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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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PSALM 27 v 8

"When Thou saidst, seek ye My face, my heart said
unto Thee, Thy face Lord will I seek"

One may say at the outset that this passage of Scripture tells us that vital religion consists in God speaking to a sinner, and that sinner speaking to God. My friends, ask yourselves the question whether you have such a religion. "O beware of trust ill-grounded" Beware of an ungracious confidence. Beware of thinking you are right if you are not. It is a great thing - comparatively few believe it or understand it - for a sinner to hear the voice of God out of heaven and live. It was great to Moses who said to Israel - Did ever nation hear the voice of God out of heaven and live as ye? You have heard His voice and you live. If we only realised a little of the infinite goodness of God in speaking to a sinner and causing the sinner to live by that very voice, and if we have a hope that such has been God's mercy to us, surely we should fall flat before Him and offer the praises, all the praises that a grateful, gracious heart could dictate.

We saw this morning a little of what it is to hear God saying "Seek ye My face"; that the Scripture is full of invitations, it is, so to speak, an invitation to poor sinners for whom God has a favour; that it is the voice and work of the Spirit in the heart moving a sinner Godward; that it is a sinner's felt condition, sin, guilt, bondage, corruption, and every evil thing in him moving him, by the grace of the Spirit, to seek relief, that is to seek God's face. That it is providence speaking, the rod speaking, so as that the wise man of the city hears it. These four things I spoke about as being the case of sinners seeking, that is to say, God's voice saying in them: "Seek ye My face", an infinite condescension in God to sinners.

Now, as enabled, I would draw your attention to this, first of all, the response, the response that the heart makes. "Thy face Lord

will I seek". Think of the distinction God makes between one man and another, when He says to one: "Seek ye My face", and leaves the other to say: Who is the Lord? What profit is there if I should pray unto Him? Has the distinction been given to us? We are no better than others. There is no infidel, no superstitious person, no papist, no immoral person in conduct, of whom we may say, they are a great deal worse than we are. We have to say, we do say, if taught of God - There go we - as wicked as any of them - but for the grace of God. Then think of this; the heart - not the form, not the body, not the lip - the heart saying: "Thy face Lord will I seek". And can we come in here? Can we lay our hand on our heart and secretly appeal to the God of heaven and say, this heart, so wicked, so poor, so destitute, so needy, so hungry for Thee, this heart says: Lord, I seek Thee. I need Thee, I desire Thee. Happy the man who is able to say it from the heart. My heart, my poor, weak heart, ever, ever, ever being overcome, always, and eternally to be overcome unless saved by grace, this heart saith: "Thy face Lord will I seek". Does not this profession of the heart intimate a great truth, namely that God, in some way, and some measure, is known as desirable? Is not there a perception that what is needed God possesses? and a hope that He will impart it? He meets sinners. He meets, He answers to, their need, and faith perceives it. You could not perceive the suitableness of the Lord to you and not seek Him. O the heavenly response, the pleasure the response gives to God, the satisfaction it gives to the Saviour who therein - seeing a prostrate sinner - sees of the travail of His soul. I believe a good many here have given the Saviour that pleasure, that satisfaction. My heart - once hard, now broken; once stubborn, now suppld and bent; my heart - mad once, now sober, realising the awfulness of sin and the need of salvation; my heart - set in me madly to do evil, now turned away from it with pain; my heart; what a mercy to be able to say it. There is a secret in religion that very few know. There is a depth in religion; there is a secret. It brings a man into secret things; it makes him a secret person. He possesses a religion unseen by the human eye, misunderstood by the world. O it is a great thing to have God's religion and the heart to love it.

Let us look at the Object. I might speak a long time about the subject and many of you might say, well but we are not sure after all.

