

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 23 August 1918

PSALM 39 v 7

"And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope
is in Thee"

The Psalmist is writing out of affliction. He saw the vanity and emptiness of all good here below. Long life and many days he saw not to be desirable; a good hope, through grace, was to him the best of all. But he was made cautious as to his speech, so that he said: "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue". He was careful as to how he spoke while the wicked was before him. God gave him a jealousy for the glory of God. It is a mercy if the same spirit is wrought in us, when, though we may be very tried inwardly, and afflicted in other ways, we still have wrought in us a godly caution as to our speech while the wicked is before us. Asaph fell into the snare into which some of us have fallen. His affliction so irritated him, and the providence of God so perplexed him, and the fear of God, at the time, was so absent from him, as to its powerful working, that he questioned everything and spoke unadvisedly with his lips. Wherefore do the wicked prosper? How is it that a full cup of affliction is wrung out to the righteous while the wicked are given more than their heart could wish? And this stumbled him, and it has been so with some of us, has it not? and we have thought, alas for us, that we have done well to be angry, and hasty speeches have brought trouble to us, have grieved the Holy Spirit, burdened us with guilt, brought us into confusion, and made questionable in us everything that we have had in our hearts from God. May you, may I, be careful of our speeches under God's chastening. When we are afflicted it is good to have a watch set upon our mouth; to have the door of our lips kept, kept by the Lord. The tongue is a world of iniquity; it is set on fire of hell, and it is a mercy when God gives a child of His, or His children, grace enough to make a conscience of speaking. Some of us have had to deplore for years the haste with which we spoke in earlier days. The scourge of the tongue may be on some of you because you were not careful of your tongues, because you spoke unadvisedly in some

ways, and some particulars. But this silence of the Psalmist's tongue did not prevent the motions of his mind and while he was musing on things, while he was dumb, and had, as it were, resolved not to speak, there was a fire burning within him. If you are in trouble, and exercised before God, and are exercised by wicked thoughts, there will be a fire burning within you. There may be a two-fold fire; a fire of lust, and pride, and sin, and the fire of divine grace. And the fire of sin will make you speak, and the fire of grace will make you speak in time. It is good, when we have to speak, to speak rightly. The Psalmist said - "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is". Did he enquire this out of an ill-disposition toward God, or was it the holy, clean fear of God that made him anxious to know, not the exact time, but that he must needs die? You may say, everybody knows that, but there is an awful forgetfulness in us, and we need the Lord to keep our dying day before us, so as that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. "So teach us" - we find in the Psalmist's prayer - "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom". It is a dreadful thing to the ungodly to believe they must die, but sometimes it is a cheerful thing to a saint when he is exercised, when his heart is filled with godly fear, when he can look to the atoning blood of Christ, when he believes that with the Lord there is mercy that he may be feared, and with Him is plenteous redemption. May the Lord make us very tender as to the future. Make us very real and deeply concerned about our end; that He may be with us, that we may so live as not to provide thorns for a dying pillow. I often am afraid of that for myself, for the unprofitableness, and untenderness, and ungraciousness of my spirit, and of my frequent speech. How afraid I am; although not dreading hell, not fearing damnation, but fearing how the Lord may resent my unprofitableness, and my turning away from that which is good. And it will be a mercy for you who fear Him to have a godly caution on your hearts and to be praying, Lord, I am a poor, dying creature; do cause this to be continually with me, that I may be looking at my end, and praying that whenever it comes, and however it comes, Thy smile may be with me; that I may be compassed about then with heavenly consolation and have Thy presence in my soul. He began to realise the shortness of his days. But O, "Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before Thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Surely every man

walketh in a vain show: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them". The uncertainty and the shortness of life impressed his heart and also the vanity of riches. He had, as it were, come to an end of things in his reckoning and in his spirit. His days were short, just an handbreadth or, as Hezekiah felt, and expressed it, like a weaver's shuttle, shot through the warp in a moment, and so he felt his life was like a weaver's shuttle, and here, an handbreadth, and nothing more. What a short time we have to live. "What man is he that desireth life", that he may see life? What man is he "that loveth many days?" (Psalm 34 v 12) O, we all do naturally because death itself is a part of the curse. Long life and many days on the earth belong to that obedience which God exacted from Israel, and the cutting short of life is the fruit of sin. Now here he says when a man heaps up riches there is vanity in it; he walks in a vain show. He must leave them; he does not know who shall gather them, as Solomon says - "whether he shall be a wise man or a fool". It is all vanity. All things are full of labour. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing. All rivers run into the sea yet the sea is not full. There is vanity in it all. God makes this out to His people, and their meditation of this is profitable to them. It is not enough merely to see it in others, but to meditate upon it, so that it is having a good effect upon our hearts, making us seek durable things - durable riches and righteousness - for things which make for our everlasting peace. So the Psalmist found it, and when he had got, as it were, in his meditation, his musing, to the end of those things, those time things, he then, by the Spirit is gathered up to God. It is like a beautiful emerging out of a dark cloud, a dark exercise issuing in the bright light of the Sun of Righteousness. Lord, I see in myself, I see in all men, vanity. I see in riches emptiness. I see, in the uncertainty of them, and as to who shall come into the possession of them, nothing but vanity. I cannot hope here; there is no hope in my life. I live a few days, I pass away, and the place that knows me now shall know me no more. Gloomy, people say, gloomy. They must have a cheerful religion, they must have everything bright. Death, O banish it. Meditation on solemn things, O banish it. What should we have these things before us for? Ah, says a child of God, whether I banish it from my thoughts or not, the fact remains the same, I must needs die, and all that I have I must leave. I can build

