

61

1397-61  
La P 812

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
on Sunday morning 6 December 1925

Text: Psalm 147 v 5

"Great is our Lord and of great power,  
His understanding is infinite"

If God has put us into a state of mind to hear His Word, if we are poor enough; bad enough; weak enough; if we have a sufficiently severe scriptural knowledge of self; if we are led to examine self, and see that there is not a creature to be compared with us, for badness in our own judgment, and if some inkling of the want and worth of Jesus Christ be given to us, the great object of the text may be acceptable to our hearts. A great God for a great sinner; a great power for great sins; great power for great weakness; an infinite understanding, an understanding, as the text is in the margin, without number. Of His understanding there is no number. No cases, however many, however constantly recurring, of ignorance felt, of perplexity in opposition, can ever meet and exhaust this understanding. He draws it out; He makes it known. Are you, am I, in a frame of mind to need this great God? Will my voice, as it reaches you, be reaching stones, or cases that are indifferent? If so, very sad for you, and very sad for me. But I believe that there are some of us who do need what this text declares. He is a great God. Everybody not declaring atheism would of course acquiesce in this statement, but not everybody would find it welcome to his heart. Not everybody would say - Bless God for His greatness. Now let us ask ourselves one question at the outset, namely this, were we ever thankful that God is what He is? Did we ever feel that we would not have Him other than He is, different from what He is, though we might? Where conscience says, I am glad He is what He is, and would not have Him other than He is, be thankful. Men have always been making to themselves gods, and it was not for nothing that the Lord said to Israel "Thou shalt have none other gods before Me;" not for nothing that He frequently said in the scriptures "Beside Me, there is no God, I know not any". Is it

beyond a possibility that our wicked hearts may, at this moment, be framing other gods to ourselves? A touch of God's power, a sense of His greatness, will kill the atheism of our hearts for the moment, and cause us to desire to worship Him. God is incomprehensible to us, but if He is pleased to teach us, we have some apprehension of Him. An apprehension of God will kill the flippancy of our nature, and prevent us from easily taking religion into our hands and our mouths. Great is the Lord. A little God would not suit a big sinner; a God you can comprehend is no bigger than yourself and might be no better. But Jehovah, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, incapable of increase or decrease; God, who borrows not leave to be; God who created heaven and earth out of nothing and angels and men; God, who is in His Trinity of Persons sufficient for Himself, needing no world, and no creatures, to make Him happy, or to add to His happiness, this God I declare to you. And it will be your happiness and mine to believe in Him, and to know Him, as He reveals Himself. When a person believes in God really, he may be often astonished that he is so foolish as to lift his puny arm up, and think himself something or somebody, when he is nobody and nothing. What arm have we to be proud of? What reason have we to think highly of ourselves? Here I say, it was not for nothing that God said to Israel, when you come into the land I have given to you and your fathers; when you inhabit houses that you have not built; when you eat of vineyards which you have not planted (Deuteronomy 6 v 10 and 11) what then? Do not say that the might of your hand did this and that. I have given you everything. All has come from Me that you possess. If we felt this when we sat down to our meals; if we felt this when we put on raiment suitable to the weather; when we sit down in our comfortable rooms; when we enjoy the friendship of gracious people, it would do us good. It would make us thankful. And when, in affliction, to feel this, feel that the times we pass through are ordered; the pains we feel, ordered; the difficulties that surround us, ordered; everything ordered; ordered by a wise God, a great God, that will work in us at least a desire to submit to Him. And when we have mighty sins struggling for the mastery, and an indisposition to serve this God, then to believe in Him, and that there is no sin can cope with His power, and no

