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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 28 September 1924

PSALM 27 verses 4 and 5

"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that
will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house
of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty
of the LORD, and to enquire in His temple. For in the time
of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion: in the
secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall
set me up upon a rock."

The Psalm opens with a gracious declaration of the Psalmist's confidence in His God. "The LORD is my light" - therefore he could see, see his dangers, see his safety - "and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" He had many enemies, Saul, traitors, but not one of them could he fear. There are moments when the child of God, surrounded though he may be, with enemies and difficulties, and filled and infested with innumerable transgressions, can say, does say, must say. "Whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom", men or devil, "shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell" - fell short of their designs. "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident" that God, my LORD is my light and my salvation. Then he declares that he has one desire, only one desire. He had many interests; his family, his throne, his success, the maintenance of his position; he had many interests, as who has not. You have, you have your interests, aims, designs, pursuits. You aim at success, you seek pleasure, profit, ease. You have many interests and not to attend to them would be idleness and evil. But there is in the desire of every child of God one centre. It is a mercy to come to that; when the world, your world, your interests, sink into a proper insignificance, into a true subordination to this one thing. "One thing have I desired of the LORD" How many of us could now lift up our faces to God and, regarding our many interests and then Himself as the end and hope and joy and strength and All and in

All, say to Him: "One thing", only one, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after"; necessarily and of choice, "that will I seek after". It was not an indefinite idea of some sort of good, which he had, but a most definite thing. That that I desire I will seek after, and this is it, "that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in His temple", May we be gathered up to this, this morning. May the Lord help me to speak of this desire. Desire is hunger, longing. Desire has an end, an object. This is, of course, obvious naturally. How about the spiritual intention? "One thing have I desired"; I am hungry for one thing. "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks so panteth my soul after Thee, O God". Exercised people enter into this. I believe some of us here can say this, at times: "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God." Implicit in such a profession is this, some knowledge of God. How could you desire Him if you were quite ignorant of Him? How could you wish to enquire before Him and of Him if you knew nothing of His goodness and His wisdom and His omnipotence and His care? Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good. It is not good to be without knowledge of God and of His character, of His gospel, of His promises, of His intentions, of His wisdom, and of His goodness. Then if we have a little knowledge of Him that will be a kind of spring in our hearts to our desires, and they will well up, not by some effort, but they will well up as from a living spring and you may find yourselves at times suddenly caught up to Him who is the Object of your faith and your desire, and say, this is the One; the holy God is the One, to possess whom, my soul would part with all. The One, to have an interest in whom, I desire above all things. To know whom, and to have union with whom and communion with whom, is my chief desire. Desire will take you a long way. Desire will separate you; desire will move you in the direction of the Object of your desire. The sluggard's desire does not take him off his bed; it leaves him thus, even that it is a trouble to him to lift his hand to his mouth. So the sluggard dies. A living desire is totally different; you will go after it. Yes, you will go after it. If you have this desire, I know you will go where the Object of it is. Happy soul that, whatever bondage and fear and gloom there may be felt from time to time, can say: "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after". I will go to the throne of grace; I will ask

Him to bless me; I will ask for that blessing which maketh rich and with which He addeth no sorrow. A living religion will always be like a well, a spring in your heart. It is from the Holy Ghost who Himself is promised, promised to be a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Heavenly men want heavenly things. Some may object that they are not heavenly and if you ask them why, they will tell you that they are so full of carnality that they cannot, for an instant, think that they are heavenly men. You will be denominated really by that which prevails in you and, though there be carnality and carnal desires and wrong thoughts and wrong pursuits in your hearts, yet if this prevails, that you cannot rest away from, apart from, God, that predominating principle will show what you are. If you have a desire that is of a heavenly nature and cannot rest apart from Him who is the great Object of His people's faith, then it may be truly said that you are heavenly, born again. "That will I seek after". Where will you seek it? You will seek it where alone it can be found; in the Scriptures, the perfect revelation of God in His character, His purposes, His gift, and His mercies. Here you will seek what you want, if haply your eye may light on some sweet discovery of God to you. Holy Scripture is a wonderful possession. Never will it be given up by the true Church of Christ. Its inspiration will always be held fast by the people of the living God. Holy Scripture, given, not by the will of men, but written by holy men of God as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. You will seek it on your knees. A good man is a man who lives on his knees, that is to say, his spirit bends before God. He is so poor, he cannot get on without God. So weak, he cannot stand without grace. So ignorant, he cannot rightly move without divine teaching, and so empty, that he cannot live without some supplies from God; and so he lives on his knees. He gets on well who can move, and does move, on his knees, by the Holy Ghost. Do not measure your praying by the length of time you kneel in secret; rather by the cries that ascend from your bondaged spirits. If your hearts kneel, God sees them kneeling, and if you weep, He has a bottle for your tears, and when you cry to Him, He has a book of remembrance in which all your prayers are put down.

