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Sermon Preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton by Mr J.K. Popham on  
Wednesday Evening 9th November 1932

*Text: Psalm 31 verses 9 & 10*

*Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. For my life is spent with grief, and mine eyes with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed*

If God gave us faith in exercise now, each child of His would believe that there is a preciousness in Him, in his exercises, his hunger, his pursuing after God, but the lack of that faith, that measure of faith leaves us for the most part subject to great and grave changes, and keeps us in bondage. As unwise children there is no breaking forth and I have been feeling that because the days are very dark, and threatening, and likely to be more dark and more troublesome than now, one has been very apt to be shut up in the feeling, not to look for anything better or different, which appears to me to be a limiting of the Holy One of Israel.

Why should the children of a King  
Go mourning all their days ? (24 verse 1 Gadsby's)

There is liberty in Christ, grace and fullness of love, and mercy and pity and power and yet O how bound and shut up we are for the most part. It is one thing to be in quiet easy unexercised state, a sickly state, neither hot nor cold. I would in my right moments, I do, choose any kind of trouble or exercise, rather than to be in that condition. If any of you are there and are the Lord's people there is a shaking awaiting you, a very solemn shaking when you will know what an evil state you have been in, but for the exercised children of God the scripture has a very kindly look, affords very sweet consolation.

The changes to which we are subject, frequent changes, changes which seem unaccountable to ourselves. One hour we are anxious looking Godward, praying, crying, sighing and the next carnally minded, and we cannot understand these changes. We know that the liveliness is good before God, but coldness, the worldliness and the evil that comes upon us, comes upon good feelings and right movements of the soul unaccountably. The psalmist, in this psalm evidences great changes. He begins by declaring that his trust is in the Lord, by praying that he may never be ashamed, that the Lord would deliver him in His righteousness.

A great hold that. If you are by faith enabled to lay hold of God's righteousness, that is the righteousness imputed, that will give you an energy in prayer. "Quicken me in Thy righteousness," (Psalm 119.verse 40) and cause me to escape is the prayer of a child of God. And after these early verses of the psalm he cries suddenly as if a great change had come over him. "Have mercy upon me O Lord for I am in trouble" (verse 6.) He has just been confident thanking God for delivering him. Professed that his times were in the hand of God, that he did commit himself to the Lord and now he says "Lord I am in trouble". That may just be your experience now and again comfortable, confident, humble, committing yourself to God and feeling persuaded that your times are in His hands, then suddenly there comes a cloud a change, a difference, O Lord have mercy on me.

I am still a sinner and this troubles me. I am still one sold under sin and find the good that I would I cannot do, and the evil I would, not I do. O Lord I am in trouble, have mercy upon me. Nothing but mercy will do. Nothing but mercy will satisfy. Mine eye is consumed with grief. Wept till he could weep no more, as we read of David in the case of Ziklag and its being burnt, with the loss of his wives, the wives of all his men. They all wept until they had no more power to weep. My eye is consumed with grief, my soul and my belly. All the movements of my heart, these expressed are here. I am grieved Lord, the trouble has come. My life is spent with grief. What makes you grieve ? my friends. Ah, some say we are afraid we are wrong, that we do not stand well with God. Some say, we are afraid our trouble is not of the right kind, that our convictions are not given to us by the Holy Spirit but just natural convictions. My life is spent with grief over these things.

Another says I am grieved because I am so unsteady, so unstable, so wavering, like a double minded man. I pray and forget what I pray for. I pray and while praying I run away from God. I am grieved at this. One says I am grieved because I have got a heart like stone for hardness, like ice for coldness. Do you spend your life more or less thus grieved that you are not what you want to be ? That you are what you would not be, distant from God ? Do you grieve because you get few or no distinct communications from the Mercy Seat, that you visit, from day to day, or would visit ? Is it a grief as it was to the psalmist when he said "Be not silent to me: lest if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down to the pit." (Psalm 28 verse 1). God's silence to his children is a grief to them when they have once heard His voice and then He is silent for a time, that is the chief trouble of their soul. You will never get any trouble better than that, the silence of God.

And so the life is spent, in constant change. Hot and Cold Berridge says, and I understand it.

