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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 23 August 1936

PSALM 119 v 18

"Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold
wondrous things out of Thy law"

This remarkable Psalm has, in every verse except two verses, reference to the Word of God. Statutes, judgments, precepts and other terms, all mean the Word of God. The Word of God is infallible because inspired by the Holy Ghost. It is full of mysteries. A mystery is a thing unknown and only knowable when opened, revealed, and we only know as much of the Word of God as is revealed to us. Reveal to mine eyes the wonders of Thy Word. From Genesis to Revelation there are wonders in the Word of God. Wonders of grace, wonders of providence, wonders of persons, wonders of time and wonders of eternity dealt with, opened and more or less distinctly made known. This reverential prayer, "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law" will be the prayer of every child of God who, in a proper manner - (a good deal of impropriety may be in our confessions) - ^{that} in a proper manner realises his own ignorance. "That which I see not teach Thou me". "Open Thou mine eyes".

Wondrous things of judgment, punishment, the Word of God has in it. The Bible is singularly remarkable for this - among other remarkable things - the anger of God. God could not be a loving God if He were not angry against sin. He could not be a just God if He did not punish sin. He would not be a good God if He did not hate evil. What may appear to be a negative in this matter or these matters is really necessary to His Being. Anger, wrath, vengeance belong to God, and these are expressed by Him in various terms - sword, famine, noisome beasts, pestilence. Some used by Him were particularly mentioned in the times to which they refer. Assyria was sent by God against Israel. "O Assyria the staff in My hand is Mine indignation". I would in all humility and tenderness and regard for your good and the glory of God, take up this subject a little this morning. I need not say, we are living in grievous times. The clouds are very black and

portentious; they threaten evil and, of this nation, the Lord may ask, and may be asking, this question - "Shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" There are very grievous days before us. Some may think I am, what the world would call, pessimistic. I confess that I do believe that grievous times are very near to us; that, although many prayers go up to God that He would lengthen out our tranquility, that may be very true - Though Noah, Daniel and Job were in the city, the nation, they shall only save themselves. God will avenge Himself. It may seem to some of you, and may have been a temptation to think even harshly of Jehovah in reading His judgments and punishments on nations, on individuals, on families. Let me invite you to notice this, that the foundation and cause of all judgments and punishments is sin. It is on individuals. This we see in the Scripture. Two brothers, Cain and Abel, religious, both of them. One, the younger, taught of God; the other, naturally religious, and in due course each brought something before God. Abel, taught of the Spirit, looked to the promised Messiah. Substitution was taught him, and he took a lamb and offered it to God with the fat. He had had instruction about the sacrifice, and that was acceptable to God that he offered to Him. Cain - a religious person, brought up religiously doubtless, as was Abel, by their father Adam - Cain took the fruit of his own labour and the Holy Ghost has characterised that by the Word of God in John - "his works were evil". How few think that religion is an evil thing, but it must be an evil thing if it is not through Jesus Christ and in Him. And God dealt with Cain; His anger fell on Cain; sin was at the door. "If thou doest well shall thou not be accepted. If thou doest not well, evil is at the door". When punishment falls on a person, the anger of God, the foundation of that is sin in that person and this, should the Spirit of God make it out to you, will make it a very personal and urgent matter. Save me from sin; save me from sinning. Why did God drown the world? Sin was the reason. All in it had corrupted themselves but Noah; he found grace in the eyes of the Lord. We see on every hand, as I judge, tokens, signs that God is displeased with us and with the nations of the earth. Very laudable are the efforts of our government to save us from war, but will God honour these efforts? I doubt it. We see in the world today the anger of God. Look at Spain. We judge perhaps by just what is happening, without any reference to the past. God may be having, and I believe He is

having, a dreadful reference to the Inquisition, the bloody Inquisition of that vile nation, for Spain has never repented of that Inquisition. God has a long memory. I think of you young people, particularly you young men, and feel intensely for you, and often in the night, when you are asleep, you are on my mind. What you have before you, God only knows, but what appears to be before you is grievous days and trouble. O dear young men, God lay it on your hearts to seek His grace, that you may be prepared for the evil that will come upon you. Some may say, why does the minister speak like that? I would be faithful, affectionately faithful, and warn you that evil days are before you, before all of us, but particularly the young men.

