

Sermon preached by Mr JK Popham at Galeed Chapel, Brighton on Sunday morning 20 July 1930

PSALM 116 v 5 "Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea our God is merciful"

If we have friends, we are interested in them. What affects them affects us. Are we interested in God's character? What affects Him, does it affect us? Have we any interest in this Being? If we believe Him to be, would we have Him to be other than He is? Less holy, less just, less wise, less glorious? We are interested in ourselves, but are we interested in God's Name, and character? If His Name is touched, are we touched? Do we burn with jealousy for His honour? One may say, But I want to know if I am right. You cannot know that you are right unless you know God. You cannot know that you are right unless you know God in Christ, and you cannot know Christ without divine teaching. And if you do know Him, then surely what relates to Him, what is for His honour, you will have some interest in. If we are really interested in God this morning, the text may be a great one to us. It may have, so to put it, beautiful feet on the mountains bringing to us tidings of a great God. The text is good news. If we be sinners it must be, and will be, good news to us that there is such a God as is here described. Three things are predicted of Him.

He is gracious - that deserves attention

He is righteous-that no less calls for the closest attention. Who, in believing Him, would have Him other than righteous?

He is merciful-and if we be sinners such as Christ came to call, not righteous people, what a word may this be made to us. "Yea, our God is merciful". Has mercy for misery; human misery, soul misery, misery for sin. Misery for barrenness, misery for backsliding. Who by searching can find out God? What human tongue is sufficient to speak of infinity? Yet God has ordained that some men-and among them the worst of men- shall speak for Him. "Gracious is the Lord".

This word calls for the closest scrutiny must surely, under the Spirit's grace, be attractive to men, and women, who feel their need of grace, and God has shown this, His graciousness, in various ways. "God who in times past and in divers manners spake unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." That tells us that God's graciousness, in the first place, is made known by the gift of the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments. Let us try to follow this thought, this wonderful character of God, rather that He has graciously shown Himself by revelation of Himself in the gift of the Holy Scripture. No child of God will say that he has given all the attention he should

made known by the gift of the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments. Let us try to follow this thought, this wonderful character of God, rather that He has graciously shown Himself by revelation of Himself in the gift of the Holy Scripture. No child of God will say that he has given all the attention he should have done to the Word of God; that he has realised, as he would realise, the graciousness of God in the gift of the Bible. Who by searching can find out God? Who could have imagined the glorious character of Jehovah had He not been a self-revealing Jehovah? Infinite purity, infinite justice, infinite wisdom, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, no beginning, no end - Jehovah. And not the Unitarian Jehovah but the Trinitarian Jehovah; One God subsisting in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these names set forth their mode of subsistence; the Father, the Son by eternal generation, the Holy Spirit proceeding from them both. And this God has revealed His graciousness in revealing Himself in the gift of the Scriptures. Consider, for a moment, what inspiration involves. The implications of inspiration are wonderful. Consider circumstances. History had to be, before the inspiration of its relation could be. Creation must be. Providence - the raising up of men, particular men, individuals, of families, the migration of men after the fall, the collecting of men, particular men as Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the making of a Covenant with those men, that there should be from them an election of people to whom God would make known His will as to worship, and the confining to that nation of true worship for many generations. Consider the gospel histories, the life of the Lord Jesus, His incarnation, His wonderful devotion to His Father, whose servant He voluntarily became, saying-as in the psalms it is written- "I delight to do thy will O, My God. Yea, Thy law is within my heart". Consider the training of men, the permission of God that the Apostle Paul should be a persecutor, and an injurious person, and that, at the set time, when bent on destroying that religion that came from heaven, that blessed Lord met him, quickened, converted, and turned him into a marvellous Apostle, the chief of the Apostles. Consider the providence that banished John to the Isle that is called Patmos, for the Word of God, that there he should receive the Revelation which we have at the close of the sacred Canon. And all these things contributed to this thing that we understand by the word "inspiration". God breathing out from Himself into mouths, and into the minds, and so to put it, into the pens, of the men who should be employed to write this Book, and all for the purpose that Paul expresses - "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope." This inspiration of the Bible makes the doctrines of it infinitely important, the precepts of it not less important, the promises of it full God. Full of His goodness, of His mercy, of His love, of His power, of His faithfulness. And this should, this will, if rightly apprehended by us, make us value the word of God, make us jealous of His honour in it, jealous of the doctrines propounded in it, jealous of His Name in those doctrines. Gracious is