devil can resist His might, this, this believed, would do us good. Why is religion so great where it is real? Because a great God gives it. Why is faith so celebrated in the scripture? Why is it spoken of as a great thing? Because it is exercised on a great object; wrought by the great God Himself. And why is hope so wonderfully celebrated as to be called a good hope through grace? Because God bestows it, and has made Himself the object of it. And why is love so spoken of and celebrated, true love? Because it has that great object, the God of love, whose nature is love. It is a wonderful thing to have something of God in your conscience. Conscience is marvellous in man; given by God and intended to be a friend to the man, as well as a friend to God. Now when God is present to the conscience, and deals with it, it is a great thing. Never trample under foot your consciences. When they tell you that you are wrong, do not trample them under foot. Do not turn away from their reproofs. Great is the Lord. This great is relative, as the context shows. It relates to Zion, to the broken-hearted, to the poor. It relates to sick people. Greatness in God heals the sick, binds up the broken-hearted, lifts the downcast up. This greatness is relative. O thanks be to God that we have not to do with an absolute, abstract, God. If He were only abstract, we should not reach Him. But He is not; He is relative, and He reveals this in His holy word, thus. First of all in His great gift, for He has to do with sinners, and it rests with Him what He will do with them. Mark that. If the Lord will not save us, if He will have no mercy on us, we shall have no reason to blame Him. And if He give a gift to one and withhold it from us, there is no blame attached to Him. "Can I not do what I will with Mine own"? O sinner, God owes you nothing but punishment. What He owes to Himself in the threatening of the law means punishment to you as a sinner. If then, this great God will have mercy on us, and He will have mercy, - He has mercy on myriads of sinners - He manifests it in the first place by electing His eternal Son to be the Saviour of such. And therefore that great word has a significance never to be understood fully. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." If you live to prove that He gave His only begotten Son for you,

O you will need eternity and heaven sufficiently to enjoy and praise Him for the gift. This is the manifestation of the greatness of God. There is a certain greatness or dignity in a man who will pass by an offence done to him by a fellow man, but think of this, that the infinite God, who could not, by His very nature, pass by the sins of sinners, yet would save sinners by giving out of His own bosom His Eternal Son to be their Saviour. O how great is this love, infinite. "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends." But God, who is our friend, gave His Son, and commanded Him to lay down His life. Now if you are after this, if it is to be an enquiry with you, with me, whether the Lord gave His Son and commanded Him, as incarnate, to give His life for us, to lay it down, then the answer, when it comes, will be heaven on earth in us. That it will. O what an amazing thing it is for any sinner to know that God loved him. What an amazing thing for any sinner to be persuaded in his heart that God loved him, loved him eternally, loved him greatly, loved him freely, loved him so that He would not withhold from him His only begotten Son. Great is our Lord. I wish I could preach this as it ought to be preached, this greatness of God in His great gift. "Herein is the love of God manifested toward us in that He sent His only begotten Son into the world"; sent Him to be the propitiation for our sins. O sinner, do you want to know if there is any way to the holy God for you? Do you enquire whether such a person may pray; whether such a sinner may hope; whether such a sinner may escape the wrath to come; whether such a sinner may get honourably through this life with all its perplexities, and through the mazes of his own corruptions. If so, I say "Behold the Lamb of God" The vilest sinner out of hell who lives to feel his need will find this new way to be the way, and it will be acceptable to his heart. I am glad of this for myself; what should I do but for this love of God manifested in the gift of His Dearly Beloved only begotten Son? Raise your downcast eyes and head, O bowed down sinner. "The Lord raiseth all that are bowed down". This love is relative; it is for sinners in its nature. It flows in this particular channel, and it reaches the vilest sinner. Great in His love. And when this love flows and shows itself in the incarnation of the Son of God, in the miraculous virgin birth of

