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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 17 July 1932

PSALM 31 v 19

"O how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast
laid up for them that fear Thee, which Thou hast
wrought for them that trust in Thee before the
sons of men"

Perhaps a goodly number of the Lord's people present may be instantly disposed to say each one "O how great is my sin." A very solemn confession to have to make and terribly true. The Holy Ghost will never allow a man, taught of Himself, to say: "Thank God I am made so good". The opening of the eyes of the mind by the Spirit to see the sin of our nature, to see that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" is, while a very great blessing, an unspeakable shame and pain and confusion. You need not commit an open sin to experience what I am saying. It is in the heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked". You are not well off, who are ignorant of this. You are not to be envied or easy with respect to this. Happy is the man whom God chasteneth. Blessed is the man to whom it pleases God to give a sight of what a fallen creature man is. And this sight, painfully, shamefully degrading, prepares a sinner for what the text tells us of the goodness of God. The badness of man and the goodness of God meeting, make a child of God. The one makes him miserable, ashamed, weak, poor and wretched, and the other makes him happy, comfortable, and strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. This great goodness of the text is nothing less than the everlasting love and mercy of God laid up in Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. So great is this, that what Paul speaks of is true: "Ye are complete in Him". Complete as saints, so complete that nothing can be added to it. So complete that God is pleased when He looks on a person in Christ and Christ is pleased when He sees His Church complete, and says to her: "Thou art all fair; there is no spot in thee". And the Spirit is pleased for He dwells in the soul and He bears witness with

the sinner that he is a child of God, an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ. No wonder then that the Spirit of Christ inspired the Psalmist to make this beautiful exclamation. "O, how great is Thy goodness". If you would try to count them, as the mercies of God are, you could not do it. This goodness is expressed in the Scripture as God blessing the church with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. He can do nothing less, nothing more, than bless a sinner with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, and the rule of that is this - having predestinated us unto the adoption of children to Himself by Jesus Christ. And the whole of it is thus also expressed - that God worketh all things according to the good pleasure of His will. O how happy is the man who was put into Christ and whose eternal blessings were hid in Christ, so that no enemy can come near, nor touch them, but his state, his standing, God has made secure, hid, laid up, laid up eternally before the world was made. The goodness of God to the church was laid up in the purpose of God in Christ who was to become incarnate. So, afflicted saint, God give you grace and faith to look for no goodness in yourself, no holiness, no wisdom, no spirituality in yourself, but what the Holy Ghost brings to you from the fulness of the Lord Jesus. And this is for all who fear God - "For them that fear Thee." The fear of God seems to express the whole of religion, vital God-pleasing religion. If you fear God you have in your heart an unctuous light to all that's right, a bar to all that's wrong. Deceit, lying, swearing, every evil thing that you may have in your heart, that you may do with your hands, and evil things that you may say with your lips, these the fear of God bears witness against in your consciences, those of you who have this blessed fear. The fear of God makes Him, the dear Redeemer, the chief object of desire. It enables, it constrains, you to say at times: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee". None but the Lord Jesus can please the sinner in whom the fear of God is. It testifies against your prayerless spirit; it tells you that communion with God is the chief employment of a living soul when that soul is lively. It tells you that to neglect the Scripture is a sin, because the Scripture is a revelation of God and of His will and of His ways and that revelation, so complete, is to be the meditation of the saint while here. When Joshua was to succeed Moses, God spoke to him and said that the book of the law was to be in his hand and in his mind. He was to read it and meditate upon it night and day and, according as he did so, his way

would be made prosperous and he would have good success. When you, naturally disposed to it, neglect the Holy Scripture, you will find your souls lean, free to wander, but the fear of God, stirred by the Spirit of God, will turn your heart and mind and desire and affection to the Word of the living God. The fear of the Lord is clean, and it makes you long for clean things, a clean religion, a clean profession; yes, a clean profession. Lie not one to another. Put away lying, speak truth every man with his neighbour. The fear of the Lord will affect your conduct; it will bring you to understand and follow and practice Christ's word: "Let your yea be yea and your nay, nay" It will make you upright in all your dealings with men. The fear of the Lord will move you to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. O, it is a great grace, this blessed fear of God. You will never be happy away from God, when this holy, clean fear is in exercise. I would seek unto God, will be the language of your soul, even when nature says, no. I would be humble; this holy fear will make you say, I would be humble, when pride is lifting up its head. I would be depending on the Lord, when pride says, No, depend on this, on that. The fear of God is a clean spirit. It is a depending spirit. We are dependent, but we are not often depending. But whenever this clean spirit is moving we are depending on the Lord. And the fear of the Lord is a humble spirit. You wont boastingly say, I am nothing, but you will feelingly say that in your heart, though you may not say it to anybody in the world. O, the fear of God brings the soul to deal with God and to walk before God. The fear of the Lord will make you love His honour, will make you seek His praise in the Church. "To them that fear Thee". How do we stand with regard to this clean spirit, the fear of the Lord? You will remember that in the Psalms it is said, "The fear of the Lord is clean", nothing of the flesh to defile it. There is a good deal of flesh about it, a good many hindrances to its exercise, but itself is clean. Like as there is no doubt in faith - though there is a great deal of doubt about faith, hindering it - so there is no uncleanness in the fear of God, but there is a great deal of uncleanness to clog its movements and to hinder its prevalence. The fear of the Lord will go into matters of providence. If you are afflicted, either in your own person, or relatively, the fear of the Lord wont let you lift your head up and despise it. No, it will make you say, Lord, what is it? Where am I wrong? Put me right. Forgive my sin. Take away what has occasioned this trouble, this affliction.