We think we have some of the marks, but we are not sure. And if you were, you could not build on them. Our marks, good as they may be, and innumerable as they might be, could never be a foundation. Let us look at the Object. "My heart said unto Thee, Thy face Lord will I seek". The favour of God, and, as the favour of God is in one Person, He is the Person to whom the sinner addresses himself when he says, I seek the Lord; when He says: "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God" as a thirsty land: "When shall I come and appear before God". (Psalm 42) Now I would speak a little of the greatness of this God. In Deuteronomy one says: "Ascribe ye greatness unto our God" (Deuteronomy 32 v 3). "Great is our Lord, and of great power: His understanding is infinite" (Psalm 146 v 5). And who is this but the Lord Jesus? Who can know God out of Christ? Who can see Him out of Christ? Therefore we are to look at this Person. And first, with respect to His greatness. His greatness consists in the first place, that is for me to speak about, in His own wondrous Person consisting of the Son given and the child born, of whose government there shall be no end, and whose Name is Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace, of whose government and peace there shall be no end. This is the Person, the God-Man, Jesus Christ. You do not seek a myth when you seek Him. You do not seek, as one blasphemous minister, so called, said, you do not seek a mere Jew who had his limitations and was ignorant of many things, but you seek the mighty God in the Man Christ Jesus. What a Person. Go worship at Emmanuel's feet. See Eternal Deity in the Word made flesh, dwelling among us - the only begotten Son declaring God - none can see Him otherwise. See Him of whom the Father said: "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". Almighty God sighing human breath; the possessor of all things hungry; omnipotence weary. A very Man, a pure Man, burdened with imputed sin. The eternally loved Son forsaken of His Father. The Creator of a creature permitting a foul creature to go to Him in the wilderness and tempt Him. This is the Person in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, in whom the grace of God is, it being given to Him before the world began for the church. This is the Person, a great Person. He fills heaven and earth as to His eternal Deity; He fills heaven and earth. Omniscient, Omnipresent. Can any hide from Me in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. (Jeremiah 23 v 24) This is the Man Christ

Jesus, sent of God to speak God's words, and to do the works which His Father had done in eternity, and this glorious Son had seen Him do. "Thy face Lord will I seek". The church sought Him as it is related in the Psalms, when, compared to a vineyard, she said that the hedges were broken down, that the boar and the wild beast out of the forest trampled under foot the vine, and nothing but desolation was there. And she said to God, the Father, - O what a prayer, the prayer of faith - she said: "Let Thy hand be upon the Man of Thy right-hand, upon the Son of Man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself. So will not we go back from Thee" (Psalm 80 v 17/18). She sought the Lord and sought Him in the Mediator, in Jesus Christ. Sinner, where is your eye, your heart, your attention? Whom do you seek?

Thy face as the Substitute will I seek. A proper substitute is a person who takes the place of another in precisely all the particulars in respect of which a Surety is to act; precisely the condition, and the responsibilities, and the liabilities, and the debts, and everything attaching to the person for whom a substitute is needed. We can understand that in human affairs - the debts and claims one man has on another - but who can understand our solemn, awful indebtedness to a Holy God? He against whom we have sinned? Now Jesus Christ fills the whole place, not just of one sinner, but of all the elect whose sins merited eternal wrath. He is the church's Substitute, and on the Jubilee day - the year of release in a sinner's experience - by the Spirit Christ says to that sinner, I took that place, I have settled your debt, you are free. Do you seek this Substitute? Do you ever look on that scene of matchless grace, Jesus in the sinner's place? Do you ever seek to hide here, and to hear God's word in and through Him in that work of a Substitute?

Payment God cannot twice demand
First at my bleeding Surety's hand
And then again at mine

Sinner, is this the Person you seek, one who stood, as you hope, in your exact place, to whom your sins were reckoned, to whom they were imputed? and He, the Substitute, the glorious One groaning under the burden, and the guilt, and the curse due to sins imputed to Him, and, as you hope, your sins. "Thy face Lord will I seek." O Substitute

divine, O vicarious sufferer, O mighty Lord Jesus, who "bore all incarnate God could bear, with strength enough and none to spare", I seek Thy face. Can you say it to Him? Have you said it to Him? He listens, He kindly listens when sinners go to Him. He kindly listens to them. Has He heard you say that? I will seek Thy face as Thou art on the cross? He despised the shame, He endured the curse. What the curse meant to the Lord Jesus He alone fully knows, but some realisation of it will cause a man to say this - there is a beauty in the shame that Jesus endured and despised. There is a beauty in His sufferings, a life in His death, a forgiveness in His blood, a justification in His work. There is a glory in the death of Christ. Through the badger's skin covering eternal glory, a sinner, by faith, sees that glory on the cross of Christ. O what can be compared for blessedness with an interest in Christ, and what happiness can there be apart from some knowledge of this?

And Christ raised from the dead, do you seek Him? Why do you seek the living among the dead? - it was said by the angels - He is not here, He is risen. People may - even gracious people may - make a mistake for a time about Him. Mary thought that He was the gardener. Sir, said she to Him, if thou hast borne Him away, tell me, that I may go to Him. What a great thing it is to believe in the resurrection of Christ. The ministry of the Apostles was very emphatic on this point. With great power gave they witness to the resurrection of Christ. And good reason there was for it, and good reason there is for it still, because that, on that great fact, hangs the life, the eternal life, the justification of a sinner, and his entrance into heaven. Do you seek a risen Saviour? He is in heaven.