the Saviour, and when this Saviour is manifested by the Holy Spirit to a sinner as suitable, suitable because He is a Man, suitable therefore because He is capable of having sin imputed to Him, hope rises. This is one of the grand points of the gospel that the Lord Jesus is next of kin and is therefore capable of redeeming, capable of having the work of redemption laid on Him; capable of paying the debt of man and doing the duties of man, and discharging the liabilities of man and meeting the cases of a man, all men who have in their hearts a real sense of sin and of debt and of distance. The ramifications of the gospel are infinite. Take your case as you may know it; a case of rebellion, of lust, of pride, of vanity, of weakness, of yielding to sin, of turning from God, of unfaithfulness, take the case as you may find it in your own heart, and as the Spirit opens Jesus Christ to you in His redeeming character, in His work of salvation, you will find that there is not a case that you can come into, there is not a sin you can feel, there is not a sorrow you may bear, that this Lord Jesus Christ will not meet. How suitable He is. Ah, if we were but as suitable for Him as He is suitable for us, it would be a mercy. Mark what I say. O what a question, are we suitable for Christ? Plenty of men may be saying today, what a suitable Saviour Jesus Christ is, but then mark the scripture - the poor, the blind, the lame, the maimed, the halt, the leper, the debtor, the dead, the repenting, the weeping, the hard sinner, who would repent if he could, the distant soul that would come near if he could, such sinners, such sinners (they do not think it always) are welcome to, and suitable for, such a Saviour. And these two are to come together as when the physician heals the sick, when his remedies touch the disease. As when a broken bone is set and healed, there is contact between the physician, the surgeon and the patient, so when the Lord Jesus comes to a sinner, there is a contact between Him and the sinner. A distant Saviour you may think of coldly, but you will melt before a present Saviour, and thank Him for His healing touch.

Great in His love; and we must bring the Trinity in. O may we never by a syllable or a thought disintegrate the Trinity. The integrate of the Trinity is a blessed thing; a wonderful

mercy to hold it in your conscience. The integrate of the Trinity means this simply that the three Persons, as they are one in nature, so they are in salvation. Each has a different office and work, but the whole is one glorious whole. The complement of the Father's love, of the Son's incarnation, is the merciful revealing work of the Spirit, the great work of the Spirit. Great is the Spirit. Yes, great is the Spirit. Great in His love is the Spirit. He comes, He comes, full of grace. He comes with the washing of regeneration; He comes with the healing message; He comes in the sweet invitations; He comes in the gracious revelations of the Lord Jesus and makes Him known. O this holy gospel deserves to be preached well. This holy gospel meets sinners. I would not part with the little I know of the Trinity in unity in salvation for all the world. It is not much I know, but the love of God, I have known in my heart. And the greatness of the Saviour's merit, I have known. And the touches and teaching of the Spirit, I have known in my heart. Bless God for a little saving knowledge. Mourning soul, dry up your tears. You may say one day with Hart

Though temptations seldom cease  
Though frequent griefs I feel  
Yet His Spirit whispers peace  
And He is with me still

You will find all your fresh springs of hope and love and faith are in Christ. You will find sometimes you can say

O my Jesus Thou art Mine  
With all Thy grace and power

and when He comes, you are increasingly amazed that He should come, that He does come to such a person and then you will find a sweetness in the grief

Though frequent griefs I feel

Ah you will say perhaps, you will say with me, Lord I am frequently grieved that I am a sinner. I am grieved that I am a

sinner, and that I do commit sin. I am grieved that I turn away from Thee. But O He wont let you turn away from Him always. His Spirit will hold you; His Spirit will not let you go. So we have to do with a great God in Trinity. I would ever keep the Trinity before you because there is no salvation outside the Trinity and salvation is not confined to one Person in the Trinity. Each Person is a Saviour, and the three are the Saviour. One God is the Saviour of sinners. The Father saves by electing sinners; the Son saves by redeeming sinners, and the Spirit saves by quickening sinners, and these three unite in one gracious experience. Bless God for a true experience of the Trinity. Thus the Trinity is knowable and enjoyable and enjoyed sometimes. Ah, one says, but I am beyond all you say; I am an uncommon sinner. I know one thing, the more you are taught of God, the deeper will your convictions of sin be and the more likely you will be to conclude that there never was another person like you for wickedness. But then that wont alter this, this great truth, that your sins do not reach and outstretch and go beyond the infinite love of God, the infinite merit of Christ, and the infinite grace of the Holy Ghost. When you can get beyond infinite in love, in merit, in power, then you may despair. But until you can get beyond the Trinity, then there is no ground of despair. As Christ is at all opened and manifested to you, you will never run beyond the boundary for there is no boundary here. The illimitable ocean of God's mercy in Christ, the illimitable merit of Christ, and the illimitable goodness of the Holy Ghost, these, these will hold and keep a sinner, and take him to heaven. Great is our Lord, and this salvation in and by the Trinity will explain many things to us. It will explain afflictions which are sent by the Lord. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten". What a mercy it is that God deals so kindly with us, so tenderly with us. That is a beautiful passage in the Psalms. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." See a poor child who does not realise any danger, yet walking right into danger and the parent is near. What does the parent do? Stand still and see the child destroy itself? He interposes, stretches out his arm, and snatches the child from danger. God sees you going into evil, He sees me going into evil, and what does He do? Take no notice?

