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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 10 December 1922

PSALM 119 V 175

"Let my soul live and it shall praise Thee,
and let Thy judgments help me"

Then we may say that the Psalmist had death before him, death of which he was afraid, death which he himself could not avert, could not avoid, but faith in him sent out this petition: "Let my soul live". We are more familiar with the word "death" than with the thing and yet the word itself may not have been much or deeply or closely considered. Death is the total and final cessation of all the functions of life and a unsusceptibility, incapability of the renewal of those functions and this death affects the whole human race, first the soul, then the body. First the soul - because on the day of the fall of Adam the soul died, lost all power, was unable, and ever since then has been unable, incapable of any of its proper functions, God-ward functions - then the body in time. And this death is exceedingly solemn. We were all born in the first; we must all know the second. I said we are incapable of any God-ward movements any right functions in our souls. To be sure men speak of God, think of Him, have notions about Him, but they know Him not. None of us can be said to know God by nature. The proper actings of the soul God-ward are belief in Him, love to Him and perfect obedience to His commandments. These are the natural motions of the immortal soul as created by God, and the body, untainted by sin was the servant of the soul. So long as the functions of the soul were healthy, right and God-ward, so long was the body perfect. And when disobedience brought death - according to God's word to Adam: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shall surely die" - then the whole of human nature was just warped, turned out of the right course and killed in respect of God; killed, dead. And of each one here that was true, and of some, alas may be true now: "Dead in trespasses and sins". Consider it for a moment. A person created by God, a good God, placed in the most advantageous position imaginable, in a garden planted by God Himself, the whole of the garden at the man's command and for his

enjoyment with one exception. "In the day that thou eatest thereof". All the trees of the garden are yours, for your enjoyment, for your life, all of them, but this one tree you may not touch. If you touch it, you die. If you eat of the fruit of it, you die, and die to God. Thence forward there shall be no communications between us on the ground of the law. Can there be imagined any state or condition so dreadful, mournful, terrible, fearful in all the consequences of it, than this, a person, a living person, immortal, essentially immortal, cut off from that Being from whom his own being came; from that fountain of goodness that was to supply all the true appetite of man, cut off from that wonderful, glorious God. If we realise this, we realise a good deal of sorrow, we feel a good deal of shame, we perceive that on natural law grounds we are without hope. O sinner, it is solemn to be dead. You live in pleasure, but you are dead while you live. You think you are well though you are smitten with a deadly disease. You congratulate yourself perhaps upon having done this or attained to that, while yet you just have hanging over you the curse inevitable; it must fall on you unless, in the wisdom of God, it falls on a Surety. If a dead person is to live again it must be by a power outside himself; a miracle more wonderful than his first life, than his creation. Can this be? Can one, whose state is, as the Scriptures describe it - and I have just very feebly and briefly set it before you - can one in such a state be restored, and more than restored? Can his soul, incapable as it is in the fall, of a single act God-ward, that can be pleasing to God, come to be exceedingly pleasing to God and do acts which shall be acceptable? And the body - that through sin has become mortal, but because of its essential union with the soul and its essential immortality, must rise again - can that very body be raised again so as to wear the image of God, in a manner it did not wear it before, and enter a Paradise not to be defiled by sin as was the paradise in which our first parents were placed? If a true answer is given to these questions it must be afforded us by the Scripture, that is to say, it must be a divine revelation of God, and, blessed be the Name of God, such a revelation the Bible is. It does not contain a revelation; it is the revelation, the inspired, infallible word of the living God; is the revelation that He has made of Himself, of His purposes, of His will, His love, His mercy. A revelation of Jesus Christ, His eternal Son in our nature, in whom all the goodness that a sinner is to have is put,

