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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
on Sunday evening 21 December 1924

TEXT: PSALM 119 verse 68

"Thou art good and doest good teach me Thy statutes"

God was real to the Psalmist, not a name only, but a Being, whose presence he knew, whose grace he felt, whose works he admired and whose teaching he valued. Now brethren, if this same God is not real to us, if we do not know Him to be the divine Being the scriptures speak of, if we are not His disciples, what will become of us? If we have no faith we are not believers and if we believe not, we are condemned already, so saith the scripture. Think of it, under condemnation if you have no faith. According to appearances, not the shadow of a reason why you should regard yourselves as christians, or think that you have a good prospect for eternity, or any reason to look forward for tomorrow or any day, without apprehensions of divine displeasure. Your position is solemn, your position is dreadful beyond all expression and description. He that believeth not is condemned already. A condemned person, if he knows he is condemned, has no prospect before him but death. And if you knew, you to whom I am speaking as having no faith, if you knew your position as in God's sight and under His law, you would see that is just what you yourselves have before you, death, nothing else, death in this case being eternal, death being hell, lying and living under divine displeasure. I hope in the last day that it will never rest on me that I did not warn every person who has ever been reached by my voice concerning the Being of God, and the terrors of the Almighty, and the truth of condemnation, the fearfulness of unbelief. Oh, sinner, there is a God in heaven and you are His creature and you have made yourself a rebel and are living, dead in trespasses and sins, and have no concern about it. What a state you are in. I was in it once, then He had mercy on me. You are not beyond His mercy. May He have mercy on you, may He call you by His grace, visit you with His love, and show you that, where He is a God of justice, and of vengeance respecting

all His enemies, He is to you, in Christ, a sin forgiving God. Then He will be real to you, more than a name, a notion. He will be real and be near you and sometimes you will feel He is near you and, as He is near you, things of this life will be small, comparatively unimportant, and you will feel that the one thing needful is to be one with God in Christ.

Now my text tells us three things, that is it has three points in it. The first is God's character. "Thou art good". The second is His work "and doest good". The third is a petition, a prayer, "Teach me Thy statutes". And to these three points I desire mercy and wisdom to call your very close attention.

First we have the character of God. "Thou art good". Goodness divine seems to comprehend everything that is proper to the divine Being. Everything that is proper to God is, as I apprehend it, comprehended in this word, "good". When one of the people of the Jews went to Christ one day and said "Good Master what shall I do that I may have eternal life" Jesus answered and said unto him "Why callest thou Me good. There is none good but one, that is God", as if He should say to him if I am not God you ought not to call Me good. If you do not acknowledge My eternal deity, you have no right to say that I am good. Call no man master. One is your master, even Christ. God is good. His eternity is good, uncaused, eternal, this is good. It is the character of God to be eternal. "The eternal God is thy refuge". All other gods are gods of time. They cannot do good; it is not in them to do evil. They cannot move; they must needs be borne, or they must be nailed and fastened in one place. Says our God "Do not I fill heaven and earth". I am eternal. An eternity past is His, an eternity to come. That is, an eternity as we speak of in respect of ourselves to come, is Gods. The eternal God is one incapable of any increase, of any diminution. Incapable of extension. He can never be more, never know more, never love more, never be more perfect than He has been eternally, and is. And this is the God in whom we live and move and have our being, in whose hand our breath is, whose are all our ways as we are His creatures. This is the God who feeds us,