The fear of the Lord will make you very cautious in your movements. James tells us that it is a sin, an error, to say: We will go into this city and dwell there a year and buy and sell and get gain, whereas we ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live and we will do this or that. This blessed fear will come into your circumstances so as to make you careful of your movements. It will also exercise your heart in your afflictions. Lord, do sanctify them. May I be the better for them. May the cross be sanctified to me. Make me a little child, willing to receive the kingdom of God as a little child. O, it is a great thing to have this fear of God with you in your heart, an unctuous light to all that's right, and a bar to all that's wrong.

And the fear of the Lord again will make you careful with respect to the end that is coming. Two things are between us and eternity; a little time, a very short time, and also sin. Now if sin be removed, and the fear of God will make you seek the removal of it; if it be subdued, and the fear of God will make you pray that it should be subdued, then you will be careful. Ah you will be afraid sometimes of providing thorns for your dying pillow. O happy the man who fears God. "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long" says Solomon. This is not a legal fear, not a fear that makes God dreadful, not a fear that turns you away from Him and makes you flee to hide yourself from Him, but a blessed spirit that says in your heart, I would seek unto God, I would be near God, I would cleave to Christ, I would be found in Him, I would live on His merit, trust the blood of Christ for salvation. I would walk with a tender conscience all my days. The fear of the Lord. Well, may the Lord, who sees you, sees your hearts, and all things, graciously grant that this clean spirit may be in you. You will never be right without it. You cannot be lost with it. It is for this people that this goodness is laid up. Now it is not laid up, never to be given away or imparted. It is laid up to be given out. Says Christ in His memorable prayer as recorded in the gospel according to John: I have given them the words Thou gavest Me. Now if we fear God we shall get something from Him at times. He has not laid this goodness up never to be opened, never revealed, never brought home and never communicated. No: "My doctrine" - My Son, My Servant, My love - "shall drop as the rain. My speech shall distil as the dew". Which means that the dry earth shall be refreshed with rain. The

fructified with rain. The tender herb shall flourish as My doctrine drops upon it; the grass shall grow as the shower of My mercy shall fall upon it. This is the goodness of God. Let us look for a moment or two at this. There is, for instance, the forgiveness of sins. What a joyful sound. O what a joyful sound to malefactors doomed to die. Do you pray, "Lord, may this bliss in me be found; may I redeeming grace enjoy" What is to be compared with it? A sinner's sins like mountains; he cannot look beyond them. A thick cloud; he cannot see through them. God says, "I, even I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions as a thick cloud, and as a cloud thy sins." Now if you fear God you may not have attained to this rich experience, but it is laid up for you; according to the text it is laid up for you. "How great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee". Therefore the Spirit of God moving this fear and teaching you, will again and again set the blessing before you, and enable you to go on and to do as it is written: "Be of good courage"; "Wait on God". He hath not said, seek ye Me, in vain. He has said "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it". He has said: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will answer thee and thou shalt glorify Me." Surely, when sin is on you, that is a time of trouble. Says God, "Call upon Me", make known your requests, come again and again and again. Take another grace of the Spirit, I mean what He gives the soul to feel, namely hunger. One of the greatest blessings you can carry in your heart, that you can bring to this chapel, or go with, wherever you go, is a real hunger for God, an appetite that will make you say, I cannot be happy unless I have God with me, God for my portion, God for my strength, for my wisdom, for my peace, for my comfort, for my everlasting all. This is laid up. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him." Ah seeker, fearer of God, God has laid this up in store. What a mercy it is to have this blessed thing in your own soul, to enjoy the Lord, to embrace Him by faith; to believe that God is your Friend. To live under the shining of the Sun of Righteousness for a few hours, yea for a few minutes, is heaven below. You have all you want. Providence is good, trouble is good, weakness is good, infirmities of body are good. Trouble in your family and illness in the Church, you will see everything to be under the hand of God when you can feel that He is your portion. O how great is this. Can you estimate the worth of it? No, no natural estate, no good things in providence, can compare with this. One writes, and we

