

50

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
on Sunday morning 12 August 1934

Psalm 107 v 43

"Whoso is wise and will observe these  
things, even they shall understand the  
lovingkindness of the Lord"

To confine ourselves this morning to this Psalm, we may regard it as setting out the whole life pilgrimage, sins, shortcomings, troubles, adversities, prayer, answers to prayer, and exhortations to praise God. The different ways in which the Church of the living God walk, the painful outbreaks of sin, the sin lodging in their nature; the merciful, though often severe, chastisement of God which their sin calls for and brings to them; the earnest cry, born of trouble and of the Spirit. These things are very beautifully set out in this Psalm. The various gradients, stages of experience, also we have here. In the first stanza, or first nine verses of this Psalm, one might take it to set forth the beginning, the simplicity of the child of God called by that invincible call, the Holy Ghost working mightily in their hearts, and in these first verses we have no word concerning backsliding or anything of that kind. They are full of zeal; they are called away from the world; they are brought into trouble; they lose their home so to speak; they have to leave it. As Pilgrim left the City of Destruction, so these called ones have to leave and did leave their city. They came into the wilderness; they found no way there - no way back and no way forward; shut up in the wilderness. Is not that what some of us have experienced? some many years ago, perhaps; some more recently. No way. Perplexity, trouble, loss of all things as to real value. They cry; they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, must do, and they are taught to do it. The Holy Spirit is in them though they may not think it. Perhaps if you had told them He had made them His temple, they would not have believed you. But so it was with these people. So it is today. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble. Well now, if some of you who are young in the ways of God are put to it to examine yourselves by not looking at yourselves simply, but by these verses, the City of

Destruction you have realised yours as an inhabitant of. You have had to flee from it, did not know where to go; do not now perhaps know where to go. The wickedness of your heart, the corruptions of your nature you have some knowledge of. What do you do? Let honest conscience answer. If it answers this is what you will be saying, I cry to God. I go to the throne of grace or try to get there. I pour out my heart to God. I tell Him I am a lost soul; I tell Him that I have not one little bit of hope now in myself nor any help in myself. I am brought to despair of self and in self. Not a bad place. You say, but most uncomfortable. True, but there is much discomfort in true religion. An eternity of happiness awaits the saints, but here they have to prove in the beginning and throughout, Christ's word: "In the world ye shall have tribulation". Judge yourselves, as you may be enabled, by this great Word of God. "They wandered in the wilderness" - no rest. Conscience has no rest; the affections have no rest, know not on whom to place them. Your heart has no rest, no centre. Then faith - you would not think it faith, perhaps you do not now - but faith cries unto God. "Lord save or I perish". That is what is brought to pass in the experience of poor people in their beginning.

Later in this Psalm we find these pilgrims rebelling. They have had hope; they have had deliverance; they have had food filling them, satisfying them, and after a time the affections which were set on God now wander, and the heart that was wholly His now is divided. The throne on which the sinner asked Him to condescend to come and sit as King, now you give something or somebody else a place. So, throughout, changes, sins, chastisements deserved, merciful. And the text says: "Whoso is wise and will observe these things", the things of this Psalm, "even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord."

First, a little of this wisdom. "Whoso is wise", watchful, careful, does not want to let anything slip away from him, enters into that which is in the Hebrews: "We ought therefore to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard." The spirit is heedful. What has God done? You would fain remember it. What has He said to you? You would fain think of it, as to its bearing, its influence on your spirit. What it did for you; what it brought to

you. How careful it made you. "Whoso". How many Christians here have this wisdom? You may have years and years to go back. You may go back to places where you were left to brow-beat your conscience to do something you knew was not right in the sight of God though perhaps not guilty among men. You slipped away from prayer, from the Scriptures as to a prayerful reading of them. Then came trouble, perhaps rebuke spoken with living power on your conscience, setting before you how you have gone away from God. Then came a trouble; God left you to be in a dry place, nothing to refresh you, no living water to quench the thirst that now you felt. No bread of life to appease your appetite. That now was gone. You found trouble. "I found" said the Psalmist in another place "trouble and sorrow". So people find who turn away and slip away from God.

