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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 12 September 1934

PSALM 41 v 4

"I said, Lord, be merciful unto me. Heal my soul
for I have sinned against Thee"

It is a great truth, though not much believed, that the only evil in the world is sin. Affliction is the fruit of sin; wars, rumours of wars, all kinds of evil; hatred, nations hating each other; men defrauding one another; men defiling themselves with lying and all manner of evil; these are the outcome of sin, yet also, in themselves, great sins. If the people of God here this evening but got a sight of sin as God sees it, a sight of it in His Own light, what confessions, shame, confusion of face and mourning there would be. We see so little in sin as that often we are very light-hearted. The reason we know so little of sin is we know so little of God. You will never know sin in any light but God's, that is to say, you will never know sin rightly. There is of course a natural knowledge of sin up to a point, but never, never can nature know what sin is as God knows it, and therefore can never justify God in His righteous, holy punishment of sin. Sin is that thing which God hates, because it is just the exact opposite of His nature. It is rebellion against His commandment; it hardens the heart against Him; it is rebellion of the worst kind; it is as the sin of witchcraft. Who can rightly express the terrible nature, the pollution, the foulness of sin? None, but as taught of God. Natural religiosity wont make you hate sin. You may be very proud of your religion, but you will not be humbling yourselves before God. I think there are two standards by which the Holy Spirit causes the child of God to judge of sin. The first, the holy Being of Jehovah as He reveals Himself in the spirituality of the Law. Adam's uprightness - a created and natural 'holiness' - could never convey to his innocent state the spirituality of the law; his eyes were not opened until he fell. Before then he evidently knew God in His goodness to Him in the Creation and Providence. While the Law was not transgressed it was a

witness to the disparity between the Creator and the creature, but until broken, Adam was innocent - and therefore ignorant - as to the infinity of that disparity. Now where God quickens a sinner He reveals His holiness by the application of the law; so Paul found: "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Then a sinner perceives by faith the Holiness, the essential Spirituality of Jehovah; though he cannot conceive of the earthly paradise and Adam's innocency, yet he does perceive that the Holy character of God reflected in Adam made in His image and after His likeness, as far transcends that image as the Sun does the shadow that it casts; more, as light does darkness; as uncreated Holiness exceeds creature uprightness. That is the first standard, and if we are born again, the day will come, if it has not already been in our experience, when we shall get a sight of sin in God's Own light. I think I shall never forget when God gave me that sight of sin in His Own light. Instantly, I said, "Lord, I cannot bear it". Nor could I have borne it but for the sight of the atonement almost at the same instant granted. The second standard by which we may judge of sin is man's position in Eden, placed there by God; a position of remarkable advantage, purity, peace, a kingdom; dominion over all things that God had created; an ample supply for all his needs; obedience rendered to him by all the creatures, and the high privilege of walking with his Creator. Nothing to annoy him, nothing to bring him into any kind of bondage, nothing to provoke him to anger; the whole of his surroundings by that beneficent Creator who walked with him. His position was a wonderful one, a position we cannot enter into, seeing we are more or less, every day and every minute, subject to change, annoyance, and difficulty, and perplexity, and provocation. And this man, in that position, with his knowledge of God, his walking with God, with his eyes open he fell into sin, ruined himself and all his posterity. Dear friends, if God should bring before us this standard - let us say, He leaves a just balance and that we, through the fall, hate such a balance - well, it will deeply humble us; and I would not, God preventing it, have a religion that has not some knowledge of sin in it. If you have no knowledge of sin, I will tell you this, there is in you - as to your experience, the state of your mind - no room for the Saviour. Happy the man who is convinced of sin by the Holy Ghost; who sees his state, who feels his condition, who realises that now he is absolutely at the disposal of his righteous