was put from eternity. And the revelation too of the Third Person in the adorable Trinity, the Holy Ghost, who, in the fulfilment of covenant purposes, shall come to each person whom God has designed and ordained to obtain salvation by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; come to him as the Spirit of life in Christ, whereby he shall live for ever. O, what a revelation. It is so wondrous, so glorious, that it is not to be wondered at that Satan, being permitted to do it, should have stirred up men in these last days to deny the perfect inspiration of the Scripture. May God help us to hold fast that inspiration and believe that the Bible does not contain the Word of God, but that it is the Word of God. That the Bible is not a record of revelation, but it is the revelation. And when one is born again he sees in himself and feels such death and he is surrounded by such deathly influences and tempted to such wrong things as bring death, as to make him greatly fear sometimes, and to cry out with the Psalmist: "Let my soul live". The source of death is in us; the source of life is without us. The power of death is within us; the power of life is in God. "Let my soul live". Spiritual life is in Jesus Christ as its source. "This is the record that God hath given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son". And, says Christ in the gospel according to John, "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly". This is spiritual life; this is that regeneration of which the Scriptures speak, which is declared to be necessary to a man seeing the kingdom and then entering into it. "Except a man be born of the Spirit He cannot see the Kingdom of God, for that which is born of the flesh is flesh". Its functions are all fleshly; its circumference, its centre is this life, what the world contains. "That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." God is its centre; God is its termination; God is its great end; all meets in Him. So when the Psalmist prayed this prayer, his eye was on God. He felt death in himself but he perceived life in God. He could not, by himself, avoid that which was natural to him and the influence of sin and Satan, but he saw One who could come into his heart and be a life and a preserver, a protector, a guide, and his end, and so he prayed: "Let my soul live". "Let my soul live" in Christ.

And if you look to the law, if you consider your position under the law, if you feel under the law, you must be, inside, full of death, because the law is, as the Apostle calls it by inspiration,

"the ministration of death". It can do nothing else than minister death, speak death, and bring death, which is the curse of God. That is the best, that is the utmost of the law. Broken, not abrogated; powerful, though broken; full of life, though broken; full of authority, though despised; the law pronounces death. "The soul that sinneth it shall die". Not be annihilated; O, no; "It shall die" to God, die to the source of goodness, die to holiness, die to true happiness. The gospel is just the opposite, the ministration of life. That covenant of grace which the gospel reveals is a covenant of life and peace, and this, opened and applied, brings life to all the people of God. "Let my soul live" in Christ. "Ye are dead", said Paul, to the quickened Colossians, "and your life is hid with Christ in God". "You", says Paul to the Ephesians "hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins". This spiritual life is the life of Christ which He came to give to His people and does give to them. "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly". Now this life in the soul manifests itself two ways. It manifests itself by its appetites, by its pursuits, by that which is its end. It speaks its own end. Let us look a little at this. All life discovers itself and its own nature by its appetite. Spiritual life is no exception to this rule. It must discover itself by its appetite. You cannot feed this life on gold and silver. You cannot satisfy this life with speculations. Only one satisfaction can be given, can be received; that is God Himself. "The Lord is my portion saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him." Now my friends, set up this standard, bring yourselves to it. Have you an appetite for God? If you have not, then you are dead. If you have, whatever doubts may perplex and distress you, you have life, and the Scripture proves it, thus: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned". Hence the natural man goes his own way; downward, downward, downward, and the spiritual man goes his way and that way is upward, upward, upward; God-ward. "All men" says the prophet, "will walk in the name of his god. "And we", he continues - we, who are seeking the Lord, who are saying, each to the other "Come let us go up to the mountain of the house of the Lord, and he will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths" - "we will walk in the Name of the Lord our God". He is our Object, He is our aim, He is our nourishment, our All. O, happy man