O the folly of religious people today; the so-called efforts to maintain peace. "Who is he that saith and it cometh to pass when the Lord commandeth it not?" Judgment falls on families or branches of families. Eli displeased God, indulged his sons who made themselves vile, and that branch of the priestly family God destroyed. Beware of indulging sin, either in yourselves or in others. When the Lord saw that the iniquity of the nations was full then He gave them up and His people destroyed them. When Israel turned away from God and persistently worshipped false gods, then the day came when the Lord said - I will make a full end of you; you shall go into captivity for 70 years. He called on the nations then to serve his servant Nebuchadnezzar and the nation that would not serve him was punished, because that king was called upon to avenge God's quarrel with His apostatising people. Wondrous things. You who are acquainted with your Bibles know that I am not speaking without the Bible when I say these things to you. The Word of God has wonders. O but these judgments, they are righteous my friends. If it were not in the Scripture, who would dare to say what the church in heaven says, what she sings - "Holy, holy, holy". What for? How is that great voice singing? What is being said? "Holy, holy, holy". The punishment of the great whore - her punishment and the smoke of her destruction was rising and this scene causes the church to say "Holy, holy, holy". It may strike some as being altogether wrong, but the Word of God declares it, and we must, every minister sent of God must, vindicate God more or less in His holy, righteous judgments. Without iniquity are His ways; just, true, and righteous are His dealings, His

punishments, and I beg that you will, as a congregation, bear this in mind, that never is there a punishment, either in time or in eternity, that has not for its foundation, sin. May the Lord gather you to Himself in this solemn business.

"Open Thou mine eyes" that I may look on Thy wonders in holy providence. The Scriptures are very singularly powerful and clear in their declaration of God's punishment of sinners. If a prophet deceives the people, I, the Lord, have deceived him. Divine permission is a very solemn truth. "Who will go and deceive Ahab for us?" There comes forth a spirit and says "I will go". How will you do it? I will be a lying spirit in his prophets. Thou shalt go, said God. Go, you shall prevail. These things are heavy on my heart and I bring them before you as part, not of my own imagination, but of God's truth. I can well understand a loving disposition, an affectionate mind, a tender regard for relatives, looking askance at these truths. Let God be righteous; let Jehovah be exalted. Though all the world were dead, He lives. What worthless worms are we. If we sit in judgment on God, the day will come when He will deal with us for it. If we judge Him not to be good and righteous in all His ways, and without iniquity, we shall hear of it one day, either in mercy or in judgment.

Now before I close I want to bring the great and awful matter of sin before you in a Person. That Person is the Lord Jesus Christ. God made Him, the head of His body. The Holy Spirit has revealed in the Scripture what is known to theologians - you will excuse the use of the word - as the federal, the federation, federal union. Therefore Christ did not come as a stranger; He came to represent and deal with God for the people who were in federal union with Himself. It was not unjust in the Father to make Him to be sin. It was not unjust in the Father to take pleasure in wounding His Son. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him". The mystery is great and beyond human conception if not revealed in the Scripture. The mystery is great that there should come a just man, the holy Son of God in our nature, and that God should have Him made under the law and that He should represent, and be in the place of, His people. He made Him to be sin. O what a wondrous thing the Word of God reveals here. One man, God-Man, to die for a number that no man can number, that the sins of these people, which

they could not atone for should be taken from them and laid on Him, their Head, their Substitute, their Saviour, and truly made His own as that it was perfectly proper, just and good for the Father to bruise Him, to put Him to grief. "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." It is hateful to hear men speak of Christ suffering unjustly. If they mean it only that He suffered unjustly from men, that is true, but when they mean that His suffering on the cross was unjust suffering, then it is blasphemy. It was not unjust. A sacred, wonderful mystery, that the holy God should love vile people so as to give for them His only begotten Son. "He that spared not His own Son" He had but one Son; He has but one Son. By adoption He has sons numberless; by nature He has but one Son. "Having one only Son He sent Him." What it was to that holy Person, that holy soul, that - to use Rutherford's words - that Kingly soul of Christ, to be put to grief; it is beyond us. Faith can believe it; faith receives it; faith builds on it; faith rejoices in it. When you get on legal ground, you who fear God, and look at your sins in the light of the law, you may well sink. I understand that well; I know what it is to get on legal grounds. I know this, unless you have the faith of God's operation you will die under your sins, but if you have that blessed gift, the faith of God's operation, you will honour God by believing in His Son. You will work the work of God which is that ye believe on Him who He has sent. You will overcome the world of sin in you as well as the world of sin without by believing that Jesus is the Son of God; no other way. O but the load, the sin laid on Him. If my sins, if your sins, be so heavy to us, a load we should sink under if left; if they are so grievous to us; if the prospect of punishment for them be so terrible to us; what must the load of all His people's sins have been to Him, and what must the punishment have been? "Awake O sword against My Shepherd, against the Man that is My fellow," saith the Lord of Hosts. "Smite the Shepherd". The love of this will captivate you and melt you into contrition and lift you up into happiness unspeakable when God is pleased to reveal it in you. O that Christ should have borne my sins; the Just should have borne the sins of an unjust person. "Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree that we, being dead to sin" - dead by the death of Christ, dead to sin by the death of Christ - "might be made the righteousness of God in Him". And so, though we

were as sheep going astray, we are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. Is not this a wonder in the Word of God, a wondrous thing?