"These things". There will be two things prominent if you are wise, two things prominent in your observation. The first, your unwise and base returns to God for His undeserved mercy. You did not deserve it when He came to you in the operations of His Spirit and washed you with the washing of regeneration. You did not deserve to be turned away and brought out of the City of Destruction. No, you were just brought by the observation that now you were enabled to make to say O how base have been my returns; how wicked my behaviour toward God. Then you say, He has chastened me. You will see more love in the chastening than ever an unbelieving heart will allow. Oh the pains God has taken with some of us. The kindness of God in hedging up our way, perhaps with thorns, and yet, so bent on evil and mischief is the heart, that it breaks through a hedge of thorns. Then says God, I will build a wall of hewn stones around her that she shall not find her paths. God fixes people when He chastens them. He will have them come back. He loves them so He wont let them destroy themselves and so He hedges up their way, builds walls of hewn stones. Now that is a great wonder, one of the wonders of God in His Church, that He does chasten. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth". Every son He receives He chastens, lays the rod on them. A good old woman at Leicester, who died many years ago, said, speaking of the birch which God had laid on her: "I bless Him for every twig", and you will bless Him for every twig of the birch that He lays on you. The rod is for the back of the fool. The stocks are for the feet of wanderers. If you are wise you will observe these things.

Next, you will observe this, that there arose in your chastened heart a prayer. An astonishment perhaps that was to you, an astonishment to hear the Lord say in your heart: "O Israel thou hast destroyed thyself. Now take with you words and turn again to the Lord. Say unto Him - Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously, so will we render the calves of our lips." That prayer, thus dictated and indited gets an answer. "I will heal their backslidings". He does it. He delivers them from their destructions. Sin has destroyed their comforts and threatens to destroy their souls. The devil has destroyed all their steadfastness and threatened to drive them into perdition. Now it is written: "He delivered them from their distresses. He delivered them from their destructions." The cry is a mighty cry that the Spirit of God enables them to send to heaven.

Then we find this also to be observed that the healing comes. "He sent His word and healed them" The healing is by the atonement applied to their hearts by the Spirit. It is a healing of the conscience, a sweet healing that. When the guilt of backsliding is heavier and more bitter than all the sins that have procured that guilt, it is a great thing to have the blood of Christ on your conscience. It is here in this blessed Book, but every one taught of the Spirit wants to have it also on his conscience.

To observe these things is to watch them. Let us look at this for a minute. Whoso will watch, watch several things. First the goings of God in His sanctuary, the goings of the Spirit in your hearts, those convictions, those cries, those sighs, those unuttered, unutterable prayers, groanings which cannot be uttered. Observe these things. They are to be observed. Oh they are worthy of all the close attention we may be able to give to them. Every sigh that you sigh toward God, that you may possess Him. Every glance of faith that is directed by the Spirit to the cross of Christ. Every humble confession you are enabled to make of your sins and base treatment of your best Friend. Watch these things. You will find that they always will lead you to the throne of grace. They will direct your eyes and your heart and your hungry soul to the Lord of life and glory, and cry mightily for the Bread of Life which shall nourish your faith. Observe the effect of chastening. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear". When the rod makes

your back sore, when the rebuke pierces your conscience, when the frown that you feel is on the face of God toward you affects you, when you say: "O I deserve this and hell afterward" and yet find your heart crying: "Lord be gracious to me", watch this. It is God's kindness. See the effect of chastening. As blessed, you do not rebel. As weak, you may sink very much in your heart, but, as chastened and the chastening is blessed, then you move Godward. See how it separates you from yourself, how it turns you away from things you indulged, the sins you loved. See how it moves you toward God in a way that, during your backsliding, you knew nothing about. "My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him". What is it to despise God's chastening? To take no notice of it, not to be affected well by it. The fire may burn Jacob but Jacob may not know what it is. He knows something is wrong, but does not know who kindles the fire. That, in your case, is to despise God's chastening. You may even philosophise about it. You may say of some chastening, some external trouble - yea other people have trouble, and why should not I have it? That is despising it. This is the best: "Hear the rod and who has appointed it" and the honest conscience says: "Lord enable me to listen to this rod, what it has to say to me. The rebuke, the reproof, the instruction, enable me to hear all these." "Whoso is wise" in this. Then also observe how God has dealt with you. He has said, after a time of chastening: "It is enough". He stops it. The punished child repents; the offended Father relents, turns with double love, kisses the prodigal, welcomes him home. This is to be observed. There are several things in this which it is well for us if we can observe, namely, first the sweet attraction to God. There is in Him an attraction that you had no notice of, no inkling of it, while you were in a backsliding state. Now you see that there is mercy, bowels of mercy, tender compassion, great goodness, infinite fulness, and faithfulness that reach unto the clouds. Faith looks at these things. Observe them my friends. You who have had this may now be having these experiences. Observe this. God appears now to be kind where before He seemed to be severe and unkind. Observe the healing. This is wonderful. "I will heal their backsliding". Their cry has been "Heal me O Lord for I have sinned. Heal the bones which Thou hast broken". And now the healing is given. The smile on God's face turns the winter into summer. The motions of love and of the Spirit of God bring poor sinners to His blessed footstool and instead of frowning

them away He welcomes them and He comforts them. Now they know that there is comfort in love, that there is fellowship in the Spirit. They observe these things.