Brisk and dull in half an hour,  
Hot and cold, and sweet and sour  
Sometimes grave at Jesus' school  
Sometimes light and play the fool (301 verse 4 Gadsby's)

and says the psalmist here, "my life is spent with grief". He had many dangers, many afflictions from Saul and other sources but I believe his inward troubles were greater, greater than all others. If you do not find God in your souls, but I believe his inward troubles were greater than all others. If you do not find God in your souls, having His blessed life within you, you must be grieved. "My years with sighing", when he could no more weep he went about sighing. O says he "where is my God ?" O says the enemy, to him where is your God ? You have boasted of Him, where is he ? The soul sighs out "O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to His seat! I would order my cause before Him. and fill my mouth with arguments" (Job. 23.verses 3,4). but if you cannot find Him, this is the cause of sighing. One prophet said that "the Comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me" Lamentations 1.verse 16. and therefore he was sighing and grieved. No language to express adequately the trouble of his heart and so he went about sighing. You may go about your house sometimes sighing - O if the Lord would only bless me. If Christ would come to me. If the Spirit of Christ would dwell in me. If He would make me acquainted with Christ. My life is spent with sighing. Some say we sigh because we are bound.

"The yoke of my transgressions" says one is "bound by His hand: they are wreathed, and come up upon my neck:" so that "I am not able to rise up." (Lamentations 1.verse 14). Some of you may be there. All sin, all fear, all bondage, you sigh Is this to be my end? Am I living just this wretched life, shall I die in this state ? Bondage is bitter specially when God sends the spirit of bondage into a soul to fear. It is very bitter to be under the law and find that it speaks to you, claims you, demands payment of debt which you cannot meet. That is very bitter and sometimes the soul in bondage says "I wonder if my fear is a right fear, if my convictions are spiritual". If my poor desires for God are right desires. Now God keep you sighing till deliverance comes. I wish He would grant it now, O if faith were strong enough to lay hold of the atonement, you would find liberty in your consciences. You would find peace with God in your souls, but till that happy day comes, go on sighing. He marks a sigh divine, He listens to the groaning of the prisoner. He comes to loose the prisoner.

His mission is "Preach liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound" That is Christ's mission. He was anointed to do that. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek;" "to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound". (Isaiah 61.verse 1).

My life is spent with grief says one, because I have lost the Lord's presence, forfeited it by my sin and to get Him to come near me again. That is one of the keenest sorrows of a child of God, one of the sharpest pains he can feel, that God has withdrawn from him because he has sinned. Do you understand it ? How many of you can understand it ? can you go to the spot and say "I believe He met me there. I believe He caused me to hear His voice there, but my sins caused Him to withdraw and I go about the city and cannot find Him". I cry " O that I knew my beloved's whereabouts. I go here and there and the watchman met me but I cannot find Him. This is a solemn sighing . May the Lord help those of us who understand it to go forward sighing after Him. He is not displeased with sighing. Sighing has confession in it. I have deserved to lose Him. I deserve that He should never return.

O but you plead by sighing, praying in sighing, arguing in sighing and He understands it all. Blessed be His great name, He understands it. Sometimes you sigh because you do not get answers to prayer. In many things we need God, in everything we need Him but when we go and pray that He would interfere in this matter, that He would appear in that trouble, that He would deliver us from that snare and get no interference then there is sighing. I spend my years with sighing. What a life ! The world knows nothing about it. If it hears about it, it only mocks, but The Lord Jesus understands this and he says "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". (Matthew 11.verse 28).

My strength faileth because of mine iniquity. Here is the source of trouble, sin, iniquity. You feel ashamed sometimes do you not, to pray, "ashamed .. to lift up my face to Thee," (Ezra 9 verse 6). Why ? Because He said our iniquities are with us. Do you go like that, feel ashamed, hardly have courage to name the Lord's name. Hardly have strength to send one sigh to heaven because of mine iniquity, my strength faileth ? It is a great loss to lose your strength. Samson lost his strength He said when he had yielded to temptation and had lost his strength but did not at the moment know it. "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him". (Judges 16 verse 20). Yes iniquity will take all strength away from you.

Your faith will lose its energy and you will be ashamed to lift your face up. Your mind will lose its purity and you will feel defiled. Your love will lose its warmth and wax cold, your hope will lose its brightness and you will be in dismay. Not despair, but dismay. Your mind will get alienated in some way, in some measure. O iniquity, iniquity, dreadful. I can speak about this with shame and sorrow I do it. "My strength faileth because of mine iniquity". God wont let sin be little to us. It is little to the people who do not know it, but it is great and solemn to the people of God to have iniquity. Passed experience will not avail you when God breaks your bones or causes them to be consumed, when He closes your mouth by your sins, a sense of them, you will find it is no little thing to have sinned against the Lord. Look at the case of Solomon He followed the Lord so wonderfully for a time but who in his old age had his heart turned away by many strange women, then the Lord spake to him. Solomon the beloved of the Lord, and God appeared to him that he would meet, deal with him for this, though he would not take the kingdom away from him in his life time, yet He said, thou hast not followed Me though I appeared unto thee twice. 1 Kings 11. verse 9.