and clothes us and rules in His awful and mysterious and wise providence. Eternity belongs to God. It is Himself in a sense. "Thou art good". His perfections declare this. What a solemn thing it is to be surrounded by deity. "Do not I fill heaven and earth". "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him" This is God omnipresent. He is all wise. "I the Lord search the heart and try the reins" He is omnipotent, doing His will in the armies of heaven and among the children of men, whose hand none can stay, to whom none can properly say "what doest Thou". This is God. He is just. I judge that it is provable that the goodness of God is His justice, that because He is good, He is just. A good man cannot bear injustice, and if this be so, how much more may it be said of God, He is so good He cannot be unjust. If any of us die in sin and God will judge us and shall judge us through eternity, He will be good in that. His justice will shine illustriously in perdition. May it not shine in any of you nor in myself. The character of God is a character that permeates all things so to speak wherever we are, whatever we are doing, whatever we devise or plan or attempt, God is about all. Do not be surprised if injustice prevails here and there. There is one above all and what He permits for a time shall turn to His glory. If you see oppression in high places do not be astonished at it. God is above all and one day He will bring all things to light, all things. And one of the most solemn considerations in this connection must be this that he searcheth our hearts, that His omniscience looks us through and through. No thought can be hid from Him, no device of our minds, no enmity of our hearts, no injustice in our spirits, can be hid from Him. O sinner, if you came to see this, if you felt the application of it to yourself, if you saw that everything that is wrong in your thoughts is open to the gaze of Almighty God, that every evil thought you have He will put into the scale of His divine justice and weigh it. If you believed, if you felt this, how terrible would you be to yourself and how terrible would God be to you. Think of it, it is a killing thought, it is a solemnly depressing feeling, but very wholesome, to believe that everything in us is open to this good God.

"Thou art good" He is good in His wise providence. What He

withholds from you it would be hurtful for you to have, What He gives to you is best for you, though it may not seem so to your judgment. When He inflicts chastisements, it is good. His people are taught to believe this. When He brings them into straight places it is better for them than to be in large places, and they are brought to believe it. "Thou art good". Good in nature, good in every perfection of deity. I would proclaim Him to you. You live in Him, you move in Him, you have your being in Him. You cannot escape His gaze; you cannot miss His justice. And His power, His omnipotence, is never mis-used. It is dangerous for a man to have much power, because being sinful, he is disposed to misuse it, but God uses His power in goodness. Never will He inflict an injustice on a creature, never. O young people God is about you though you know Him not. He is about your ways, though you believe Him not. The mortifying things you experience, He can turn to good. May He give you a prayer that it may be so. But whether it be so or not, the truth remains, God is about you, about your success, about your defeats and failures. God is about all. It is a solemn thing to believe it. I have trembled many times at this majesty of God, this presence of God. And mind this, you will never be with Him unless you are pure. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." You will never see Him with joy if you are not made pure. As you are not pure by nature, through sinfulness, you must be made pure in another person else you will never see Him. Think on His character and God grant that when you go home this evening you may not, in going home, banish every thought and seek to forget every word about God. God give you mercy to think about His character that He is good. Blame Him not for some untoward providence. It may turn to your good and profit. Blame Him not if you cannot have your own way. It may be His way to save you. O impute nothing unjust or unkind to this great and glorious, mysterious Being. At the same time do not try to understand Him. You cannot. He must be believed, never comprehended. That that you can comprehend is no greater than yourself. If you could comprehend God then He would be no more than you are. But though you cannot understand Him, may you be brought to believe Him. If you believe in Him you will be a little person, and a great sinner. If you believe in Him you begin to tremble, and

trembling will be health to Him. But do not try to understand Him nor yet to pry into the reasons of some providences for these He may wisely hide from you. May you believe that all He does is wisely done and done because He is good. "Too wise to err, too good to be unkind". It is a very poor description I have given of Him. May He describe Himself to you by giving you faith and giving that faith to look on Him as He may be seen. Ask Him to teach you.