not at all here. Nothing in me, nothing I possess, nothing about me, solid. And this exercise, this musing, people find to be good as the Lord helps them in it. Do not, therefore, dear friends, try to avert your gaze from the future, from death that must come, from the uncertainty of everything, of which you may be having painful experience. O, to be gathered to this blessed spot, to which I would now call your attention.

"Now, Lord, what wait I for?" I have nothing here to build on. "What wait I for?" I wait on nothing, I expect nothing, here, but I am not in despair. Though I cry vanity of vanities respecting earthly goods, respecting my own life, I am not in misery, for Thou art my hope. My hope is in heaven. When the Spirit leads a sinner to this blessed spot, he has in his mind, in his heart, a comfortable hope. He looks on unseen things. He sees righteousness for his justification, blood for his sanctification, the Spirit for his Teacher, his Guide, his Helper in all his uncertainties, and all his infirmities. He perceives a foundation on which to build, and longs to be builded with all the saints together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.

"And now, Lord, what wait I for?" As if nature, and riches, and troubles, were all behind him for the moment, and one only before him, and that one, not himself, except as a subject of mercy. He saw one before him, a good God of whom it is written in the Psalms: "With Thee there is mercy and with Thee is plenteous redemption". Mercy that He may be feared. "Now, Lord". First of all my beloved friends, what a mercy it is to have God before us, for faith to see Him. A sight of God will put the world out just as if you look, as much as you have power to do, to the sun; his bright rays in your eye will just darken everything about you. So, if you see God, you will see nothing else for the moment. You understand this, some of you, do not you? What could you look at, what do you see to look at, when the Holy Ghost manifests God in Christ to your faith?

Had I a glance of Thee, my God (one writes)
Kingdoms and men would vanish soon
Vanish as though I saw them not
As a dim candle dies at noon

My brethren there is something here. O that the Spirit may discover it to us. Lord, said he, my life, my hope, my righteousness, my sanctification, my wisdom, my strength, my redemption; Lord, what else do I want? "What wait I for?" It is good to be brought to this point, and who can bring us to it, but the Holy Ghost. Every influence of our nature, every influence in our worldly connections, every influence in our businesses, lawful though they may be, is just against this. O, the contention that God has with us in these things, that is, with our enemies, with our carnal nature, and all the movings, and workings, and attractions, and words of the Holy Ghost are against this to which we are so attached by nature. And so a sinner comes to that - Lord, I am an empty creature. All are empty, but all are not emptied. Some are emptied; bless God for being emptied. I would bless Him that He has emptied me many times, during many years, and you, some of you, have to join me in this. O, we bless God that He has given us counsel which has emptied our hearts of self from time to time. It may not have lasted long, but I speak of the work. God's work has been to bring us to this. There is an emptiness in us, and we have felt it, that makes room for God. An empty vessel is a vessel that has in it a capacity to receive something. An emptied sinner is a sinner that has a capacity to receive Jesus Christ and of His fullness. O what a mercy this is. "Of His fullness have all we received and grace for grace". God can bring a little child in grace to this point, though ordinarily this belongs more to an experience in later days than in earlier days. Lord, it is all vanity. If you have lived many days, under God's teaching you have lived to perceive how foolish, and empty you are, and how unsatisfying life is; how unsatisfying every blessing is in providence. It comes for a purpose, it does its purpose; you enjoy it, it passes away, and all you have is a remembrance that often will pain you because you marred the thing God gave you, but at the very best it does not yield you any satisfaction. O, what a poor life sin has made of our life. What a marred nature our nature is, like the vessel Jeremiah saw the potter make; it was marred in the potter's hand. And so is our life; therefore it is called vanity, wind, emptiness, death. With this experience a child of God comes before his Lord and he says, Lord, what do I wait for? What am I expecting now? No good here. No good in myself; I do not wait on myself expecting it. I do not wait on providence expecting that to be more solid. I do not wait on my days