who, in the midst of many things here to attract and to distract and to trouble and to allure, can say, "My soul wait thou only upon God"; out of whose heart at times will go, as with a great feeling bursting forth, "Thou O Christ art all I want". Blest soul that can say as much as that. "Let my soul live". "Let my soul live" in Christ. May He be my life; may He communicate His life to me; may He animate my soul with spirituality, so as that I may say, I want none, I seek none, but Himself. Well, it is a great thing to have an appetite for God, and this appetite will show itself variously at times, as for instance it will show itself by its searching into the Scriptures; its love for them. You will certainly hang about the Word of God if you have life. Often your eyes will be in it if haply they may light on something there suitable, something which God may speak. The Word of God is a great Word and you will esteem it as the Psalmist in this Psalm throughout esteemed it, as Job esteemed it, more than his necessary food. As the Psalmist said, "I have taken Thy testimonies unto me as a heritage for ever". The Word describes God, shows Him in His nature - Holy, holy, holy; eternal; "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light that no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see". It describes Him in His purpose of love, in His covenant of free grace, in His will that none can resist, in His power that shall protect His saints and support them and break into shivers, as with a rod of iron, His enemies; His pity, His patience, His goodness, His great salvation. It describes Him in Christ, in that wondrous Man in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily; in the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the Trinity, who proceeds from the Father and the Son and is the quickener and teacher and guide and help of all the saints of the Most High. And if you have spiritual life, this great One will certainly be often in your thoughts and you will be wishing to know Him and praying to know Him and to receive Him. Your appetite will be that way, with that great Object. And the Scriptures speak of salvation - "Salvation is of the Lord" - of righteousness imputed, of forgiveness freely given, of sanctification made over to the soul by Jesus Christ. What are the Scriptures to you? A beautiful Book, whose diction you admire, whose doctrines you more or less think to be right? O, that is poor; it is good enough in itself, but it is poor. If you can say - some parts of this Book have been made over to me; I have felt their power; they have shone into my heart and I have seen God in the light of them; some of them, as

promises, have warmed and strengthened me in my soul; some of them have set before me a great God and I have trembled; a suitable Saviour, and I have hoped; a Holy Spirit and I have craved to have Him in my heart as my teacher - well, you can say a great deal in saying that. It is a great deal to say. Holy Scripture, blessed Scripture; thank God for the Word of God, and thank Him for what parts of it He has made known to us in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.

"Let my soul live" in righteousness. "Righteousness" Solomon says "delivereth from death". No man shall die who is a righteous man. God will not permit a righteous man to die. I speak in respect of eternal life. "Righteousness", Christ's righteousness, "delivereth from death". "This is the Name wherewith He shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness". You must be righteous by the imputation to you of Christ's righteousness or you must die for ever. And this is most wonderful in its intimacy. It is made over so absolutely to the Church as that she takes her name from it. "This is the name wherewith she shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness". "Let my soul live" in this. Ah, if you see your own filthy garments in the light of God's teaching, you know what it is to be dead in your own feelings. But if you see the righteousness of Christ by faith, you know what it is to see how you can be delivered from your death and then this cry will be suitable to you and be sent to heaven out of your heart: "Let my soul live" in righteousness, in the only righteousness that God accepts and is pleased with. Is this your prayer? Could you join with one who, speaking of Christ's righteousness, said it was imputed nonsense, or do you say, before the Lord, all beauty, everything that God requires, everything that you can ask for in respect to salvation is in the righteousness of Christ and does your heart close with it, approve of it, and earnestly cry to receive it? Then you will be praying this prayer for substance: "Let my soul live". Deliver me in Thy righteousness and cause me to escape, to escape a deserved judgment, a deserved hell.

"Let my soul live" in sanctification. Before God can make a sinner happy He must make him holy. The Apostle Paul speaks to the Hebrews thus: "Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling".

Made holy by Him who imparts a holy nature to them. Hence, the delight of the saints is in holiness - "In holiness the saints delight" - and sin is their burden, corruption is their grief, and when they defile themselves by their defiling imaginations and wrong thoughts and wrong words and wrong ways, they are grieved. Their element is holiness. They cannot live out of it; they languish and die without holiness. "We pine away in our sins", they said of old, "we die" And that is the experience of all the people of God, they languish and pine away and die without holiness. "Let my soul live" Make fresh, and clearer, and deeper, and more constant communications of holiness to my soul; sanctify me; grant that I may in affection universally love holiness and universally hate sin.

"Let my soul live" in and by Thy power. There is a power of death about us. Principalities, and powers, and darkness, these are about us, and what is worse than all that is death is within us.