sometimes sing

No fatal shipwreck shall I fear
But all my treasures with me bear

The Christian's treasures are in two places; first in heaven. Ah they are beyond the reach of the devil there; they are beyond the reach of sin. Then these treasures are in the soul and they are there in a small degree, and sometimes they are lost as to feeling. You may say with the Psalmist: "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation". Lord, I have lost it. That may be your complaint; I have lost it. I have sinned it away; the Holy Ghost has gone. Then you want Him to come again. How great is the goodness of God to them that fear Him, in respect of the word which He gives them. "I have given them Thy Word." There are some sinners here, I believe, who have some word of God locked up in their hearts, and the devil will never take it away, although he will try. And sin will never rob them of it; though it robs them of the enjoyment of it, the word abides. How great is this. Ah, a house full of bank notes would be poverty compared with one gospel word put into your heart by the Holy Ghost.

"Which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men." And this appears to mean that God has wrought great deliverances for His people, even before their enemies. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." What wonders God wrought when He brought Israel out of Egypt; a weak nation in the midst of a strong nation; a strong nation that was strong enough to oppress the weaker, yet God came and by His mighty signs and wonders brought out that oppressed people from their oppressors. What wonders He wrought for David when Saul was constantly, for years, seeking him. Wonders of mercies and wonders of deliverances, great deliverances; great deliverances giveth He to His king. Now look at your own cases. Has not God wrought wonderfully for some here? When there have been mountains of difficulties, valleys of humiliation and emptiness, what has God done? He has fulfilled His word that He will level mountains and exalt valleys. He has done it. Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord; witnesses of My wisdom in ordering matters. You could not have managed things, but God did manage them. You have been enabled

perhaps at times to say: "My times are in Thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me", and by faith you have put your case into His hand; left it there by faith. Though you may have gone back into anxiety in a very short time afterward, still what was done then remains. "My times are in Thy hand"; and it has been given to faith to look on while the Lord has done wondrously. He has turned into blessings the curses of the devil; he hired Balaam to curse Israel, and Balaam's wicked tongue was made to bless Israel completely. God has wrought great deliverances for His people, very great deliverances for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men.

David said to his enemies: "How say ye, flee as a bird to your mountain?" What is the connection? "The goodness of God endureth continually". Your contemptuous speeches are for a moment. "The goodness of God endureth continually". Therefore trust in Him. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart". What a good God some of us have. You will find in the Scripture it is said: "Blessed is the man that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, that abideth under the shadow of the Almighty." Pestilence, arrows of death, devils, all may seek His life, but he is safe; hid in God. "Because thou hast made the Lord which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation there shall no evil befall thee neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." O, a worm trusting in God by precious faith is stronger than an army of thousands. "Which Thou hast wrought". Go to the camp of Midian; who can overcome that mighty host? 300 men, says God, are sufficient for me, each with a trumpet, and empty pitchers and lamps within the pitchers. And when they came to the outside of the camp they blew the trumpets as Gideon had commanded and said "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon" -first the sword of the Lord - and brake the pitchers so that the light of the lamps shone forth and the host of Midian ran and cried and fled. Then go to Jericho and look at those strong walls. Who can invade the city? The Lord said to Joshua : I have given into thy hand Jericho, and the men of valour and ye shall compass the city all ye men of war, and go

round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the Ark seven trumpets of ram's horns; and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times and the priests shall blow with the trumpets". And Joshua did as the Lord commanded him and when the people heard the sound of the ram's horn and trumpet on the seventh day, they all shouted with a great shout and the wall of the city fell down flat. Just think of it, the weakness of God is stronger than men. O has not God wrought without your working? Has He not made plain His wisdom and His goodness and His power without your hand? "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit saith the Lord." So we may have some sweet experience of this in our souls to encourage us still to wait on God and hope. "How great is Thy goodness". You cannot measure, it; nor count it; you cannot reckon it; it is in God; it has been there from eternity. It is in Christ and will be there for your use, your salvation. It will be poured out into your soul like rich blessings and pieces of heaven sometimes. Sweet smiles, gracious communications, for again, I would say, this goodness is not laid up in Christ never to be used and never to be communicated. It is for the salvation of the Church; it is to be communicated to the people of the living God. Wait then on God. Be of good courage, courage respecting God. Honour Him by trusting Him, honour Him by leaving yourself and leaving your wisdom and your strength and your contrivances and all the things you would be glad to make use of and just "By thy weakness thou shalt prove that Christ is strong". Emptiness in a sinner is a place for Christ. Ruin in a sinner is a work for Christ. He undid the works of the devil when He was here, and He will undo them from time to time in the hearts and in the experiences in providence of all His dear people. May we then, according to the measure of life and experience and hope that we have, join with the Psalmist and say: "How great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee, which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men.

AMEN.