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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday evening 4 December 1927

PSALM 148 v 14

"He also exalteth the horn of His people, the praise
of all His saints; even the children of Israel, a people
near unto Him. Praise ye the LORD".

What an awful thing is human life. No man has ever done one
sinless action since Adam fell. No saint has ever done an absolutely
sinless action. Fallen man - the image of God in which he was created
defaced, his purity of mind destroyed, the uprightness of his nature
gone, warped, polluted, unrighteous, and distant, infinitely
distant, from a moral or spiritual point of view, from God. To
believe this is to have sorrow; to feel this is to be ashamed; and to
believe this, and feel this, alone; to see no remedy, no way of
returning to God, means black despair. What an awful thing it is for
a sinner to stand before God as a sinner. You may, some of you,
realise at times, may often have realised, the awfulness of standing
as sinners before God. You see your shortcomings, you see what a
necessity there is to be straight with God in His revealed Word and
you see you are just the opposite and are not fit for His presence.
You believe that some people are to be with Him, but surely you cannot
be numbered among them seeing you are what you are. Here is room for
the Holy Ghost to descend upon us and baptize us in the gospel and
show to us that that holy, glorious gospel is sufficient to remove
sin, forgive iniquity, purge away pollution, justify the ungodly
that believeth in Jesus and, without any consideration of what he has
done, what evil he is capable of, make a saint, a child of God of him,
and make him nigh who was once far off, And then, only then is that
Scripture entered into experimentally: "They looked unto Him and
were lightened and their faces were not ashamed." Is there a man of
God here who does not, when he looks at himself, feel there is
infinite cause for shame and banishment from God? Put your
experience by the side of the Scripture description of a Christian
and will you be able to conclude that you are a Christian? Put your
walk by the side of the precepts of the gospel and are you straight?

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Put your desires by the side of that Word: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" and by that word in the Proverbs: "The desire of the righteous is only good" and are you straight? O there is an awfulness in this self examination, but do not turn from it; O do not turn from it. But you say, when I examine myself, I am soon full of confusion and all but hopeless. Well, as sanctified your self-examination will be turned to a real comfort, for then you will say, sick of self, I turn my eyes another way, to Jesus and His blood. And the Spirit of Christ is the author of that good turn. And so it comes to pass that this word is brought into experience: "A people near unto Him." None can enter into that until he has felt to be at a distance from God. I have been glad at times that the Lord speaks of the different experiences of His people in terms of distance and nearness. What a thing it is though; how grievous to feel distant; when you pray, to feel that He shuts out your prayer; that the Comforter which should comfort your soul is far from you. But then unless you have that experience you cannot understand the change; what it is to be made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Near unto Him in the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace is the just expression in Scripture of the salvation of the church. It contains all other parts, to speak of parts, and the whole is greater than any part. This Covenant was put forth by the Lord Himself, and taught to the Apostle Peter, the symbol of a sheet, a great sheet, knit at the four corners, let down to earth, coming even to me, says Peter. And the voice spoke and said: "Arise Peter, kill and eat". And this shocked the Jew Peter who, as a Jew, had never had anything common or unclean to eat. But God took away that from him and said, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." That great sheet contained four footed beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air and wild beasts. Lively figure of the Gentiles, lively figure of some of us; wild beasts, determined to have our own way; creeping things, loathsome things; fowls of the air, foul imaginations, flying hither and thither, and yet cleansed in the eternal love of God, the purpose of His grace, the gift of them to Christ, and of Christ for them and to them eventually. "Near to God". Let down from heaven where they were in God's heart and purpose. This Covenant is sure, ordered in all things. All what we call contingencies, providences, changes, difficulties, changes in your feelings, changes in your

circumstances, changes in your friends, changes in the church, changes in the world, all these things. David, from feeding the sheep, sent to the war. David, the stripling, going out to meet the giant, and David, after being anointed, subjected to the persecution of Saul who envied him, hated him. The Covenant is ordered, arranged, and everything fitted in; everything, like a body; joints and marrow all fitted by the wisdom and the love of God. And the people in that Covenant are near to Him. In His heart, in His love, in His wisdom, in His goodness; in the gift of grace for them to the Lord Jesus before the world began. Near to Him because He would adopt them as children unto Himself by Jesus Christ. Near to Him because He called them the body of Christ; bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh, and members of His body in particular. Near to Him as the branch is in the Vine. Near to it to receive of its fatness to make the branch fruitful. "A people" - a chosen people, a royal generation, a royal priesthood - "near to God". The priests approached God, came near to Him.