The second thing in the text is His work. "And doest good" Let us look at the work of God in grace, in providence, in a person. In grace. He does good in grace. He was gracious in eternity. He never began to be gracious. He is gracious. And His works in grace you have first of all in the Lord Jesus. He gave Him grace before the world began. Gave Him grace, what for? That He might bestow it on sinners. "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them". Who can rightly comprehend the action of the Trinity in eternity, when each Person in council with the other, came to this conclusion, to save a multitude of sinners that no man can number. And to do it in perfect conformity with His justice, He gave the grace to His Son, who should in time become a Man. The greatest goodness of God is there. It was in Christ before the world began. Oh what a storehouse is Christ. Oh what a wealth Christ possesses, given to Him. He had it as God. It was given to Him in the Covenant as He was to be a Man, that He might bestow it, distribute it, as He will to one and another, to all given to Him by His Father. Sinner, if you are born again, you will be after this. Oh to see, to meet with, to know, to hear speak to you, this Man, full of grace and truth. "And doest good". He did good in the incarnation of His Beloved Son. The greatest of all acts in this world was that when God brought into this world that human nature which the Holy Ghost had created, that His Son should take it up into union with Himself. That was goodness, O illustrious goodness, saving goodness, infinite goodness, tender goodness, embracing sinners, saving sinners, making sinners holy and pure as God Himself. If we are partakers of His goodness, if we are benefited by this work of God, we shall need eternity to praise Him for it. "And doest good" in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Worship Him

there. The Papists and the ritualists are, I suppose, now busy in making their dolls and when they fasten them and are bearing them about for the adoration of the people, what awful idolatry, what wickedness will be, but when a sinner sees God in Christ, that holy, glorious Being moving in His works, controlling all things but showing Himself gracious to convinced sinners, what a God is worshipped. Holy is this God, Jesus Christ. Good is this great, blessed Person and God did good in sending Him. And this Person Jesus Christ, Almighty God, did good when He obeyed His Father's law, in the place of those who were always disobedient. Oh think of it, a good God obeying for us creatures. God, in human flesh, obeying for those who were always delighting in wickedness, for we all delighted in wickedness by nature before we were called by grace. Sinner, if you see this goodness, you will fall down before the blessed Surety and divine Obeyer and worship Him in this, His good work. It was a good work when, in the Garden of Gethsemane, He fell on the ground, prostrate with grief and trouble, and had presented to Him a near view of what He was to suffer when, sweating as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground, He said "If it be possible let this cup pass from Me" And did He thus suffer for you? Was this good work of His for you and for me? And when He was on Calvary's cross and knew in Himself that all things were now accomplished, He said "I thirst", and when the vinegar was offered to Him He took it not, but knowing that He had accomplished Salvation's work, that He had borne the wrath of God and exhausted it, that He had received into His soul and Person the curse of the broken law, He said "It is finished" and in delight, the light of God's countenance, in the enjoyment of God's love, and of His holy presence, Jesus Christ went to heaven. "And doest good" Now dear friends He does good when He begets a sinner in righteousness and true holiness, When God quickens a dead person into life it is one of the best acts that He does in this world. It follows the goodness of God in making, in creating, the Man Christ Jesus, for a sinner is created in righteousness and true holiness after the image of Jesus Christ. This is the image that every one born again is begotten in. This is the image every saint is destined to wear through eternity. This is the new creature that shall overcome the old man with all his tempers

and sins and evils. This is the work of God. It is a perfect work. Yes, it is a perfect work, not in measure, but nature. Nothing can be added to the holiness of the new man. Much can be added to his stature, that is to his knowledge, and to his communion with God, but nothing can be added to the purity and the perfection in purity of this new man. Oh happy sinner who is born again, blessed sinner who has the image of Jesus Christ upon his soul. Oh blessed sinner, you can never thank God enough for it. In your deepest depressions, in your keenest sorrows, in your heaviest trials, in your most violent times of temptation, if you realised that you are born again, and I believe this is to be realised in all times, though it is not always realised, you will never, even in those seasons, never thank God enough for the new birth. Thou doest good. He does good. Oh when the blessed hour came for an elected, redeemed sinner to be born again and God the Holy Ghost came to him, unsought, undesired, unseen and the kingdom of God was secretly, mysteriously, set up, that was a good act. I say again it follows on the act of God, the good act of God, in preparing the body for Christ Jesus. Then into that body Christ Jesus came, the Son of God, and when a sinner is born again, into his heart comes the eternal life which is in Jesus Christ, and was given to him in Christ Jesus before the world began. "Doest good". Think of it, God was so good to you who are born again as that He came down, came into your hearts. His good Spirit came into your hearts and gave you a new life, new eyes to see Him as you had never seen Him before. New feelings about Him such as you had never experienced before, new thoughts about Him and then about yourselves. O sin, it becomes real. God becomes great to a sinner. And, as a sinner realises the, as it were, twofold distance - (the distance of his nature, that is always distant though without shame, God's work in making a creature, the creature has no shame belonging to him) but also when you come to sin, O what a distance, infinite as it were, infinite. Sin between God and the creature, sin that God must hate, sin that he must necessarily punish. This, this is sin. Some of us have seen it, I have seen it, and I do see it in myself. It is in me, I know it. It is in you and some of you know it. How good of God to give you grace to confess it. It is a good work in a sinner that he has grace to confess and forsake