Sin prevailing aggravates, troubles increase affliction in the people of God and they know then what this scripture means "my strength faileth". I am left to flee and yet cannot flee before the pursuer. (Lamentations 1.verse 6). Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and misery her pleasant Sabbaths, the smiles of God, the green fields, the rich harvests. These she remembered when she was in captivity, when sin had brought famine and death. And you will remember sometimes in those cases, when you say I used to be tender, the fear of God used to influence me. The life of God moved me in all things as I felt, I used to get near to Him. I used to receive answers from Him, I used to have a smile upon my soul. "I washed my steps with butter," (Job.29.verse 6), the candle of God shined upon me. I had a good experience of His love and mercy, but now I am starving. My bones which were not seen, sticking out, for I have got a famine of hearing God's voice, of receiving His goodness. I have got famine in my soul and therefore I sigh. Oh the remembrance of her Sabbaths when she was in captivity brought Jerusalem to a point, if she had had no pleasant Sabbaths to remember her captivity would not have been so bitter. And if she had remembered that her sins had brought her into captivity the captivity would not have been so bitter, but O how aggravated all was to her by sin. How is the most fine gold become dim. Do you understand a good experience lost, as to its influence upon you, though you cannot cast it away.

My strength faileth, and here the poor child of God finds his faith particularly needing strength. O if I could but be strong in faith. The stronger the faith, the stronger and more fervent is prayer, and when faith fails for want of fresh communications then there is indeed a slackness, yet a cry. Will these sighs ascend to heaven ? You may think that yours do not, and if you are asked why you so think, you would say, "Because they are so mixed with wrong, with sin" and you do not remember at such moments the golden censor in which is much incense to mingle with the prayers of saints. And when you forget that incense, then you will be sure to judge that your prayers are no more than the chattering of a crane or a swallow. (Isaiah 38.verse 14.) You will feel like a sparrow alone upon the house tops, and thus here is a sighing. Your leanness is before you, where once you were fat and flourishing in the things of God. Once you answered to the call of righteousness, the planting of the Lord "full of sap." (Psalm 104 verse 16).

Once you could say

Let worldly minds, the world pursue,  
It hath no charms for me (1100 verse 1 Gadsby's)

How all that is changed, and you say " Have mercy upon me O Lord for I am in trouble". Ah this is trouble, I know it is trouble, I am in trouble Lord, a spiritual decay is upon me. Well look at it in the face my friends. Rutherford's advice to a correspondent under affliction said "Stare the cross in the face seven times, Look it in the face." The psalmist was looking it in the face here, He had not turned away his face from it. He looked at it. What a state I am in, is that what you sometimes say to yourself ? What a state we are in, God distant from us, the Spirit's operations suspended, the comforts of love gone, the fellowship of the Spirit lacking. O what a state and then you are exposed to temptation, and feel by temptation one moment sighing O if God would but hear, and restore my soul and then next some little vanity comes before you, and you turn away to it. Anything and everything attracting our nature has an overcoming influence if the Lord is not pleased to present Himself or touch the soul with His gracious power.

Spend until you have got nothing left. Spend that sighing. I think this is not a bad thing, though it goes on and on until you say, I am worn out with it. My soul is weary with my crying. One thing God will have you remember. He will have you remember, What is that ? Thou hast wearied me with thy sins. That is very solemn. My bones are consumed, that is I am so weak, I have no strength to stand. God's hand weakens us.

In this case I judge, that the psalmist was brought to, very close self examination. It was not a cursory view he took of his case, not a passing thought that he was not in a satisfactory condition of mind, but really he was searched into trembling. Self examination brought condemnation into his conscience. Probing by the Holy Spirit brought to him a view and sense of the fretting sores of sin in his members and by this solemn work he was brought to the ground in weakness, in fear, in trembling with bones consumed, so weakened that he could do nothing, but was in the dust.

Now this is a solemn place, but it is not a bad place. A bad place is to be under the power of sin, and not to know it. A bad place is to be unconcerned, even though the absence of God is your place at the present. A bad case is to be really diseased and not know it, or if you know it, not to have power to go to God with it. When Ephraim saw his sore, he went to another. He went to King Jareb, (Hosea 5.verse 13.) now look at it. This man turns to God, a sure sign of the Spirit's work in conviction. A sure sign of the operations of grace in the soul. You mark it. When you are in a poor case, and there is no Holy Ghost at work, you do not turn to God, but when you are in a bad case and the Spirit is at work, then you turn to God.