Now this blessed Covenant bears fruit as it did in the case of Peter and Cornelius and all who were gathered together to hear Peter in the house of Cornelius. The Holy Ghost descended - I wish we might know something of that as a congregation - The Holy Ghost descended, operated, spoke, touched, influenced. If He came on you, you would feel Him. You would answer to the word of Christ in promising Him. "Ye shall know Him, for He shall dwell with you and shall be in you". And that inbeing is expressed again by Christ when He said: "He shall be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life." His descent is spoken of by Isaiah. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour My Spirit upon you." This is the Holy Ghost. Did you ever feel Him? Did He ever come down upon you and into your heart? Your own religion died then; your wisdom vanished then. Then your goodness departed from you. Then you found corruption where beauty had been. Then you found God dealing with you and you dealing with Him. You found yourself dealing with Him, confessing sin. Then also you received the Lord Jesus. Dear friends, neither an individual nor a congregation can have anything right without this descent of the Holy Ghost. Peter said, when I began to speak the Holy Ghost fell, came upon them. I wish that something of this could take place in you, in myself. There is a peculiar

influence, there is an air, an atmosphere, where He is. There is a life in His operations, a power in His voice, a light in His teaching. He fulfils Christ's promise concerning Him: He shall convince of sin, of righteousness and of judgement. Of sin, because they believe not on Me; Of righteousness because I - spoken against by them; I, judged wrongly by them - go to My Father; Of judgement because the prince of this world is cast out; he is judged. And then also, as it follows: "He shall glorify Me; for He shall receive of Mine and shall shew it unto you". No entrance into divine things without the Spirit of Christ. No knowledge of Christ without the Spirit of Christ bringing that knowledge. No purity of conscience without the blood of sprinkling, sprinkled by the Spirit of Christ. No knowledge of the love of God until He sheds it abroad in the heart. The whole of saving religion, as we term it, the whole of gracious experience is from and by the Holy Ghost. Changes in religion may be, and are indeed, taking place. An easy confidence has come, but the Holy Ghost withers all that, and brings the sinner into the dust, and raises him from the dust, and lifts him off the dunghill and sets him with princes, even the princes of God's people, and makes him inherit the throne of glory. That is how people enter the Covenant and enter into the Lord Jesus. Then you will agree with me, that no sinner ever did an absolutely sinless action and you will say, of all sinners I am the last to think of such a thing about myself. Why, you sometimes will be scarcely able to bear a view of your motives. Perhaps some of your best things had the worst of motives beneath them. Then, blessedly compelled to fly to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, you found the only access and acceptance is in the Lord Jesus and by the operation of the Spirit. And from this great Covenant come the parts of salvation which the Scripture speaks of. From it, that is from the Lord Jesus and by Him comes the atonement. "In whom we have obtained forgiveness of sins" Then comes the obtaining of the inheritance: "In whom we have obtained an inheritance". Then follows "the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost." And in these experiences the people are near unto God. Take the forgiveness of sins; how near a forgiven sinner is in his experience; he cannot express it; it is beyond all language to depict one who has been in his feelings, far off; in his judgement, far off, infinitely far off, who has been, in every thought of his heart, unfit for God's presence; now forgiven, his sin removed from him. He is near. His