You will seek this blessing also in the appointed means. Christ has seven stars in His right hand; the ministry is His gift, His gift to the Church, and whenever people are brought within the reach of

such a ministry, they will be found seeking by that, and this takes attendance, the attendance of God's people, and going to hear, quite away from the ordinary kind of hearing, as to will he preach a good sermon. This will be it, will the Lord say something to us by him? Will He give a message? Will He drop in some mercy? Will He send some reproof? Will He give some instruction in respect of the Person and work of Christ? The ministry is for the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. Well, and how many of us so seek? Do our desires find expression in these three particulars?

Now the thing the Psalmist here desired was that he might dwell in the house of the LORD, in the sanctuary, in the tabernacle, in the temple, all setting out the same thing. As a Jew, the house of God was the centre of David's life and hope. There were the types of the promised Messiah; there was the laver, the candlestick, the table of shewbread, the altar of burnt offering, the altar of incense and within the veil, in the holiest of all, there was the Mercy Seat, and the cherubims, and there God promised to meet with, and commune with, His people. To be exiled from this was exile indeed to the Psalmist. It made him say: "Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God". To see the ascending smoke of accepted sacrifices, to hear, on the annual day of atonement, the tinkling of the bells on the garment of the high priest, O what a sight, what a sound, to a gracious Jew. He rested not in them, but they told him of One who should come and in whom would all these types and shadows be realised, and so he wanted to be there. Let us go from the type to the anti-type, The anti-type is Christ in His divine Person. Would you dwell in Him? This is the thing.

Out of Christ, almighty power,
Can do nothing but devour

Who can dwell with everlasting burnings? Who can live in the presence of an absolute God? Who, convinced of his sins, convinced of the Being and majesty of God, if he met with Luther's prayer would not unite with it fully? Lord, he said, keep me from an absolute God, from a God out of Christ. I want to be in Him, says the soul. To the

Church of God, the Church which is in God and the Lord Jesus Christ at Thessalonica, and all through the world it is the same, in God, abiding in Him. There is a safe place here; there is a sanctuary here; here is the Mercy Seat; here communion with God is had; here the gleams of mercy, the beams of divine love emanate. Here people are cheered with a living hope. That I might dwell there; not be a stranger, not live outside this; not look at Christ as looking at a picture, cold and icy. O No! Not regarding the truth as a theory or an empty, dry doctrine, but looking at that Person who is the image of the invisible God and who represents God to His Church. In whom all the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwells, and in whom all the wisdom and love and mercy of God shall be seen. When men were making endless conjectures as to whom Christ was, He put this question to them: "But whom say ye that I am?" And what do we say about Him? What is He to us? That I may dwell there. No terrors, no commanding law, no cursing dispensation because of failure. Love in all its beauty; forgiveness in all its completeness and freedom; justification in all its absoluteness; sanctification in all its divine purity; acceptance without conditions of goodness. Here these things are known, seen by faith. The sinner says, I would wish to dwell in Him. One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in Jesus Christ. This Person of Christ is a meeting place between God and His people who are sinners. Here they come together and this was possible, and it becomes an experience, because in Christ first of all mercy and truth met together; righteousness and peace kissed each other. Now a good, holy, just God and the vilest of sinners meet together. Here they can meet and never sunder. Here they talk with each other. Here an injured Saviour kindly speaks to those who murdered Him. Here a blessed Redeemer, full of forgiveness, meets those who are full of sin, and here the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ becomes their Father and sends the Spirit of His Son into their hearts, crying "Abba Father". And here the Holy Ghost is and, coming from Christ, He makes these poor sinners His temple, and so they find this, that the Trinity and themselves are at one. You will have no richer experience on earth than this, God calling you and bringing you unto His Son and letting you know that He has no quarrel with you, and causing you to feel that you have no prejudice, quarrel, bitterness, anger, pride, and anything else that would cause separation between Him and you. He is rich indeed who has such an