judge, and that if divine sovereignty does not give him grace, he has no cause, no reason of complaint. I have said, as you know, sometimes - What does God owe to you? Having sinned against Him, does He owe you heaven? Being an enemy to Him, does He owe you reconciliation? Being guilty does He owe you forgiveness and justification? Let conscience answer. Our sin has in it an infiniteness, though it be the act of a creature, because it is done against Him who is infinite. Bunyan said, when you can find a little God you may find a little sin. What then? When the Holy Spirit comes to do what Christ promised He should do, convince of sin, He does a great work, a marvellous work, a work for condescending love that can have no parallel in the whole of nature. Dr Goodwin says, it is great when He comes to rake into the dunghills of our hearts. That is true, but O, it is bitter, very bitter to be a sinner and know you are a sinner; very dreadful to feel that sin is in you, that it constantly solicits indulgence, that vain thoughts fill you, that wild imaginations make your hearts like the wild ass, that you feed on air, on ashes; that in your hearts you say, after your fallen condition, Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him? What profit is there if I should pray unto Him? What a state we are in, and I have lived now long enough and had experience enough to kill a hope of ever getting better as to my nature. And God will take care that you learn it, if you have not learned it, you who belong to Him, so that there will be a large room for Christ in you. Sin digs our graves; sin lights the fire of hell, that is the wrath of God; sin makes us huge, deformed, without form or beauty, void. Sin? If God were not determined that it should be removed from some people, and that they should be justified by Christ's righteousness, there could be no hope for any son or daughter of Adam. The Psalmist clearly here, in his affliction, had a knowledge of sin, his own sin. Ah you will have no stones in your hand or your pocket if God shows you your sin, and there will only be motes in the eyes of others whilst there will be a beam in your own eye. O happy man who is a sinner by divine conviction. God is not the author of sin, but He does convince of sin. It is one thing for a person to say, I know I have done wrong, for one to say, I know I told a lie, but it is another thing for God to show that wrong and that lie in His Own light. Then it will be to you an inexpressible evil that you did when you committed these two sins. You wont be able to bear yourself sometimes unless you have some touch of the Holy Spirit's grace and mercy.

So in the text the Psalmist reaches his sin through, and by means of, his affliction. "I said, Lord be merciful unto me. Heal my soul for I have sinned against Thee". Why against God if he had only done something against his neighbour? Because the commandment is: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". All sin reaches Jehovah, as to the effect of it, and the guilt of it and the punishment due to it. "I have sinned against Thee". "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight, that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest and clear when Thou judgest." There is no hope for us but in the person and death and Priesthood of the Lord Jesus, but there is no despair in the soul that is under the deepest conviction of sin because of this precious Person, this vicarious death, this ever-prevailing intercession of our great High Priest. O, said God: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people; speak ye comfortably unto Jerusalem". Why? "She hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins". Double? You may have felt you need double punishment for your aggravated sins, your provocations, your evil. You may have felt sometimes that the lowest place in perdition was the place suited to you, the chief of sinners. O, but double; think of it. Double for all your sins. What is that? Justification and heaven. Heal me. We are full of sores. The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the feet to the crown of the head, there is no soundness, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores which have not been bound up, neither molified with ointment. Well, the gospel meets this case. Heal me. Heal me first in my conscience. Conscience has a two-fold office, a two-fold work. First, its office is to justify God against self. Some of you understand that do you not? Have not you said, again and again, O how just God is to speak against me, and how just He would be if He punished me as I deserve. And how have you looked to Him with warm feelings sometimes when you have realised that He exacts of you in chastening you less than your iniquities deserve. Conscience; it does a great work in a sinner when it says, God is right, I am wrong; He is just, I am unjust. He is Holy, Holy, Holy; I am polluted, filthy. Listen to your conscience when it justifies God. And the second office that conscience has is this - It is a friend to you, but it does trouble you and testify against you. It tells you what sin is as you never knew it before. It tells you that the thought of foolishness is sin. It tells you when