Do you seek Him as a Mediator? There is One God - O dreadful truth to a convinced sinner; an awful, eternally awful truth to the lost - "There is One God and One Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." A Mediator. A Mediator has two interests, the interest of God and the interests of men for whom He is a Mediator. The interests of God He attended to when He lived, when He died. He always did the things that pleased His Father, and His death was an obedient act. His death was the death of an obedient servant. My Father commanded Me to lay My life down and I lay it down of Myself; of My own will and of My service to My Father who sent Me to do it, and

commanded Me to do it. And He serves the interests of sinners in ministering and serving in the things which pertain to God. And He serves a sinner when He brings life and peace to his conscience. A Mediator between God and men who intervenes and comes in between His own men and death, and devils, and world, and sin, and guilt, and bondage, to deliver them. He comes in between all evil and His people because He is the Mediator between God and men. There are two ways of being satisfied with respect to this Person. The first is the testimony of the Scripture. Happy the man in this chapel who can now say before God to the Lord Jesus - We believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. How many could rise in their spirits to Almighty God, Jesus Christ, and say, we believe; we believe on the testimony of holy Scripture; we believe on the testimony of God in Eden, the Seed of the woman, Jesus; on the testimony of God in the Covenant to Abraham - In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed, and all the prophets, and types, and the shadows, and the definite declarations of the New Testament, on the record here, we believe that Thou art that God and that Man in One Person, the Christ of God. It is not a cunningly devised fable; it is a great doctrine, it is a divine fact. We do not follow a cunningly devised fable. But O, when you get the second that I am to name - this, that you have got a manifestation of Him in some measure in your heart, and you can say, now I was in trouble and He came to me; I was in darkness, and He shined into my heart; I was in affliction, and He came and comforted me; I feared destruction and He told me He was my salvation; when I say you can come to that - you have got a satisfaction on the satisfaction. You have got a testimony that time will never undo or contradict; that will land you in heaven. It brought union, and comfort, and peace, and strength, and confidence. "Thy face Lord will I seek".

It is seeking heaven. Turn then to this in the next place. Abram went out not knowing whither he went, and he sought a city. The Holy Ghost tells us that he sought a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. How many could have that name, so to put it, Abram, written on their hearts and their foreheads? Now these, as if it should be said, these sinners in Galeed, careless ones, and living in the world once, and only for the world, these sinners are now seeking a city and God is the builder of it, and no human eye can

see it, but they believe it and they seek it. A city of safety, a city of abode, a city built by God, founded in His love, in His purpose, in His wisdom, in His omnipotence, in His death, in His resurrection, whose builder and maker is God. Sinner is your face this way? What a great thing it is to be a seeker, seeking this, and yet not knowing it sometimes. Not knowing wither he went. He forsook his country, his people, and his father's house, and went out not knowing wither he went. You say sometimes I have left the world, I was obliged to do it, I could not live in it. I have left the world and now I do not know where I am going. You may think sometimes, I must give it all up. If you have talked about godliness, you may say to yourself, I wish I had never done it. But now, if that be so, may I put a question to you. If you do not know where you are going, if you have left the world, if you now feel that you have no prospect before you, this is my question - Do you go back into the world? Could you go back into it? Would its pleasures be your pleasures? Would the things you forsook give you any satisfaction now? Ah you may say what the dear godly old member at Lutterworth said to her Pastor, who was my Pastor, when she went and said to him, my name must be taken off the church book. Why? he said. Well because I am not right, I know I am not right. I do not know my interest, I do not get near to God, I get no satisfaction; you must take my name off the church book. Well, he said and where will you go? Where will you go, to the world? And instantly she said, O I could not do that. Now perhaps that is what some of you may say. I could not go there. I left it not to go back to it. Well, go on seeking; remember Abram did not know at the beginning where he was going only his face was toward the country and his back was on his own country and his kindred and his father's house, and the Lord said to His people in the Psalms: "Hearken O daughter" What was she to listen to? Why this; forget your father's house, forget your kindred. What, must I forget all natural relationships? No, but I must have first place. Seek Me and ye shall live. Seek Me who maketh the seven stars and Orion. Seek Me who makes peace and says, Peace be to him that is near and to him that is far off. Seek this good God and you will find the city. Seek the Saviour and you will find an abode. Seek the Saviour and you will find the true tabernacle in which the Lord dwells, the tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man, and you will find everything you want. "Seek ye My face, He said.

I will mention what I often talk about; I will mention in passing one or two things. First of all seek God who forgives sins. Remember His powerful declaration to Moses. "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34 v 6/7). Why sinner, your sins and my sins are not sufficient to make the blood of Christ ineffectual. "The blood of Christ thy soul can cure", can remove all stain from your conscience, and remove the load of dead works that are on it. O dear friends, those dead works are to be removed. What a mercy. Seek the forgiveness of sins. Sin felt is a bar between God and the conscience. Sin removed makes the way plain, straight, sweet, and brings the sinner near to God. "Ye who sometimes were far off" says Paul "are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2 v 13) None can know till they get it, what the holy satisfaction is that the conscience feels when sin is washed away.