experience as this. One may say, it is a great deal too high. The question is, is it true? We have not attained to it, perhaps, but is it in the Scriptures, revealed as that which a person may have? If it is, then may we say: One thing have we desired of the LORD, that we may come into this experience, meeting with, finding ourselves in, the Lord of life and glory. Is it not implicit in the 3rd Philippians, where the Apostle, abandoning everything of his own, both by birth and acquirement, said he forsook all, esteemed all to be dung and dross and loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. O, what a mercy to know something of this dwelling place. In the Hebrews, the Holy Ghost says by His servant, the Apostle, that we have now a High Priest over the house of God and that He is the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man. This, then, is the place where every child of God would find himself. "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life". How long are you to live? Through eternity. All these blessed days the child of God fain desires, seeks after and would have; to be there for ever and ever. The eternal God is the refuge and home of all His children and each one comes to this; I want this. Time is an empty vapour; life, what is it? A vapour which appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away. It were a poor prospect if this were all of hope in this life. O, but it is beyond this life. Here we get hints of it, here just passing glimpses, here sips; there an eternity of bliss, because an eternity of holiness. God makes His people holy and therefore makes them happy. "All the days of my life", and yet what interruptions there are to this experience. Take your own case, any child of God here. What interruptions there are to being in the house of God experimentally. No interruption as to the union, but many interruptions as to the feeling, the experience of the Lord Jesus.

And now there is an occupation in which he would engage. "To behold", to gaze upon, "the beauty of the Lord". Yes, there is that in Christ which does attract the attention, catch the eye and hold it at times. This is the beauty of the LORD, namely, first, the Person of Christ. The Person of Christ is the highest expression of the love and wisdom and power and goodness of God. He is the image of the invisible God. In the Man Christ Jesus all the fulness of the Godhead

bodily dwells. In Him the Father was pleased that all fulness of life, of grace, of justification, of pardon, of sanctification, and all goodness should dwell. There is not a grace, nor a comfort, nor a moment of peace, nor a sense of acceptance, nor a feeling of holiness, nor any communication of power that the people of God ever have or can have but what they receive from a full Saviour. Poverty is ours, emptiness is ours, sin is ours. Salvation from all these evils is Christ's. O, what a Person - God, in all His loveliness, in all the greatness and glory and beauty and blessedness of His character. The Person of Christ, the pure, holy Man, born of the virgin. Beauty, everything; God, shown to His people, perfectly represented to them, and man, perfectly represented to God. The Man Christ Jesus, true almighty God. There is nothing in nature to parallel or equal this. However beautiful and grand, however attractive to the eye and the intellect nature may be and is, it can never reach this. And here, while what nature has to show must ever be seen by comparatively few, and thus the educated and intellectual ones of the earth, with regard to this beauty of the LORD, the illiterate, the poor, the ignorant, yea, and I will say, the imbecile, can see all this in the light of the Holy Spirit. So this comes down to us who are poor and needy. You may feel often as if you must close the Book and say I cannot read for I am not learned. O, but you only need one thing. After all your diligence and all the rest, you just need this one thing, the light of the Holy Spirit shed in your heart and understanding, bringing some holy truth, some branch of the blessed gospel, something concerning Christ into your heart. Then you will see His beauty. Ah, did you ever see the Lord Jesus? If I put Erskine's question to you, can you answer?