his sin. Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall prosper. Prosper? Yes prosper when he is failing always; prosper when his business is wrong, when his health is bad, when his ways are hedged up. Prosper? Where? At the throne of grace. Yes. Many Jacobs have been made Israels on their knees. Many poor sinners have had their names changed into Israel on their knees. They shall prosper. And how good is the work of God when listening to the prayers of confessing sinners He says to them "Thy sins are forgiven thee". It is a perfect work dear friends. Forgiveness is a perfect work. It is thus expressed "When the sin of Israel is sought for it shall not be found." The law cannot find it; justice cannot find it; the appeased, happy conscience cannot find it. The devil cannot find it so as to bring it up and fasten it upon the soul. It is expressed thus "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions and as a cloud thy sins". It is a perfect work, not perfectly enjoyed here; enjoyed occasionally and sweetly. Oh the face of God shining on a burdened sinner makes him happy. Why, I would not part with my little happiness in this for a world. "Happiness thou lovely name" Where is it? In an appeased, purged conscience. In the knowledge of God in Christ as being yours. My brethren this is a good work, the undoing of the devil's work, the undoing of the work of sin. The removal from a sinner of his sins. Ah we have need to thank God that He so ordered it in His goodness and His wisdom that sin and the sinner might be separated. Were you ever thankful for this? Sin and the sinner are separable, and when you know this, by the separation from you of your sins, by the pardoning, cleansing blood of Christ, then you will thank God for such an amazing mercy. Blessed be God for forgiveness. "And doest good" in forgiving a sinner his sins.

He does good when He unites a sinner to Himself. Divinely ordered and effected union between the sinner and Jesus Christ becomes the comfortable knowledge and experience of that sinner sooner or later. It is no fancy, it is sweet. You get near to Him, He comes near to you. You see Him, you love Him. Your heart moves. You have an honest sorrow, a sweet grief, a blessed penitence in your spirit, together with a holy joy and rejoicing and you go to God your exceeding joy. You go to His altar and



there you kneel in your heart and worship Him, and worship love divine. A transient experience it may be, but it is an experience. Judge it not by the time you feel it, but by the thing itself which is so great, so great that only the Trinity could accomplish it. So great that it swallows up death and hell and misery in the soul. So great that eternity wont be too long to explore the wonder of it and praise God for it in the enjoyment of it. In union with the Lamb, from condemnation free". By occasions I have not wondered at what Dr Owen says, that it is difficult for a saint, when he has some experience of God's love and favour, to repress the wish to quickly leave time for eternity, earth for heaven. What a mercy to have this good work of God in you. He gives faith. A sweet grace this is. Faith in the bleeding Lamb, faith in the Father, faith in the Holy Spirit. Faith that brings near distant things and makes distant near things. Makes time a speck, and eternity desirable and a glorious future. Faith that believes in hope against hope, that keeps the soul secure enough but makes it not secure. Faith in the bleeding Lamb that makes His wounds and His blood a hiding place and a cleansing fountain. Oh what a work of God is this work, the work of creating faith in the soul. That is the distinguishing mark, line of demarcation, between the world and the church, between a child of God and a child of the devil. Hast thou faith? Dost thou believe on the Son of God? Dost thou believe on the Son of God?