heavenly Father receives him, his dear Redeemer receives him and eats with him, and the Spirit is with him as the earnest of his inheritance. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." O guilty person, this is what you need. Good tempers, pleasing frames, they will never satisfy you. You may think you have got them and they will vanish in the very thought. Humbleness of mind; you may think you have it and you will find even pride will be very near to it, if not at the bottom and in the middle of it. Sincerity; hypocrisy will rise and be alongside of it if not above it. And so you will be a ruined person. And I wish every person in this congregation might come to this utter ruin. It has taken some of us a long time to learn this; that is to say, God has patiently borne with us and given a little here and a little there. It is astonishing how legality grows up alongside grace and when, on some painful occasions, you look within and see, not only the depravity of your nature, but the untenderness of your walk, the unchristian spirit you have had, the unfaithfulness to the Lord Jesus, the wretchedness of your mind, the worldliness, the covetousness, the idolatry of your heart, until at last you are ready to say, I am no Christian, I am no child of God. Who, with grace, could do what I have done. And so it comes to pass that we put these things above Christ. Not intentionally, but actually in the spirit, we put these things above Christ and think because we have them, because we have done them, therefore we cannot belong to Him. I could wish that none of you of the Lord's people might suffer half what I have suffered, the damage that has been done to me by this wretched spirit. O convinced sinner, you will never be near to God that way. Your fears, your legal self-examination will drive you further and further away, and you will get weaker and worse day by day and the only remedy is when the Holy Ghost comes upon you and brings a free gospel, a full Christ, an imputed righteousness, an imputed sanctification, an imputed goodness, a fullness of grace from Himself; that will bring you near. "And you that were sometime far off hath He now made nigh by the blood of Christ". O, the atonement; who can express it. Heaven, in all its great purposes; God in all His eternal love; Jesus in all His perfection. His death made this atonement; ordained it, made it. And now sinners are plunged into it, lose their sins, lose their lusts, their guilt. Then they are now nigh.

They are nigh to Him in their troubles. Yes, their troubles seem to say that God is so angry, He puts them away from Him; they cannot get that sense of nearness that they had at times. New troubles bring new exercises, but now sometimes the Lord the Holy Ghost whispers in the heart: "Pour out your heart before Him;" "Trust in Him at all times ye people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us", and the soul is near to Him. You may have said with the prophet Jeremiah: "When I cry and shout He shutteth out my prayer" but not now, when He says, pour out your heart; when the Spirit says: "Open your mouth wide" When He says, now go to the Lord Jesus. He is a brother born for adversity, He is full of sympathy, compassion; "Able to have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way". Go to Him. Go to Him for His power; He will sustain you. Go to Him for His love; in His love and in His pity He redeemed you, and in your afflictions He is afflicted. Go to Him. And when the Spirit thus works and speaks, the sinner finds Himself near. Yes, he gets into that - though he may not be thinking of the word itself - he gets into that which you have by the Holy Spirit in the Hebrews: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. By a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near" O what a drawing near this is. Do not you understand, some do, what a drawing near it is. Getting out of night into day; yea, as when the sun shineth in his strength on the soul. Away from gloom, even if you retain your trouble. Away from fear that God is angry with you, believing now that He has ordained this for your profit. O my friends, "A people near unto Him" is indeed a very wonderful and sweet experience. Ah if some of you should say, blessed trouble that brought me so near to Him, I should be able a little to understand you. Wonderful to think that the Lord should have ordained a path of tribulation for you to walk in, that you might find yourself one day walking with Him. Jesus went and joined Himself to two sorrowing disciples and you will find just that, that He has come and joined Himself to you, and then you will answer to this: "A people near unto Him." In tribulation's thorny maze, near to Him. In deep waters, near to Him. In floods, near to Him, for this wondrous reason, that He has come into the floods and into the waters. What an amazing thing it is.

"Near unto Him" in a way of experimental union. "I am the Vine, ye are the branches." Judged by the bad fruit that we bear, judged by the wormwood and gall that we have in our nature, who can imagine himself to be a branch in that blessed Vine, whose holy fatness brings forth good fruit? But it is this holy fatness that will remove, and so to speak, kill all the bad fruit that we have to complain of, to be ashamed of. This nearness is expressed in a wonderful way that the Scripture has it: the branch and the Vine. Now here is a poor man; he says, I wish I could live near the Lord and he thinks he will make some effort. He will do this, he will refrain from doing that, and all the time he is just bearing bad fruit. His efforts - though he would not believe you if you told him that it was sin - his efforts are just sin; not of faith, therefore sin. But how am I to bear fruit? By the sap flowing into your soul by the grace of the Lord Jesus, by the operations of the Holy Ghost. No other way; neither for an individual, nor for a church is there any other way of bearing good fruit. Therefore the Saviour says, "Abide in Me". Do not go after other things. Israel of old was forbidden to go after other gods and forbidden to mingle themselves with the nations about them. Why? Because if they did so they would bring ruin to themselves. Today it is different. We must be general, we must be very affectionate, we must receive things and receive people though they are not straight with the Scriptures, and this is the beginning of evil. This may be the very beginning of apostasy in people who have the letter of truth on their lips. But when the Lord sends His holy grace and and sap into a sinner, a child of His, then all that is killed. "Herein" He said "is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit." Why "herein"? What is that? "Abide in Me". "Abide in Me and I in you". Come to Me, call upon Me, look to Me, rely on My atonement, look to My robe of righteousness, wait upon Me, draw from My fullness; "so shall ye be My disciples". So shall ye bear much fruit and so will My Father be glorified in you.