Dost mind the place, the spot of land
Where Jesus did thee meet?

'Tis grand to have this; 'tis beautiful. Perhaps sometimes when you were sighing in secret and confessing sin, it came sweetly and suddenly, and unexpectedly into your heart. You saw the Lord Jesus, saw the God-Man, the Mediator, the Intercessor, the Advocate, the Redeemer, the King, the foundation, the High Priest; you saw Him. When people behold Him in His Person then they get in their hearts some feeling of union and of nearness and they love Him. I should

always oppose the senseless, for the most part, senseless question, indiscriminately put - "Do you love the Lord?" This is the question - "Do you know Him?" Love will follow the knowledge. O, to know Him, and His Father who sent Him, is life eternal. Happy the sinner who knows in any measure, by the revealing teaching of the Spirit, the Person of the Lord Jesus. Here is union, here is sweet peace, here is the sinner's only hope. Here is all his reconciliation, all his justification, all his sanctification, and by faith he beheld this beauty of the Lord. To behold the beauty of the Lord in his atonement, the atonement effected by the Lord Jesus by His active obedience and His active death on the cross, for His death was as active as any moment of His precious life. By this the people of God are redeemed, and a perfect atonement is made for them. And does not this meet their case? Are you covered with guilt? Are you infested with sin? Are you troubled with corruption? Are you, again and again separated from God by some new iniquity, done in your heart, if nowhere else? O, when brought into the temple and favoured with a sight of that fountain which Christ opened for sin and all causes of separation, what you will feel will be this. Here is the remedy, here is the remedy. Broader than all your evil case, deeper than your deep depravity, higher than all the guilt that you have accumulated by your sins. O, what an atonement is the atonement of the Lord Jesus. In it are reconciled every attribute of Deity, and the happiness of sinners. In it poor men, wicked rebels, are reconciled to God. By it their union with the Lord God is cemented, if I may so express it. Well, it is wonderful to have this, to see this beauty. Works here have no place; the thing is done and vital religion is not a work but it is an application of the work of Christ, It is not something done by the sinner; it is something brought to him by the Holy Ghost. He is the vessel into which the Spirit puts this mercy. To behold the beauty of the atonement. All that the law demanded, all that infinite justice could ask and must ask, all that infinite holiness required, all that was necessary to bring wretches to God and God to them, the atonement effected. Happy man who looks, by precious, God given faith, into this beauty of the Lord.

And therefore, next, happy is the man who looks by faith into this beauty, that God is a just God and a Saviour. Just He is necessarily; a Saviour He became freely. Just, He must be,

throughout eternity. He will be just in perdition, when devils and men shall be under His hot displeasure. A Saviour He became in His love, in His goodness, in His own election to be such. This beauty will ravish your hearts when you look on it in your justification. Justification? Well, I can say that it becomes more wonderful and beautiful to me as I approach my end, for sin does not become decrepit, as the body does, with age. O, the vigour of sin; how painful it is to know it. And so, if justification is to be complete so that no fault can be found in the justified person, it must be entirely God's doing. And this is obvious if you, for one moment, consider that justification is an act passed on a culprit. It could not be self-justification and stand, but God's justification stands. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right-hand of God". Ah, sinner, if ever you take the name of a justified person upon you - that is, the truth of it, the mercy and the greatness of it, should come into your heart - then you will say, this was altogether and alone the act of God on my soul. And to behold the beauty of a justifying God; a justifying God who has laid aside all that quarrel because the Lord Jesus sufficiently atoned. A just God, who has no frown on His face, and brings no law charges against you, but just acquits, and gives you a new white stone in which is written a name that you only, yourself, can read. "To behold His beauty". And to behold His beauty as a sanctifying God and Saviour. I have more than once mentioned this to you, dear friends. Take your experience of sanctification - your praying one day with fervour, and the next day your silence in prayer, your prayerless spirit; one day your love of God and holiness, and the next day your carnality; one day, how you love His ways and His people, and the next day come under the influence of some prejudice and some rebellion - and what will you do? How could you stand before God if this were to be your sanctification and nothing else? O, but when the Lord Jesus is made to a sinner in his heart, sanctification, he sees no ebbing, no flowing, no now rising and then sinking - truth of the matter - but an everlasting state. Holy in Him; "Holy brethren partakers of the heavenly calling". What a favour this is, and is God the God who justifies and also sanctifies? Yes; and therefore what a mercy to know and look on this beauty of the Lord, that He is the sanctification of His people as well as the justifying

God, who reveals Himself as such in their hearts. "To behold the beauty of the Lord". These matters are essential to salvation.