you have, in some way, belittled God, brought Him down to your own judgment, that you have sinned grievously in that; that you are guilty of the sin that God charges Israel with in the Psalm, a Psalm a little further on than this - "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself". I am disposed to say that I judge it is difficult for a sinner to sin a greater sin than that, a sin that reaches the glorious Being of Jehovah and drags Him down to his own level. It is a grievous sin. Moses does not appear to have been far away from that when the Lord, having promised food to Israel, he said: What, if all the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air and the fishes of the sea were brought, would they suffice for a month? What a limiting of the Holy One of Israel that was. You have done it; I have done it. Can this want be supplied? Can this trouble be sanctified? Can I be brought out of this tangle? O, shame on us. The Lord mercifully has made some of us ashamed of it. I am not boasting of sin when I am speaking of these things that it does; I am ashamed of my sins. Nothing makes prayer so difficult to me as my sins. Heal me in my conscience. What will heal you? The blood of Jesus Christ. Remarkable is the word of the Apostle Paul in the Hebrews: If the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh - that is, qualifies a defiled person to once more go into the service of God - how much more shall the blood of Christ - think of it, the blood of Christ - who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. I have mentioned to you before what my late friend Mr Thomas said to me on his death bed: My conscience is as if it had never had a sin on it. A great experience that. May the Lord give it to you and to me. You say, it never can be. Do not lie against your right. All your defiled conscience, with its load of dead works pressing you down to the earth and almost into despair, needs, is the precious blood of Christ.

The blood of Christ, a precious blood
Cleanses from all sin, doubt it not
And reconciles the soul to God
From every folly, every fault.

How should we, who have had the forgiveness of sin, praise Him and

sing with a loud voice in our hearts, if not otherwise, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain". Worthy is He of all the honour that a believing heart can give to Him, and of the crown a living soul would crown Him with, for this forgiveness of sin. It is great, great to put your head on your pillow one night perhaps in your life, when you have said: Now it would be as easy for me to die as it is to lay my head on this pillow. Not for me, one says. You do not know. Can you pray? Can you ask the Lord? Are you pressed, are you urged, are you driven by your trouble and by your guilt to the throne of grace? Wait on God; plead the blood of Christ, and one day you will get it. You will say, I waited on the Lord; this is the Lord, I have waited for Him, and you will draw water out of the wells of salvation. Heal my conscience.

Heal my heart in regard of its wrong affections. You wont say you have no wrong affections if you are the Lord's people. O, the quantities of them. What commerce we have had with false gods; what trust in an arm of flesh; what gadding after some things that could not, if you had got them, profit you. What setting your affections on air, thinking it was substance and would satisfy you. Affections? O, how vile have been some of our affections, driving us, or dragging or deceiving us away from the living God. The self-satisfied cannot feel this, but some of you who are Christian people will mournfully acknowledge that I speak the truth. What can put you right? "Heal my soul, for I have sinned". And what will this healing be? Well, God has many means; I will name one or two. One is this, the free return of God to you; the sovereignly free, wonderful and perhaps, at the moment, not expected, return of God to you. Perhaps you have been saying, I cannot expect Him to come again; yea, you may have justified Him, so as to say, Lord, I do not deserve another smile while I live, and if I have not another smile while I live I hope Thou wilt take me to heaven at last. And perhaps while you were speaking He heard you and came and said this perhaps, in substance He said it: Wilt not thou from this time - this time when I have called your attention to your sins - Wilt thou not from this time cry, Thou art my Father, the Guide of my youth. What! God say that to you, you who have sinned as you have, sinned, not with your fingers, not with a thread, but as it were with a cart rope, with both of your hands. And now He says, call Me my Father. I am your Father, I am your God, I am

your Saviour. I have loved you; I do love you, and I have drawn you with lovingkindness; I have allured you into the wilderness. Wilt not thou from this time cry unto Me, Thou art my Father, the Guide of my youth. And that takes you back to when the Lord made you a simple-hearted child, and you felt there was nothing you desired, nothing you sought after, but Himself. I dwell on this for a moment because I have been amazed at hearing it in my own heart. Well now, that will heal your heart's affections. You will have pure affections; they will be on Christ, your treasure, more precious to you than fine gold, than the golden wedge of Ophir; your life, your hope, your refuge, your rock, your hiding-place, your Saviour, your great High Priest; all, all that you need. O, what a healing. Ah, says the Lord, by Hosea, "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely". By Jeremiah (31 v 18) He says, Is Ephraim My dear son, is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him. I will surely have mercy upon him. And O, the sweet effect on Ephraim. He said: Thou hast chastised me and I was chastised. I was as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, but now I smite upon my thigh; I abhor myself. So the affections are healed and the will is healed. You will do this, you wont do that, nature says; the will is a stubborn thing in us. Nothing can break it; you cannot train it, you cannot tame it; it just says, I will go here, I will go and dwell in this city for a year and buy and sell and get gain. I will go after my lovers; it was better with me when I went after them than it is now that I am bereaved of them; I will go after them. And the Lord sees it, yea He has got a dry land to put rebellious people in. Some of us have known that dry land. No God, no Christ, no Holy Spirit, no water of life, no refreshment from heaven, no breezes of the Spirit; just a dry, arid, hot place, which would consume you, as it would seem. What then? O, Christ comes, that glorious God-Man who said to His Father, "Not as I will but as Thou wilt", and with His Own loving touch on your will the change is in a moment effected. You say, Lord pardon my wilfulness, and He does it; He heals the will. Heal me, O Lord, for I have sinned against Thee. He heals again the unbelief of our nature, that inveterate enemy of God and our souls, that bitter thing, unbelief. Hart's judgment of his unbelief has been mine at times, and no doubt even perhaps now, it is your chief sin. Unbelief gives damage to the soul and it injures - as far as unbelief can touch God - it injures