Then union is expressed in this way; the body fitly joined and compacted together. The body joined to the Head and every member united to it, and every joint supplying somewhat to the edifying of the body in love. "Near unto Him". The influence of His grace, the influence of His love, the sweetness of His love, the beauty of His

countenance, the greatness of His Person. O when you get near and find yourself nourished in your soul, when love grows and faith abounds and hope is in you lively, and love warms your affections, then there is an abiding, and a receiving nourishment from Him. Nothing else will do for you. As long as God enables me and keeps me at this, I will preach it to you, for I know you will never be pleasing to Him or near to Him, but as this is in your souls. Nothing else will help you, nothing else sanctify you, nothing else do you good. You may make a fire for yourself and stand before it, and warm yourself, and then congratulate yourself and say, Aha, Aha, I am warm; I have seen the fire. But let me warn you, if you do that one day the fire will go out, the sparks will die. And what then? But if you are near the Saviour and united to His precious Head, Himself even being everything to you, then that holy fire by which you are baptised, that Holy Spirit by whom, and whose teaching, you are united to Christ, that will abide, and you will have joy in yourself. "Let every man prove His own work, then shall he have rejoicing in himself and not another."

And this union, this nearness, is expressed in yet another way in holy Scripture; the union of husband and wife, which means such a nearness as has in it communion, friendliness, mutual love. "A people near unto Him" in this way. Does He speak to you? Do you speak to Him? This is expressed in the Song. "My beloved is mine" - O the sweetness of that confidence - "and I am His". He says, "My beloved" to her and she says: My beloved brought me into His banqueting house and He spread over me His banner. He stayed me with flagons, He comforted me with apples. He communicated with me, said something and I communicated to Him and said something to Him. And if our religion is indeed a holy religion, you have got it here, the union of a soul to the Son of God. My brethren, may the Holy Ghost descend on us and bring this divine union to pass in our souls; it will bring you near to heaven and bring heaven near to you. It will remove the vulgar notions of heaven that people have and give you a spiritual apprehension of the joy of the Lord.

"Praise ye the LORD". Ought we not, if we have such a hope as this, if such a God as this speaks to us, has spoken to us and blessed us, ought we not to seek to do this that is here exhorted to. "Praise

ye the LORD". Who thought of salvation first? The Lord did. Who schemed, planned, and devised? The Lord. Who began to bring it to pass? The Lord, when He sent His Son to be made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law. Who accomplished it? Jesus, on the cross, when He said: "It is finished", bowed His head and dismissed His spirit. And who brings it to a sinner's heart? The Holy Ghost. The beginning of it is that, and the middle of it is that, and the end of it is that; the Holy Ghost. So we know, those of us who have this holy religion, so we know the Trinity. So we have communion with the Trinity. May the Spirit descend upon us. I would keep this before you; that is religion that will save you, that is by Him. What comes from heaven into the heart by the Holy Ghost will take a sinner to heaven; nothing else will, nothing. And you will begin to say, have I got that? Ask Him to give you the earnest of your inheritance, and then you will know you have the Spirit; and then you will know it all came, not because you were so gentle, docile, good, obedient, holy, but on the opposite exactly. Unholy, wild as a beast, polluted as an unclean thing, and then God brought this religion to you and called you clean, made you clean. What can a minister desire more than to be this, as the voice of God, and clear of the blood of all men. A minister must give an account of his ministry, an account of the people who are given in charge to him to look after, and his desire must be, when right, to do it with joy, not with grief. If he has to do it with grief it would be unprofitable for the people in respect of whom he gave such an account.

Now I have told you as far as I have had gracious ability - and it is but poor - I have told you the truth. Search this Book and if you do so with enlightened minds, you will see that I have told you the truth; that nothing else will save you from sin, and fit you for God's heaven, but the great salvation of Jesus Christ, brought to you by the Holy Ghost. And if that is so, may the next step with you be this, to kneel before this great God and ask Him to give you that religion.

AMEN.