the Lord in the gift of the Scriptures. And I press this on your notice because we have come to a day, the darkness, and the evil of which cannot be exaggerated, when this Bible is trampled underfoot, when its inspiration is denied; when, even if in some sense inspiration be permitted, be allowed, it is not perfect; when even the Lord Jesus has not escaped the evil tongue of religious teachers; that He was but a Jew, that He was ignorant, that He spake under the influence of Jewish prejudice, and Jewish training, and all kind of thing, and when the blessed doctrines of grace are trampled underfoot. Have we an interest in this God, in this Bible? The Lord give to us grace to jealously regard it, hold it, and as it may be given to us in any way or capacity, to defend it. It is no little thing that God has given to a man in the gift of the Bible. Asking what advantage the Jew had over the Gentile, seeing he is depraved equally with the Gentile, the Apostle Paul answers the question himself - "Much in every way chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God". And they did not value the oracles. They disobeyed God, they broke through the boundary of divine prohibitions, and they neglected the distinct ordinances, and they provoked God to jealousy by gods He had not sent or created or thought of. It never, as he spoke, came into His mind. Yet these people, favoured beyond all other nations, trespassed against Him, broke through all boundaries, transgressed, and stepped over every line that God had laid down to keep them in. And that brought on them His judgements, and His desolations. But we are different, some may say. In what respect? Is human nature different? Is the fall less in a Gentile than in the Jew? O, but we know the Bible. Well, did not the Jew know it? Was not the tribe of Levi set apart to teach the people God's precepts, God's ordinances? And yet with all that they broke through, they transgressed, they rebelled, they did wickedly. We are no better. We have proved - said Paul to the Romans - we have proved both Jew and Gentile utterly depraved, wrong, evil, and only evil. O, but we hold the doctrines of grace. Well, where do you hold them? In your head, or by faith? If in the former, you won't be long before you give them up if trouble should come on account of them. If by faith, then you need the communication of grace every minute to keep you, specially in the hour of temptation that shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth. "Gracious is the Lord". O, brethren, do ask Him to enable you to hold fast by His inspired Word. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God". God breathed; breathed out, so to speak, His mind into the heart of a person whom He would employ to express that mind in the Scripture. Think of it, just meditate upon the importance of a word that God breathed out of His heart; He breathed it into the inspired writers, rendering them infallible whilst thus under His great power, the breathing into them of His word, so that though each writer retained his own natural disposition, he was, notwithstanding an instrument, a man who should just say what God breathed into him. This makes this Book unique; it sets it apart from all other books. And it is not without reason that I call your attention to this, because the days are

evil, and it is very likely the day will come when some of you younger people - if I do not see it - will find that your attitude to this Book - that is, how you hold it, what you believe of it - will be a test, and do not forget one important thing that in his temptation Jesus Christ met the tempter with the inspired word-"It is written", "It is written" , "It is written". If you think you can meet the tempter by any other means, or weapons, you are woefully mistaken. But if God has given you His word, not only in the Book, but in some parts of it in your hearts, and made you receive the whole of it as His blessed Word, then the weapon that you will effectually use against your enemy will be- "It is written". You may say, I am a poor, ignorant creature liable to fall at any moment; any temptation that may come may prove fatal to my steadfastness. Yet, if God has given you His blessed Word, you may say to the tempter - "It is written". Some of us have woefully failed in respect of that divine precept given by Peter - "Be sober, be vigilant", and that word in Proverbs - "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it the issues of life"