"And doest good" He does good in providence too. He knows what is best for us. He knows how needful sickness is to some and He gives it to them. It is like a medicine, it is made such to some. He knows the needs be for adversity to some. It is a constant irritation to nature, but a constant remedy and faith receives it. God knows what is best for us. He does good in providence, and I am of the opinion that every child of God will, sooner or later, come to a hearty acknowledgement that God has done good to him in afflicting him, bereaving him of this, depriving him of that, and withholding from him of another thing. Each one comes with the cup in his hand, as it were, and says he would not have one bitter in it taken out of it. He would not, if he might, add a sweet to it which God has been pleased to

withhold. I know I am not speaking fancies and some of you know it. I hope it may please God to grant that others may know it. Oh it is a real thing. In a word, God's good work in giving vital religion to a sinner is to the praise of the glory of His grace in that sinner's everlasting good and happiness. Let us then together justify this, our good God. Let us praise Him for His good work in providence, His good work. Ah many a sick bed has declared this, God is good. Many a heavy burden has declared it, God is good. Blessed be His Name for His goodness. He has brought some of us on for many years now. He is bringing us on still as we hope and trust that we may reach His home at last. Heaven is His habitation and there He will have His blessed church to be with Him for ever.

"Thou art good" His character is good, beyond all reproach. Though the devil seeks to besmirch it, though men deny it, it still remains true, God is good. I believe it. I declare it to you. God is good, and His work has the stamp of goodness indelibly put upon it. No ignorance, no injustice, no unwisdom shall ever mar or mark any work of God, for the day will declare it. Now it may be but little known, little acknowledged, but the day will declare in wisdom He has made all things; in wisdom He has controlled all things; in wisdom He has brought all His purposes to pass. Come then, beloved friends, let us together kneel before this Lord and bow before Him, our Maker, and ascribe goodness to Him and to His works.

Now in the third place there is a prayer in the text. "Teach me Thy statutes". You could not believe the first two parts of the text in your hearts and not pray this prayer. You seek to Him who is wise that He would impart wisdom to you; who is good, that He would give of His goodness to you. All the goodness of God in Christ is communicable. I wish we believed it. Some say, of course they believe it. No, nobody believes it, of course. Whenever it is believed it is believed by grace, by faith given by the Holy Spirit. Is this goodness to be communicated? Yes. Then says the sinner, communicate it to me, give to me of that goodness. May a sinner ask this? He is the only person who will ask it. A sensible sinner is the only

person who will come to God for this goodness. "Teach me Thy statutes". Man claims liberty. Sinful man says I will go where I like. Who is the Lord that I should obey Him? That is what some of you say in your hearts, perhaps not consciously, but actively. Why can I not do as I like; like a rebellious child says I wont obey my parents. If I do it is a painful, disagreeable necessity. I will do as I like myself. Nature is just that rebellious creature. Faith says, Oh Lord bend me, tie me, keep me in proper limits. A statute is a limitation, it is a fence. A statute says to those inside it, you are not to go without it. If you do, you are a transgressor; you trespass, you step over a boundary which God has fixed. This is what is intended. "Teach me Thy statutes". What have we inside? First we have the walk of faith. Teach me to walk by faith. This is one of God's statutes. You will never walk as well when you walk by the sight of your eyes, never. You will see such crooked things, you will see such strange things; you will behold such apparent inconsistencies that as you judge by them, you misjudge God, and you wont know where to walk or how. But if you look upon Him, by a God given faith, who sitteth upon the circle of the heaven, who knows all things, and is above all things, ordering all things, controlling and guiding all things, then you will walk unto all pleasing and it will be profitable to you. Judge not the Lord by the sight of your eyes. Says a child of God, I wish I could walk as I ought to walk. The statute will be the limitation. You are to walk inside that. Says Paul "we walk by faith not by sight." Walk by the sight of your own heart, what a poor, stumbling creature you will be. I have been. Walk by your strange feelings sometimes; walk by the passions that rise in your heart; walk by the foolish and unwise words you speak sometimes; how will you walk? When the Lord says - Faith in the bleeding Lamb is a precious way for you to walk in; when He says "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden"; when He says I have opened a fountain for sin and for uncleanness; when He says "Trust in the Lord for ever for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength" and these things get into your heart with the power of the Holy Spirit, then you walk well, you walk wisely, you walk humbly with your God. That is the only way to walk, the only way. All other ways are stumbling ways,