Seek justification. Justification is just this, the pronouncement of the judge on the person charged; the sentence being, he is justified; there is nothing blameworthy in him; I find no fault in him; discharged from every accusation. The sin of which the sinner is accused is not found; when sought for it cannot be found; for, says God, "I will pardon whom I reserve". Seek this; then you will have peace; then you will understand the power of peace. There is a power in peace. "The peace of God".... it is written "shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4 v 7). Keep them as in a garison and the garison is this: "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about" them that fear Him. (Psalm 125 v 2). O sinner, how safe you are when, in your own experience, you have forgiveness, justification, and peace.

Seek union. Seek to abide in the true Vine. "I am the Vine, ye are the branches. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the Vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me." To abide in Christ is to cleave to Him, to wait on Him, to wait for Him, to go daily to Him. And in this is involved the growth in grace to which saints are exhorted - "Grow in grace" - taking root downward. Taking root downward is the root of faith striking into Christ, and His

atonement. Bearing fruit upward is living to the praise and glory of God, whether you eat, or whether you drink, or whatsoever you do. It is not a beautiful religion that men will approve, but a secret religion. Very few people believe this that Dr Goodwin says - Jesus Christ is most glorified in secret. O does not a man like to bless himself in some good works? No, says God, you glorify Me when you offer praise, and when you order your conversation aright. And when you eat, you do it to Me, and when you drink you do it to Me. And when the servant serves, as Christ's freed man, and when the master does what he does as unto Myself. Bearing fruit upward, the fruit of love, and bringing the sacrifice of praise, and even glory, to Jesus Christ.

Seek good out of your troubles. Seek to get good by means of them. Who would not run out of trouble if he could the moment he entered. The first thought of a man getting into trouble is, how can I get out of it? Seek good by means of it. God may have put a stone wall around you because He sees your madness and folly in determining naturally to have your own way. He says, I love you, therefore I build this wall around you. Seek good out of it. Seek good by means of it. Seek Him to make the crooked things straight. You want Him to take the crooked things out of your way, but He does not say He will do that, but He does say He will make the crooked things straight; straight even to your will, to your mind, yea to your choice, and it is very wonderful, and beautiful to see God working so as that the crooked things, while they remain in themselves crooked, are straight in your conscience, and judgement, and affections, and will. Seek Him to make the rough places plain. No, nature says, I want Him to take them out of the way. No, He wont do it, but He says, I will make them plain. And a rough place is very plain when you have got the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace on, the shoes of iron and brass. They are plain when, by faith, you see God working according to that Scripture: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." Very plain when you see the Lion of the Tribe of Judah opening the book and having control of men and devils; armies, and all enemies, and all creatures in His hand, under His control and management. And when you can put your own case, and troubles, and afflictions into His management, and believe that Scripture. "Of the increase of His

government and peace there shall be no end." (Isaiah 9 v 7). O, says faith, Lord, "my times are in Thy hand". I commit my spirit unto Thee, I commit my body, and my family, and my business, and my interests to Thee. All things are in Thy hand.

"Seek ye My face" says God, and says faith, Lord I do seek it. I want Thee. No rest can I get without Thee, nor do I wish to have it really. Well my brethren, let us thank God if we are seekers. Well, but we ought to be more than that, say some. It depends on what you mean, whether we ought to be more than that. If you have had God for five minutes in the hand of your faith; if you have had His mercy and then, through prevailing corruption, have let Him go, what is the next thing? The Holy Spirit giving you power to return to Him, giving you power to come and say, I repent, I repent, and pulling you off the bed of indolence, and enabling you to say to all you meet: "Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?" God's people are always seeking Him. They have daily needs. Would that some of us had daily prayer. Daily do we sin. Would that we had daily repentance.

"Thy face Lord will I seek" to straighten matters for me, to subdue my iniquities, to give me to remember my resting place, to give me power to seek, and to confess, and to repent, and to wait on God continually. "Thy face Lord will I seek."

Now dear friends, may the Lord help us to walk in this path. We must be afflicted people; we are an afflicted people. Some of our friends are much afflicted. May the Lord bless them and help us to pray for them, and kindly look on us in this evil day. And do let me say this in conclusion, God keep you, and keep me, as many of us as have heard Him say: "Seek ye My face", keep us saying to Him, "Thy face Lord will I seek", and keep us from ever attempting to have a substitute for Him, a thing in His place. He wont tolerate it. He is jealous; His Name is Jealous. May the Lord help us.

AMEN.