I would, in the next place, speak of the graciousness of God in His providence. His providence is the working out of His divine purposes. The hymnwriter says that it was His decree that formed the earth that fixed our first and second birth, if indeed we be born a second time. Our parents, their position, and our consequent training and position God had in His mind in eternity. We were not like so many atoms floating promiscuously without design, coming clashing one against another anyhow, but just born, and bred, and directed according to the purpose of God. When men look at this, when the fear of God is in them as they look at this, they may come to reckon that their worst things were among their best; that when they thought they were going a wrong way, they proved it to be the right way; that being emptied of some things it was that they might be filled with some other, and better things. Solemn, O, solemn is providence, not to be trifled with at all. Strange providences may have people from town to town, giving one this occupation, and another that occupation, and all for the purpose of fulfilling His decrees. Strange was the providence of God in allotting to the nations of the earth so much here and there. And there was one particular thing in His doing this. Who would have thought that when He divided the nations their lots, He had one nation before Him, and all the rest had but just to be moved, and placed, in respect of the need of that nation, the lot of His inheritance, the cord which He drew, and all for the purpose of fixing His religion there, gathering the people to that place, and for that purpose. Now apply this to your own cases. What strange movements may have been with regard to some of you, and how solemnly you may have thought, this surely cannot be for good, yet it turned out to be for the best. "Who so is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord ". He does nothing in vain. He does nothing unwisely, for He is too wise to err, too good to be unkind. Take, O, take special notice, as you may be enabled, of

the providence of God with you; and not with you only, but in relation to others, in relation to the church of God, and above all things, in relation to His Own glory, for at is His great end, and if you be rightly exercised, there will be at times that in your mind - Will this providence, this trial, this loss, this affliction, tend to the glory of God, in my good? 'Gracious is the Lord.'

In the third place He is gracious in calling into being in different localities visible churches. There is an invisible church made up of the election of grace. No man can infallibly say of another - looking at another as possessing what is esteemed to be grace - that is a child of God. The true church is invisible. Grace becomes visible in its fruits, but there are so many things like grace, counterfeits by the devil invented, that it comes to pass that you cannot say with absolute infallibility, he is a child of God, or she is a child of God. That is known to each person by the witness of the Spirit. But now there are visible churches. O, the graciousness of God in this. The health of a visible church in a neighbourhood; the glory of God set on a hill in a visible church, the glory of divine truth, the doctrines of truth; very great and much to be observed. "Gracious is the Lord" - when a man says, I will start a cause in this place, he may do it, and not have God in it. I know of a chapel that was built in a wrong spirit, and to the man who was first of all in it, I said, You may build your chapel, but you wont get God in it. There was nothing but confusion for more than thirty years in that dying place. But when God starts a cause he sends a minister, when He sends His holy Word, and applies it by the Spirit of Truth, then there is an establishment. And though that minister may cease his ministry after years, there will be something left that will show that God set that place on a good footing. What grace God shows in raising up a visible church. It is for His glory. Paul writes to the Ephesians thus, speaking of the Father - "To whom be glory in the church by Christ Jesus world without end." This makes membership of a church very solemn. It makes the entrance into a visible church a serious step, and all who rightly view the matter will not lightly take the step of entering, or seeking to enter into, the church of God on earth. But God is very gracious when He unites people one to the other in the Lord Jesus, and when He says to them by the Apostle to the Ephesians - "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". Walk with all lowliness. "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness". "Let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2 v 3 and 4). "Confess your faults one to another". "Be not high-minded". All these Scriptures are addressed to visible churches in their individual members; to us here as a church - and in a sense, and for the moment, I wish our many friends who are absent were present with us but God will speak to them no doubt - that we may, as a people "Walk unto all pleasing". A solemn Scripture - 'Walk unto all pleasing'. "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called". That means separation

from the world. It means self-denial, it means taking your cross up, it means bearing and forbearing. It calls for humility, and for patience, and it will bring about self-examination from time to time, so that each other, each member, will say, I am not fit to be in this church, I am so vile, and yet he will say, I am glad, and thankful to be in it. "Gracious is the Lord" in this.