expecting them to get brighter. I do not wait for anything here. "Lord, what wait I for?" What are you waiting for? Some wait for a turn in affairs. A decaying business may, says the owner of it, may change for the better. I may see better days. He goes on, even becomes insolvent but knows it not, expecting a turn, till he is hopelessly disappointed. Another writes his expectations in sand, little thinking that the incoming tide will wash away his writing. What are you waiting for? Look at it, look at the question: "What wait I for?" Are you expecting anything here that will yield you good; O, real good? O, woe, woe to you; you will get disappointed. And when he had got thus far, did he lie down, fall into despair, curse the day of his birth? No, he says, "my hope is in Thee". Some of us have been long coming to it, it may be, in the fullness of it, as it is here expressed. We have hoped for this, we have hoped for that, and God has disappointed us; in great mercy He has disappointed us, and now we have come to this - "My hope is in Thee".

And I will speak of it in two ways, first with respect to our remaining life on earth. Have we a hope of good outside God? Who can sanctify troubles? Who can supply our needs? Who can make, of a little, enough, but God? The barrel of meal does not waste, the cruise of oil does not fail, while God is continually multiplying them. All real hope in the heart of a child of God as to this life is in his God. Happy it is for him that it is so. If things are bright and he has a hope that they will continue so, he says I hope in God that He will preserve these. If they are dark and grow darker, then my hope is the Holy Ghost will guide me safely through. "Guide me O Thou great Jehovah". If things appear to be getting worse, then he says, I do hope the Lord wont leave me, that He will be with me.

Be with me in temptation's fire;
Wilt for me work, and in me too,
And guide me right and bring me through (182)

That He will do it all. His hope is in his God for this life. He is brought to enter into the language and feeling of Paul - "Having", says he of godliness "promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." This is a very sure antedote against drunkenness, and surfeiting of care. "Be careful for nothing, but in everything,

by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Said the Saviour of sinners to His dear people - "Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof". Be careful, says Christ, lest your hearts be overcharged with care. What we shall eat, what we shall drink, wherewithal we shall be clothed, are great questions, and very often anxiously asked, but when hope is in God, then a person can rightly leave himself, his family, and his things in the hands of his good and gracious God. What He wills is best, and his soul's feeling is, as faith is in exercise

Wait then my soul, submissive wait
Prostrate before His awful seat.

That is the thing; wait on the Lord, be of good courage. If sickness come, if health is continued, if poverty comes, or the Lord continues His goodness in maintaining you in sufficiency, you will find this, your hope for all is in God. "My hope is in Thee" naturally, respecting all temporal things.

O, but there is something better than this. My hope for eternity is in God. My hope of eternal life, of eternal justification, of eternal sanctification in Christ, manifested to me in time to be mine; my hope of these blessings is in God. "What wait I for?" This blessed hope is called good hope through grace, and it has everlasting consolation connected with it. Good hope through grace; everlasting consolation. O, dear friends, the consolation may often be interrupted, but in its fountain it is everlasting.

First of all, a hope of justification, not as a doctrine only - though may the Lord cause us to cleave to it in this time of frivolity in religion and of men making themselves better. May we have a blessed hope in our souls that we shall stand well before God. God will have nothing but perfection, and if you believe that in your heart you do also believe that there is in yourself nothing but imperfection. Then you will have no comfort, no consolation, no strength, except as and when it pleases God to reveal to your faith that righteousness of which He thus speaks. "I bring near My

righteousness" - He must bring it near - "as a lamp that burneth", to your heart. A lamp that will give light and heat to your very heart. This is the hope. Who can stand before God in his conscience if he has no hope of a justifying righteousness imputed to him? This is the breastplate, this is the comfort, this is the strength, this is the safety, and this is the title of a child of God to eternal bliss. "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength" O may we cleave to this and seek to enter into it as into the only rest of our souls - the blessed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. My friends, it will support you when all else fails, and, as you apprehend it by faith, it will greatly comfort you, and strengthen you, when all within, and all without shall be dark, for there is a darkness of sin in us, as every child of God knows, and there is a darkness in providence as all feel, more or less. But, O, to have this; this is the hope, this is the hope, the only hope, of a child of God to stand before the Lord.