He has winked for generations at the wickedness of the world, and He is still winking at it in some sense. But when a child of His runs in a wrong way, what does He do? This great God says - I will hedge up his way with thorns, and if thorns are not enough (and the thorns of the east are great) He says, I will build a wall of hewn stone around him. And what is it for? He shall not find his paths. Think of it. The paths that he wanted, the lovers he went after; he shall not find his paths and then "I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness" And then what? There she shall say I have come to an end. There she shall say I am ruined, without hope. No; He says and there she shall sing as in the day when I brought her up out of the land of Egypt. I will give her her vineyards from thence. The very way of trouble, the affliction you have, the difficulties that are about you, these, these shall lead you to find not a wilderness only, but a vineyard.

Come to Me is His kind word. What a favour it is for God to deal with us patiently. The God of all patience and comfort, He says patience is in Him and comfort is in Him, and both of them His poor people are brought in some measure to have an experience of. Great is our Lord. Some of us have tried His patience; we have dearly tried Him; said wrong things to Him, and foolishly protested against His ways; thought Him neither kind nor wise; wished ourselves away from His control. Through the petulance and the wickedness of our nature have wished ourselves away from His control. If you have not gone as far as that, do be thankful and ask that you never may. Ask Him to keep the wickedness of your heart down. But I have gone as far as that, and what a God He has proved Himself to be. Great in patience. And when we should have cut everyone off dealing with us as we deal with God, if that were possible even, He comes and says - Return unto Me, return unto Me for I have redeemed thee. What reason have you to deal as you are doing? Why do you say you are lords, - "We will come no more unto Thee"? What have I done unto thee? Wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against Me O My people. What have I done to thee? I tell you this sinner, if God makes an appeal of that nature to you it will break you all to pieces and into sorrow and shame and contrition, and give you a good hope that He



will forgive you and take you to heaven at last. O what a God He is. How often He has to teach us the same lesson over and over and over again, so forgetful are we. Good reason has the Lord to say - Remember and hold fast; remember what I said to you; remember how I drew near to you; remember how I blessed you and remember the promise I spoke to you. We have forgotten all, we have forgotten all from time to time. It is very solemn to be a forgetter of God. I have been glad of that word "Then they remembered His holy words" All that He had taught them and some particular things He had said to them, they had forgotten. But when He arose from the dead and they saw Him, who could bear that, but correctly, and a correct representation of God by the Holy Ghost (and He never can give any other instruction concerning Him) will do you good, great good.

Great is our Lord, and of great power. There is nothing too hard for Him. His understanding knows no number; there is no end to it, an infinite succession; streams, beams, glories. Jesus Christ in His fulness possessing all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The Father in His eternal destination of sinners to life and glory and the Spirit in His infinite kindness in coming to dunghills and raking into them and bringing the Redeemer's blood to cleanse them; this is the God, this is the God I declare to you, though I do it feebly. This God is our God for ever and ever and He will be our Guide even unto death.

This God is the God we adore;  
Our faithful, unchangeable Friend;  
Whose love is as large as His power,  
And neither knows measure nor end.

This God may we know.

AMEN.