My brethren, notice God's word. It is a very special word. The world is full of books, but there is only one Book that is called by one name - it is distinguished by its name from all other books - the Bible, the collection of what it took many generations to write, for God was not in haste to compose the Scriptures. But all gathered together in this Book, this volume; will find one name covering the whole, characterising the whole distinguishing the whole from all other books, and works - The Bible. and the Bible is particular. It says to the church at Ephesus - 'walk worthy'. It says to the church in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ at Thessalonica be careful to hold your vessels in sanctification and honour. (1Thessalonians 4 v 3). So there is sufficient in these things to call for our attention, and to lead us to examine ourselves, and ask the question - Do we regard God's Word as we should do? Do we regard providence in the way in which God speaks of it? And do we, if we are parts of a visible church walk as God has commanded us by the commandments of His holy Apostles and Prophets? Have we grown easy? Has persecution so long ceased, left us dry, unexercised, easy, so that we have a cold respectability in religion, little or no exercise? Now God is gracious in these things. I won't pursue this any further this morning. You may be able to fill in yourselves as you have occasion to remember the way God has led you. And you will find, if it be so with you, that many, and many a time, at many, and many a turn in providence of God's dealings with you, you will be constrained to say, Gracious was the Lord. Gracious to my soul, gracious to me in providence, gracious to my family, gracious to the church. And O, as you say it from your heart, then you will follow the precept of Paul where he says - Bring the sacrifice of thanksgiving to God, the fruit of your lips. "Praise is comely for the upright". Surely it is most comely for men to whom God has shown Himself gracious, that they bring the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to Him. Dear friends, this graciousness of God will continue to the very end. He has set before His people in His graciousness an open door, an open door to the throne of grace, and never says, You come too often. He may say, You brought Me no sweet cane with money. He may say You have neglected My ordinances. He may say, You have sinned, and rebelled, and have done wickedly. And if you are looking at your barrenness, if you are wondering at judgements, if you are wondering why he deals thus and thus with you; now turn to your sins, turn to My Word - if you walk frowardly to Me, I will walk frowardly to you. Turn to my word-'With the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward". And this then will be one result, you will believe what is written in the Book of Job, namely, that He exacteth of you

less than your iniquities deserve. I am sure you will say it. Every child of God under affliction, and under the teaching of the Spirit will say, He has exacted of me less than my iniquities deserve. How many of us have been brought to that place? We have talked about God, we have talked about religion, we speak of experience, but then this is a closer thing - Have we had dealings with Him, and has He shown himself gracious to us in some communication, some teaching, some touch of His love, and His power, and His goodness, for what is experimental religion but the dealing of God with a soul, and the soul's dealing with God. If I understand it rightly, that is experimental religion; that you can say occasionally, I have felt that God in some way drew near; that He spoke to me; that He reproved me for some sins or some special sin; and that He gave me grace to confess those sins or that sin; that He enabled me to confess sincerely, with abhorrence of myself. Then you will say perhaps at another time, O, He spoke so kindly, tenderly, graciously, sweetly, that my soul dissolved before Him. I wondered at His goodness. "Gracious is the Lord." Then you perhaps begin with this Psalm - "I love the Lord" - great it is to say it - "I love the Lord because He hath heard my voice, and my supplications" Not a little thing to be able to say, this, that God has heard your voice when it was a voice crying out of affliction, a voice confessing innumerable sins; when it was a voice expressing great, and urgent needs, and that then, through Jesus Christ, He heard and sent some answers. Because He hath heard my voice and y supplications". And that will bring about a sweet resolve - "Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live". Some people may say, that would be legal; that would be legal. Well, if it be legal to resolve to call on God whom you love, love because He hath inclined His ear to you; in whom you have confidence; in whom you hope for grace to the end; I say, if it be legal solemnly to resolve to call on Him as long as you live, then may He fill all of us who fear His Name with legality. Blessed be God, He does give His people a heart to say, I will, as the Lord helps me, call upon Him in every hour of need. In every time of trouble, in all temptations, I will call upon His blessed Name, for I have no hope except Himself, and expect no deliverance but that which He commands for me. And so you will say at the last, as at the first- "Gracious is the Lord". Very gracious, infinitely gracious. Wider than all our wanderings from Him, deeper than all our depravity, and rebellion against Him, higher than the mountains of our sins, is this graciousness of a good God. May He enable us to believe it, and cleave close to Him through it. Amen.