Now look, in the next place, and very briefly, at another part of this beauty of the Lord, namely His wisdom. How are you to know the way from hell to heaven? How are you to know the way from all evil and affliction and sorrow except it be manifested in you? Christ is the wisdom of God. O, when this is seen, that shines that is in the 14th chapter of John. "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life". He is that, and when, by faith, you walk in Him, walk up and down in His Name, then you walk from evil to good, from weakness to strength, from blindness to knowledge; then you walk well before the Lord unto all pleasing. Likewise, His wisdom in providence. God holds very different ways with different people. He shows Himself, apparently angry, frowning in providence here and there, with some. But His wisdom is seen in this that He turns common providences into spiritual benefits. I do not suppose, at the end of David's life, when he would be reckoning up God's mercies to him and looking upon the path, so chequered, so full of trouble for the most part of his life, that he would, reckoning up God's mercies, leave those out. O, he would say - these chastenings, that exile, those dangers that I was in, the time when Saul all but had his hand on my shoulder but God sent the Philistines to invade the land and he hurried away from me to take care of his throne; would he not remember those things and say - here were God's mercies, here His kindnesses, here His wisdom. And you and I, when we look at God's mercies - and we have to do it sometimes - when, with some of us, we look back a long time, a long life, badly spent, unprofitably spent, and yet feel a chastening here and there, what have we to say? That the chastening was good; that was mercy, that was wisdom, that was kindness; and we behold His beauty in all this. My brethren, have you had this favour? You cannot see this beauty of the Lord outside the Lord, but in Him, as dwelling there. And from time to time, realising that you dwell there, what a sight you will get of His lovingkindness. "I will mention the lovingkindness of the Lord", says one, and the goodness and the righteousness of the Lord. Another says: "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord."

"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after" -

that I may come to this vital place; here life reigns, here goodness is manifested, here forgivenesses shine forth and are spoken - "that I may behold the beauty of the LORD and enquire in His temple". You will never be too old for this business if you are gracious. There will be some new difficulty, some sense of ignorance, some want, and then the Lord will say, now this is the way. "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it". Come to Me with your wants, with your lacks of goodness and experience. Come to Me with your new difficulties and troubles. And, says the child of God, why this is just what I am wanting and what I am needing, what I am asking for; that I may go, that I may enquire of Him - "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" When David had befriended Keilah, he went there, put himself in that stronghold. Then, by his intelligences, he heard that Saul knew of this, knew of his whereabouts. Yea, and Saul said, now the Lord has delivered mine enemy into my hand. And when David knew that Saul was aware of where he was, what did he do? Hurriedly run away? No! No!, he said I could not do that. What then? Bring me hither the ephod; let me pray, let me ask the Lord's counsel. Lord, he said, I have heard that Saul knows where I am. Will he come down? will he seek me here? "He will", said the Lord. Well, but David had so befriended this city that he might well expect they would befriend him, but that was not his confidence. Lord, he said, will Saul come down? "He will". Then will the men of Keilah deliver me into Saul's hand? "They will", said the Lord; and so he escaped. That is the enquiry; when you have difficulties, when you are confronted with evil, when you know not what to do, then, as under the Spirit's teaching, this will be your business. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Enquire in His temple; may this be made our way, our course, and may a good God communicate with us according to His promise saying to Moses when He gave him directions about building the Mercy Seat and so on - "There I will meet with thee and I will commune with thee." And so, if we are favoured thus, we shall come well to the end and say: Hitherto hath the Lord helped me, and I shall come well out of every trouble. May the Lord help us.

AMEN.