and a man who walks by sight stumbles at he knows not what. "Teach me Thy statutes". Who can teach these but the Spirit? Who can tell a sinner how he ought to walk and how he ought to obey, and how he ought to please God. Bring him to the commandments, to the law, Oh he says I cannot walk by this. This condemns me at every turn. Oh what a perfect work has taken the law out of the way. That is not a statute now. It is a statute for all natural men. To obey is their duty; to love God with all their heart and mind and soul and strength and their neighbour as themselves, that is the duty of men, all men. But here is a sinner brought to Zion, and here is a statute "Walk by faith".

#### Faith in the bleeding Lamb

O what a gift it is

What a work it is. Teach me how to do it. And what will be the teaching? Some manifestation of Jesus Christ to you, some sight of the infinite worth of His precious death, cleansing a sinner, some view given to you of the throne of grace to which the Lord invites such as you are. This will teach you. Then gladly you will come to the bleeding Lamb and to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. Then your faith will plead what He has done. Yea, you will look to Him, the Daysman betwixt you and God. Then you will say "Behold O God our shield and look upon the face of Thine anointed." That is how you will walk. You will go to heaven like that. Every step in this way is a step toward God and heaven. "Teach me Thy statutes". A statute is this "Cast thy burden on the Lord." The promise connected with it is "and He shall sustain thee. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." Your own law is - I will make the best of it; I will walk by my sight. "No" says faith "that wont do". It says take this to the Lord, depend on Him, cast it on Him. Look to Him, ask Him to make the crooked straight and give you strength to carry the cross whatever it may be. This is a statute "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". Another statute is this "Ye that love the Lord hate evil" Come out from the world. Whatsoever is in the world is evil. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, and the world passeth away. Come away from this. "Come

out from among them and be ye separate" and never try to unite Christ with Belial, nor darkness with light. Come out from these things and I will receive you and ye shall be My sons and daughters saith the Lord Almighty, and I will walk in you and walk with you, and you shall walk with Me in white. "Teach me Thy statutes". You will never walk in them till you are taught them. You may read them. Some of you young people read them but now if I were to put the question to you and you answered, it would be this. Do these statutes, when you read them ever make an impression on your hearts? And your answer must be "No". And some of us can say we have read them often and they have not touched us. But we have to say this also sometimes, they have come right in as it were, unbidden, but, thank God, not unwelcome. They have been welcome. "Teach me Thy statutes". Then you lay hold of these statutes and do righteously and says God of such a person - not one of his sins shall ever be mentioned to him. If you take hold of the statutes of life, as I have been speaking, you will find God and Christ and the Spirit in them and, says the Lord, not one of your sins shall ever be mentioned to you. Well, but you will always be confessing them. Yes, but He wont mention them to you. His forgiveness is so perfect; everything is perfect that He does. This is a great perfection and glorious that He wont mention the sins He has forgiven. They will never be found; He has put them away. And now He has given you grace to walk in His blessed statutes. "Teach me Thy statutes". You know to a Jew this would be more or less clear every morning, as if he should say I must take the lamb and I am glad to be allowed to do it. And at evening he would say, I must take the lamb, and I am glad to be allowed to do it. I must go to the priest with all things and I am thankful there is a priest, and this, translated into gospel language, is to go to God and name His dearly beloved Son incarnate, Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Then you will take the wave offering, then you will take the first fruits to Him, and give Him these, and these will be acceptable. "Teach me Thy statutes". May the Lord impress the greatness and glory of His character upon us. May He make us believe that He does good and show us the things in which His goodness shines and cause His good work to be in us and kindly and powerfully teach us His statutes that we may walk in them.