Behold a scene of matchless grace
'Tis Jesus in the sinner's place

What Object's this which meets my eyes
Without Jerusalem's gate;
Which fills my mind with such surprise
As wonder to create?

Is this the Man? can this be He
The prophets have foretold
Should with transgressors numbered be,
And for their crimes be sold?

O repenting sinner, cast your eye of faith here on this blessed One
and say

Yes, now I know, 'tis He, 'tis He,
'Tis Jesus, God's dear Son,
Wrapt in humanity, to die
For crimes that I had done!

I repeat what I have just said, when you get on legal grounds you will be ready to perish. O my sins; O my religious sins; sins done since I hope God called me. You will never stand a minute on that ground with any comfort. You will find despair beginning to work in you. But when faith is called into lively exercise, then you will run to this wonder. You will run away from the law that pursues you and take refuge in Christ. Then you will find the glory of those four horns of the altar and lay hold of them. That is, you will lay hold of the strength of God, which is Christ, and find that you are safe there, that your soul is comforted there, that your conscience is peaceful there, that your confidence is settled there. Open Thou mine eyes to see Jesus Christ. I tell you this, you will never have five minutes solid, heavenly comfort, away from Him. You may have a lot of

religion, but it won't stand when you are assailed, when your conscience feels guilty. But when you come to this point by the Holy Ghost - I cast myself, a ruined creature, a polluted person, a helpless worm, on the Saviour of sinners; I roll myself, and all my sins on Him - then solid, heavenly comfort comes in. I know what I am saying is true. It is one of the wonders of God, one of the wonders of His Word that He deals thus with His poor people. And it won't be a crowd that you will have with you. Though Noah, Daniel and Job were in the city, when God comes they won't take the city with them. They will only save themselves by their righteousness given to them.

Open Thou mine eyes to see the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. If you are not unclean, the fountain will be a word to you, nothing better. But if you are defiled, if corruption sickens you and weakens you, so that you are saying "Heal me O Lord for I have sinned" then, for that wondrous fountain to be opened, for your faith to fly to it as doves flying to their windows, that will be to you the beginning of heaven. Wondrous things in that beautiful last word of Christ - "It is finished". An eternity of punishment will not finish sin in hell. Think of it; nothing will finish sin there. The worm will never die; the fire will never be quenched. But when Christ took sin with Him on the cross it was that He might finish it, make an end of it. O wondrous thing to see that Jesus took sin to the cross, finished it, satisfied all the claims of Jehovah in regard to it, and brought in, for all for whom He suffered, an everlasting righteousness. Open Thou mine eyes to see this wondrous thing. Nothing will be wrong when you get this, if you get it. No adverse providence will be wrong, no chastisement will be wrong, because the God of love inflicts, the God of love chastises. But you cannot see it if your eyes are not opened to see it. Therefore, those of you who are concerned about it, who are reckoning often, now perhaps, that you must needs die (young people may be reckoning so; older ones cannot avoid it. Not many hours pass over my head that I do not think of this; I am soon to die) what then? O to be ready, and I believe some moments, happy moments, that it will be well with me. "Well while life shall last, and well when called to die", and the root of it in your experience is that your eyes have been opened to see the wonder of redemption, opened to see the Saviour standing in your place, punished for your sins; killed for your death. He did die the death

of His people; He was made a curse for them. Now, anxious souls, God turn your eyes this way, open them and cause you to see a passage, a chapter, a Psalm, that will say - this belongs to you, this gospel. The gospel is for sinners, my friends. I have admired Rabbi Duncan's word, "'Tis the sinners' gospel". You will never value it if you are not sinners. Good news from a far country. It must be good news from a far country, for this country, this whole world, has no good news for sinners in it. Good news could not originate in this world. It rose in the heart of God, in the purpose of God.

Now may the Lord help you, help all of us, if it please Him, to pray this comprehensive prayer. Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold, see, wonder at, melt under the sight of, the wondrous things of the everlasting gospel. I have only mentioned two things really, sin and its punishment. Sin, visited on some persons, visited on some families or branches of families; a world drowned because it had corrupted its way; a nation saved because God loved it. May the Lord in His great mercy grant to us to continually pray this prayer "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law."

One word in conclusion. If, when you are reading the Bible, reading of punishment inflicted, you may be tempted to

think it harsh and hard in God; if you are so tempted, I can sympathise with you, but God give you to remember this, and believe it - sin is the foundation and the reason of God's punishment, afflictions and judgments and destruction.

AMEN.