God comes to him and shows him the right way, even the Lord Jesus, and the way of prayer, the way of faith, the way of hope, the way of love, and turns his feet into that way. "I am the way". What kindness God shows here, what pity He manifests to His children here, when He comes and says to them: "This is the way, walk ye in it". When, looking on them and hearing their enquiry - Where is the way to Zion, and their faces are turned thitherward - He sends His good Spirit and opens to them the Lord Jesus Christ; Christ and Him crucified; Christ's blood for cleansing, Christ's righteousness for justification, Christ's grace for sanctification, Christ's power for the battle and for victory. And the Spirit shows this to one who mourns his ignorance. Good is the word of the Lord in this text,then: "Like as a father pitieth his children". A wise parent does this. He will see that his children are educated to the best of his ability, and wont let them - his very pity would forbid him allowing them to - grow up in utter ignorance. So God, loving His children, intends, and insists upon this, that they shall be instructed. Though in their waywardness they think they know better, He, in His wisdom,is determined that they shall learn some lessons; determined that they shall come down in their pride; determined that they shall come to the cross, where they may find life and hope and peace and all good things. How many of you has God pitied

in respect of your ignorance? How many of you has He turned to Christ's cross, caused you to see Christ and Him crucified? It was true pity, infinite kindness, and compassion He manifested to you at that time. As a father pities a child who needs to be taught and says he shall be taught, so the Lord sees that we need to be taught, and says we are to be taught; He will have us taught and sends His good Spirit. Nehemiah celebrates God's goodness in that particular, as many others. He says - Thou gavest them Thy good Spirit; Thou gavest them good laws and statutes and judgments. So the Lord does to His children in the Spirit. He gives them the law of grace, the law of Christ and the gospel, statutes of truth and love and forgiveness and salvation and mercy and these He instructs them in. The whole of that is set out by Isaiah where he, in the spirit of prophecy, says that "the law shall go forth of Zion", and those who are to be instructed and feel their need of instruction shall say, each to the other: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the house of the Lord for He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths." It is good of God to take pains with ignorant people, to, as Dr Watts expresses it

Take the fool and make him know  
The mysteries of His grace

Good to take us in hand, seeing, as He does, our waywardness and the darkness of our understandings, and patient He is in this. We are ready to forget exceedingly because what lessons the Lord teaches us are against the pride of our nature. But no, He says, you shall not forget and when we do forget He says you must learn it again, and at the end of a long pilgrimage the same pride would make the same person ready to forget, so the Lord teaches him again and yet again, and this, His pity comes forth in this particular. "Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him". And then, too, we are very helpless and are often a prey to this evil and that temptation and we bring ourselves into captivity. And God sends some army against us, perhaps an army of fears that things are not right with us. Then when there is no helper left and no strength left, He pities.

He pities all their griefs  
When sinking makes them swim

and says, "Return unto Me for I have redeemed thee". Return to Me O wandering child. The Lord sends help from the Sanctuary and strengthens out of Zion these objects of His pity. Pity is compassion in the spirit and the heart and pity, when God shows it, is His merciful sustenance. He sends help from the Sanctuary and strengthens out of Zion. It is Christ's work; as you know it is prophesied of Him in the Psalm: "He shall save the poor and the needy and him that hath no helper". And here I must leave it. May the good God give us to enter experimentally into this Psalm and into this word, so that our praises may rise high and we may be for His glory in the Church by Christ Jesus.

AMEN