And my hope of sanctification is there. That is a Scripture much to be observed - may the Lord give us power to observe it - where Paul says, speaking of Christ - "Who, of God, is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Ah, better have this in your eye than all the gold in the whole world, far better. Do you expect to get better in yourselves? Woe unto you if you do, and if the Lord loves you He will shake you out of that. Ah He will shake you to pieces before He will let you rest in that. But O when a man is shaken out of that, when he says, now I know I am lost, I know I have no holiness, I know I cannot think a good thought so as to please God, but I have a hope that I shall be spotless through eternity, and that hope is in Jesus Christ. "In holiness the saints delight". Yes, it is the breath of their souls, it is the comfort of their hearts at times. To be holy they long, and to get holiness they are taught by the Spirit to go to Jesus Christ. They are taught by the Spirit, they are led by the Spirit to this point, to find all their holiness here, and that will make them want to live a godly life. It will make them desire greatly to honour the Lord and to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things, but the thing they have before them, that they hope for for eternity, is an imputed sanctification. "Who, of God, is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption." My friends, affliction will sometimes discover to you

the unspeakable pollution of your nature. Hart says well: Afflictions make us see how very foul and dim are we. The sight may escape us, but for affliction. And then, when you have got that sight, O you cannot express, I cannot express for you, the loathing of self, the hopelessness respecting self, the despair that you have about yourself, and then, O how that does fit you for a holiness complete in another, even Jesus Christ.

"What wait I for?" Lord, I have eternity before me - I may soon have to enter into it - and I have today a nature as foul as the day when I hope I was called by grace. I have grown no better. I have grown, I trust, in grace. I have grown in the knowledge of myself, and of Thyself, but now, with eternity before me, and realising somewhat of the holiness of that place into which nothing that defileth or maketh a lie can enter, I look to Thee for holiness complete.

"Lord what wait I for?" and what do I expect with regard to power to hold on to the end? On whom do I wait for strength to persevere and come well to the end? This is a question. Where is your hope? Do you expect to get honourably to your grave? Are you looking for a good end? Are you expecting to overcome? "Who is he that overcometh the world?" Who is the man that will be an overcomer? O, says John, "He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God". That is the man and his faith is fixed sometimes sweetly, O sweetly fixed on Jesus Christ. He is ashamed of himself, ashamed of his poor profession, his unprofitable life, his many failures. How he has fretted, how he has despised warnings, how he has turned from heavenly counsels, how he has backslidden; O how ashamed he feels sometimes, but here says he, now my hope of a good finish is in the blood that cleanseth from all sin. My hope of standing and overcoming is in that precious atonement that makes a victor of every poor, defeated sinner to whom it is applied. "My hope is in Thee." Blessed be God for a good hope. Blessed be God for a good hope of finishing well our race. Paul had that hope. Said he, "I know whom I have believed". "I have fought a good fight", but I know who has helped me to do it. I know the arm that has strengthened me, and the God that has taught my hands to war and my fingers to fight. I know Him and I know that "henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous

Judge, shall give unto me, and not to me only, but unto all them that love His appearing." And when the Holy Ghost comes, then you lift your head up, then there is an energy, a power in faith, that enables you to say my redemption draweth near. I am looking for my end, and hope that God will give me a good finish.

"And now, Lord, what wait I for" respecting eternity, respecting my entrance into that state that shall never alter? I change here - dull, hot and cold in half an hour. Change in my thoughts, in my feelings, my desires, my pursuits. Now I am after God, then I am after myself, and some vanity, but I am going to a state in which there will be no change. Lord, what is my hope for heaven? Thyself, Thyself. Lord, what is my hope for a welcome into heaven? Thyself. "My hope is in Thee." O, shall we hear, do we hope to hear, our Lord say to us - "Come, ye blessed of My Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world". I feel I have that hope. O, what a sweet thing it is to one who knows he must die, that this mortal state shall pass away, that his body must corrupt, that then there will be that wonderful, free-grace given welcome into heaven. "Come ye blessed of My Father". Now, Lord, this is my hope; it is in Thee. In Thy blood, Thy righteousness, Thy eternal love, Thy sovereign grace, Thy favour. Only, only in Thee, as manifesting Thyself to me in those things, have I a hope. "My hope is in Thee". A poor man, afflicted, hoping in God. A man who has been afraid of speaking hopes in God. My hope for time, for a good and safe passage through it; my hope for death, that I may die in the Lord; my hope for eternity, that I may be with Him for ever; "My hope is in Thee"

May the Lord brighten our hope, make us ashamed of the sin that has darkened it, and grieved the Holy Spirit, and help us to wait on the Lord for the day will come in that case when we shall find it well with us. Death comes, it has come to us again as a church. Our dear, good old friend, Mrs. Farncombe, has entered into rest. O what a change for her. She has lived a long life, and a painful life, had life-long affliction, but now she has gone. Happy soul, O, happy soul. May the Lord cause that we, when we come to the end, shall say, it is well, feeling as she felt. Though she had not that bright ending that we would have been glad to see, but she felt there was the

solid foundation on which she hoped. She will be buried next Monday, but I hope to make an announcement of that on Lord's Day.

AMEN.