Death's within thee, all about thee
But the remedy's without thee

and the power of God is that that is necessary to every child of God. Let the power of God sustain me. And this is done in several ways. As we are naturally sustained continually by food, so the holy God, the God of all power and grace, sustains His people in life by communicating to them the very flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you" is Christ's own testimony. We are sustained by that. Communications from Jesus Christ, partaking of Jesus Christ by faith, is the way that God powerfully sustains His people. "Let my soul live". How good it is, and how sweet, to receive the Lord Jesus from time to time by faith, to receive Him in His Person, in His atoning work, in His intercession, to receive Him as your High Priest, as your Prophet, as your King. This will maintain life in you. "Let my soul live".

And the Psalmist protests that if the Lord will do this, he will praise Him. "And it shall praise Thee". We have much more to be thankful for than we realise often, but when we do at all realise that we live in Christ, are justified in His righteousness, and sanctified

by His grace, purified by His Spirit, then we feel, cannot but feel, how much we owe to the Lord, and we try to praise Him. What is it to praise God? It is not merely to sing; it is not merely to say things about Him, to speak well of Him; it is to fall in your spirit before Him, to worship Him, to make acknowledgement of your indebtedness to Him. It is in your heart to thank Him. Lip service may be only a deception. Heart praises are acceptable to God. There may be no word while you are praising God thus. It may be in the silent watches of the night, at any time, in any place, when the favour of God is to you better than life, that your whole soul goes out in acts of adoration, admiration, love, and gratitude. That is praising God. When your heart again and again unites with Christ, closes in with Him; when the whole soul admires the Person and love and blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ; when faith relies entirely on Him and on Him alone; when the love of God is perceived so as to draw out the soul's warmest thankfulness; then it is that there is this praise. "And it shall praise Thee". Ah there is a definiteness in it; as when you feel the love of God shed abroad in your heart, then you praise Him for that. It is not a general idea of the love of God, but a distinct experience of it. When you feel the revelation of the Person of Jesus Christ made in your heart, so that you perceive Him to be the very Person the Scripture describes and sets forth, and you receive Him by faith, then you thank God for Him. Yes, you praise the eternal Son of God for condescending to become a Man. You praise Him for becoming poor that you, through His poverty, might be rich. You praise Him for His voluntary death, that by that death you might live for ever. Praise Him for His justifying righteousness, that thereby you might be justified before God and entirely and for ever absolved from all your sins. And when the Word of God comes to nourish you and strengthen you and confirm you and help you in some particular time of trouble, then for that you distinctly praise Him, adore Him for what He has said and for what He has done. "It shall praise Thee". Will the poor praises of a sinner rise, with acceptance, to God? Yes; He says: "Whosoever offereth praise glorifieth Me, and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God". Dr Goodwin has a wise word here: "Jesus Christ", says the Doctor, "is most glorified in secret". Do not be ambitious to carry your religion on your arm before everybody that you may be seen of men. It wont be hid if you have true religion, cannot be - it must come out

some way, at some time - but you wont be ambitious to talk about it. No; let your good works say what you are. Men, even those who may hate your religion, will glorify your Father which is in heaven. "Let my soul live and it shall praise Thee". Praise Thee for grace, praise Thee for mercy, praise Thee for redemption, praise Thee for deliverance. And one word more here, it shall praise Thee for perseverance. The nature of God as He describes that and sets it forth in the gospel is concerned in the perseverance of His people to the end. His promise pledges Him to it. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee".

"And let Thy judgments help me". "Judgments" throughout this Psalm mean the Word of God. Statutes, testimonies, precepts, judgments, all more or less distinctly set forth the Holy Scriptures. Take it in this light then: "Let thy judgments help me". Let the Word of God help me; let it be in my heart a power. Power does help people to stand. Let it be an influence to move me here and there. Let it be a guide to take me in the right way. Let it be a nourishment; let it be to me sweeter than honey or the honeycomb. Let it help me. Let me take two or three points here, ere I close.