Now you who are really true children of the living God, who have had some experience of the various things in this Psalm, and have had the healing, the lovingkindness of the Lord, have you not found this, that it has been profitable to you to observe, to watch? Must not some of us confess that the lack of watchfulness, of observation, has brought loss to us? I have lost much for lack of observation.

What is the result of observing these things? Even they, who thus do, shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord. What is this understanding but a gracious experience of what the Lord has done. They shall understand that He is better than all their fears and more than that. I have said more than once, better than all one's expectation. Your expectation will never reach the height of God's lovingkindness; that is infinite. Expectation may be more or less strong in you. To understand it is to be sweetly led into the knowledge of God, to grow in the knowledge of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ. It is to realise that the blood of Christ has infinite value and efficacy, that no sin, and no fear, and no guilt can ever outdo or overcome the precious blood of Christ. Now have you entered into this? "Even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." Let me name it in two things briefly. First, how that the Holy Spirit has been poured upon you like a shower, as floods upon the dry ground, and filled your barren heart with fruitfulness, And then, secondly, providence. Better, O better than all the fears. The feared destruction has not come. God has been so good, so kind in providence. He has restored the waste places, brought deliverances where none was expected. Job, at the end of his trial, had twice as much as before that came upon him. Now, as the good old Puritan ministers, called the painful ministers, would say, now for the application.

If you understand the lovingkindness of the Lord, you have found this, an establishment in your souls as to your standing with God. We have this in another Psalm a little further on: "I love the Lord because He hath heard my voice and my supplication, because He hath

inclined His ear unto me. Therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live." There is a real establishment in the heart. It is an establishment, not with meats and drinks, but with grace, which is good. It is good for the heart to be established, not with meats and drinks which should not profit them which have been exercised therein, but with the grace of God. Have you found that you are not quite as ready now to doubt your interest as you were before the chastening and the healing? You are not as ready now to say He has gone for ever, as you used to be. You can follow Erskine

Say not He is gone for ever  
Though His visits He adjourn

You hold fast. You feel you have got a Friend in heaven whatever happens to you. There is an establishment. Secondly is there not also an enlargement of love, an excitement in your heart of love to the Lord? He has done so much for you these years, so often delivered you, so often broken your heart, so often said: "Fear not I am with thee". Yea, He has said: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" for I, the Lord thy God, am with thee. And you may not now, as formerly, confine His presence to the sensation of it. You are enabled to believe, though you do not feel His presence, that He is still with you. That is a great thing and I say, as an application of the whole text, the subject, it is one of the results of observing the lovingkindness of the Lord.

And next, is there not an obedience to this word: "O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men?" You say, He found me in a barren land; I dwelt in a dry land because of my rebellion and He came to me. Now I will bless Him while I live. I will sing His high praises for His great goodness to one so utterly unworthy. Let us praise the Lord, dear friends, for His great kindness, His lovingkindness. When we rebelled against His words He forgave our sin and comforted us with love. Lastly is not one thing to be said concerning the result of this experience, that the heart is more fully set toward heaven. Some things we set our affections on, and by reason of which we become

hardened backsliders, God has taken away the beauty of them, the attraction of them in some degree. At times we have said

Let worldly minds the world pursue  
It hath no charms for me

God, righteousness, justification, forgiveness, with all the blessings of the gospel, these are what the soul now is after more than before. Even as Christ set His face stedfastly to go to Jerusalem, so His people, through grace, set their faces stedfastly, more stedfastly as the result of chastening and of healing than before. Take heed dear friends how you do and deal with God. Take heed lest your hearts be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Take heed to the awful effect of becoming prayerless, and walking disorderly in your heart, though you may walk orderly enough outwardly. Take heed as to your affections, where they are placed. If you do, then you will find this, that although God will chasten, does chasten, yet He turns again with double love and says: "Is Ephraim My dear Son, is he a pleasant child, for since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still. Therefore my bowels are troubled for him. I will surely have mercy upon him."

"Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord" and they shall take it as a foretaste of heaven whither their hearts are bent to go.

AMEN.