"Have mercy on me O Lord, for I am in trouble" and no man can touch this trouble only the Man Christ Jesus. No power can remove this trouble but the power of the atonement applied by the Spirit. I am in the trouble that darkness and confusion bring, and no remedy outside God can meet the case. If you follow me, and I am sure some of you do, you will find it is so when God smites the soul with conviction of backsliding or by the law, in either case, in both cases this is it, the soul turns to God. What a mercy that is.

One or two words on this point. When the soul turns to God, it turns by the power of the Holy Ghost, then scriptures may come very encouragingly to you. "They that seek shall find." "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord." "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And if unbelief comes in and says Jacob like - "My way is hid from the Lord and my judgment is passed over from my God." Then the Lord will speak, "Hast thou not known ? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary ? there is no searching of His understanding."... Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles." (Isaiah 40 verses 28,30-31).

And this waiting on God is the sighing, the life is spent with sighing. And there is a song awaiting the sighing ones. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." (Psalm 125 verse 6). And you will find it just so, that when you have wept, when you have sighed, when you have groaned, when you have confessed that your strength was failing and eaten up by your iniquity. When your bones were consumed, then you will begin to come back with rejoicing, bringing the sweet answers of peace in your soul, singing praises unto the Lord. Oh what a gospel, is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not stumbled as we are, we are stumbled when we see and feel our shortness, our sins, our backslidings and iniquities, but he says " I knew thee" - We did not know ourselves, "I knew thee" - We thought we were sincere, yes we were, we thought we could stand. My mountain stands strong says one. " I knew thee" says the Lord "that thou wouldest deal very treacherously and was called a transgressor from the womb." (Isaiah 48 verse 8).

What then ? What will he do with such a wretch ? He will turn again and say "I even I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions" (Isaiah 43 verse 25.) as a thick cloud, and "as a cloud thy sins: return unto me,"(Isaiah 44.verse 22). That is what the Lord does. Sinner that is the gospel - full, free, sufficient. That is the gospel, and when this comes to pass in experience, then we understand a little of what it is to dwell "in the secret place of the Most High. (To) abide under the shadow of the Almighty."(Psalm 91.verse 1). Which is abiding in Christ, "Abide in Me". No life without Him. No reviving without Him. Abide in Me. So dear friends this scripture, which may express the present experience of some of you, is a very encouraging one. It does not look like an encouragement on the face of it, but when you look at it spiritually under the grace of the Holy Ghost you will see, there is enough in it to cause you to take courage. A sin bitten soul. A law condemned sinner. A sinner who has known the liberty of the gospel in all cases there is this - I am in trouble, Lord, have mercy upon me. Tis a good thing to be troubled when God is not with you, I am in trouble have mercy on me Lord. We may well be in trouble by the withholding of God. If He withdraws, O it is very solemn. We must close our mouth to all complaints. We must justify Him. Yet it is very bitter if God withholds. Bitter to a minister, more bitter than he can express. Bitter to hearers for they receive nothing. Come and return, with their vessels empty, as if there were no water, no fountain. Bitter for the church of God today, to be under the cloud, desertion as it is. Who knowing God, and knowing His smile, and having heard His gracious voice, but finding just the opposite of all that.



Who can doubt the bitterness of the withholding of God. But he does not always withhold. He comes, stands behind our wall. Sometimes he says My "beloved, standeth behind our wall," (Song of Solomon 2 verse 9). Then you wont break down the wall. Oh if He would but come and break it down. If He would but come and take away the sad distance that is between us. That is the desire. I spend my life with sighing. Well says one, it is a poor religion. No it is not, it is a blessed religion, it brings you to have dealings with God, and deal, and bring God to deal with you, then you together will rejoice. It is a blessed religion that wont allow you to be satisfied with anything or anybody but God. O thou bitter sinner, with all your fears and bondage, go on sighing to Him. It is not in vain to pray. O poor lean soul that has had fatness from Christ, go on sighing, it is not a vain thing to bring your leanness before the Lord. One of old said, "My leanness," (Isaiah 24 verse 16). it was not vain for him to say that. Perhaps this case, this scripture will meet some of you, and I would be thankful if God should speak to you by it, and myself, speaking as I am doing. Dear friends there is a reality in spiritual trouble. There is a reality in conviction of iniquity sapping your strength. There is a reality in sighing to God and He will come and answer the sighs in His own time.

Wait on the Lord, is the last word of this psalm. "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord". May the Lord grant it to us.

Amen