Let the promises of God help me. Promises. For instance, this; it will meet some perhaps when I name it. "All that the Father giveth to Me shall come to Me, and Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out". That will help many a person, has helped many who are in heaven. It may help you, some of you, this evening. "Him that cometh to Me" by prayer and supplication, with need, trouble, poverty of soul, perplexity of mind, guilt of conscience, weakness of faith, strength of unbelief, temptations of various sorts, let him come to Me with all this and about all this, and I, suitable to him, will not cast him away. I wont turn My back on him; I wont repel his advances; I will receive him. He shall be acceptable to Me; I will in no wise - for any reason that he can adduce, for any setting before Me of his unworthiness - none of these things shall influence Me to cast him out. I will receive him. What a help this may be to you. God grant it may be to as many of you as need the help.

Again, the Lord Jesus says, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". When you go to yourself

then you get more trouble and the burden becomes heavier. When you go to the creature, there you find as much helplessness as you have in yourself. When you go to other sources, you find them all dried up like the brook Cherith and no raven comes with bread. You just are destitute, and come to destitution. But when you go, burdened and labouring, to the Lord Jesus, then you go to One in every way suitable, every way suitable to your case; full of goodness, full of love, full of redemption, full of power, full of pity. "I will give you rest" He says. Rest in My blood, in My righteousness, in My grace, in My salvation. Take this word as Isaiah was inspired to express it to the Church: "When thou passeth 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 burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" for I, the Lord thy God, am with thee. When you get something of that kind from Holy Scripture spoken and applied by the Holy Ghost, it helps you. It helps you to cast the case, whatever it is, on the Lord; to commit yourself in your present perplexity and danger to His keeping saying: "Into Thy hand I commit my spirit", O Lord God of truth. Thou hast redeemed me and I commit myself to Thee. "Let Thy judgments help me".

You may take the word of God as a word of precept and admonition; the statutes of the Lord. A statute is a limitation beyond which you may not properly go; outside of which, you will be a transgressor. Take then a precept, a statute of God, telling you how to behave yourself, how to conduct yourself as dear children, that is to say, walk in love as dear children, as Christ hath loved us and given Himself for a sweet smelling savour. What a word it is. Separate yourselves, save yourselves from this untoward generation. Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. Look not every man on his own things but every man on the things of another. These are God's Words, God's statutes for His Church. They are to regard them and seek to walk in them. Now if these should come, any of them, into your hearts - when you are tempted, tempted it may be to do some evil, tempted to speak some rash thing, tempted to turn aside to some vain jangling, a word comes to you and speaks; when, it may be you are tempted to hatred because you are offended, the word comes to you, Walk as dear children, walk in love; when you are tempted to pride, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God; All of you be

subject one to another - "Let Thy judgments help me"; may we not disregard God's word.

Take the word as it sets forth His ordinances. These are to be observed and observed narrowly. All the Scripture has authority. I state that distinctly. I state it as a proposition not to be overthrown. All the Word of God has authority. May this be applied to those to whom it is applicable. What says the Lord? Why, to His disciples, His Apostles, ere He was to leave them He said this distinctly "Go into all the world; disciple all nations. Then, when you have done that, baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. That is God's ordinance. Whoever disobeys it, that does not touch it. Disobedience does not touch this ordinance. Be it given to us to remember the Lord Jesus in it. O, you who hope in His mercy, remember His precept. Then there is the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. The first ordinance gives right to the second. "This do in remembrance of Me". Now all these are God's judgments. Let them help me, said the Psalmist. Say you, let them help me. The Psalmist, as a Jew, walked according to the rule that God had laid down for him and for all Jews, and Christians, true Christians, are to walk according to the rule that the Lord Jesus has laid down for them in the Scriptures. These are God's judgments. I may mention, in conclusion, because the Scripture is full of it, and God's dealings with us make us know it, that judgments do sometimes mean His solemn dealings with men. First, His dealings with His own children when He chastens them, and these are a help. Yes, it is a great help to have your feet put in the stocks when you are wandering, and God wont let you wander further. Sometimes His judgments are to set out His dealings with the wicked, with men who oppose His people, and fight against His living church. On them His judgments will come. He rains snares upon them and brings evil. Solemn is this; may such judgments never overtake us. "Let my soul live"; helpless in itself, weak and weary often, let it live in Thee and in Thy mercy and in Thy power and in Thy goodness and let the Word of God in its blessedness help me, that I may live for ever.