God, it doubts God, it questions God; it questions His mercy and His love and His faithfulness and His wisdom, and His goodness. It is a daring sin; to us, an untameable sin. Since the Fall it is native to us; it is as natural for us to disbelieve as it is for us to breathe. Can this be healed? O, yes. Unbelief says: Who is the Lord? Unbelief says: There is no God. It takes the form of atheism: There is no God. Can this be healed? Yes. How? By the inshining of the Lord Jesus; by the Word of the Holy Spirit; by the invitation of the Saviour - Come unto Me; I will give you rest. Cast thy burden on the Lord, He shall sustain thee. Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. And instantly that vile thing, unbelief, hides itself, as it were. Though it never can know shame, it has to get out of the way, for Christ and unbelief will never walk together. If He comes, unbelief has to go, and the sinner says

Begone unbelief, my Saviour is near
And for my relief will surely appear

O, it is good to believe God. You do not know - no man can fully realise - what pleasure an act of faith gives to the Saviour. When a poor sinner casts himself on God at the throne of grace; when he casts a believing look on the cross; when he says: Come, thou dear Saviour and heal me; come Holy Spirit and quicken my soul, quicken me in Thy righteousness, cause me to escape; faith, overcoming faith, is in all these acts and Christ is pleased. O, it is a part of His joy to have a believing sinner at His footstool. Heal me O Lord of my unbelief. You will be ashamed that you ever doubted Him when He comes to you and you walk with Him.

Heal my temper, Lord. Haste, bad temper; you cannot heal it. You say I know I am wrong. Fainting under an affliction, despising an exhortation, though the Scripture says to you: "My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him" You have both despised and fainted; I have. Now He comes, and O, how sweet it is to perceive Him coming. He touches you with His mercy. Perhaps He drops a kind word into your heart, and instantly you submit to His holy will, and you say: It is good for me to wait on God. And your temper, well it is sweet now. It is sweetened by grace, and just as your will is brought to lie straight with the will

of God, so that it seems as if you have no will, so now your temper is sweetened.

Heal my understanding. O, says a proud professor, I know the truth. You may know it and go to hell. Heal my understanding. "Lord God", said poor Abraham, "Lord God, what wilt Thou give me seeing I go childless and my servant is mine heir?" He did not understand the promise fully. God had told him that he should be the father of many nations, but twenty years waiting is a trial, and the understanding, being natural and blinded by sin, cannot get hold of this and keep it. The Lord takes him out one starry night and heals him in that particular. Count the stars if you can; so shall thy seed be. And Abraham believed God and his understanding was enlightened. The Apostle prays that the Ephesians may have their understanding enlightened, that they might know what is the hope of God's calling and what the riches of the glory of His grace which was bestowed upon them, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power which was wrought in them, according to the power which He wrought when He raised Christ from the dead. That will heal you; heal all your mistakes about providences which seem to clash with the promise; remove all your mistakes about God in some particular regard, and you will say to your soul: "Why art thou cast down O my soul and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance and my God."

The Lord help us to pray this prayer and give us grace to walk before Him in confession of sin and in praying to be healed.

AMEN.