

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on Sunday morning 14 April 1918

PSALM 41 v 4

"I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my  
soul; for I have sinned against Thee"

The relation of Christ to sinners is the relation of the  
physician to the sick, the Saviour to the lost. It is asked by  
one

What comfort can a Saviour bring  
To those who never felt their woe?

It is said that this Psalm was written when David fled from Absalom, and it would seem that, with the affliction that was then so upon him by his unnatural son's rebellion, there was also the sadness of bodily affliction, but he had one refuge and that was God. The same refuge is open to all the Lord's people in their troubles. O bless God that He is what He is; that He is a kind physician; that He condescends to turn the bed of His children in their affliction, and to be their kind physician, nay their nurse, and to take the curse from all afflictions that come upon them. The Psalmist addressed the Lord. Hezekiah did the same in his trouble. He turned him to the wall and prayed, poured him out a prayer that brought relief, conquered pain, and removed the heavy load of despair which the prophet's message had filled him with, as to his mortal state, and his prayer brought the repenting prophet back, and turned the mind of God. If then we be afflicted, may the same mercy, the same refuge, the same faith, the same prevailing prayer be bestowed upon us. "I said, LORD, be merciful unto me". Not, Lord I am innocent, I have not deserved this rebellion at the hands of my son; not that. Not, in our cases, Lord we are innocent in this, and in that. The man who goes with such self-justification before God will, in all likelihood, be sent home as was the self-praising Pharisee. You need expect nothing from God when you take to Him nothing but self-justification, and self-praise. O, it is the best in trouble to be exercised in your hearts with

respect to this; what has brought it? Self-examination is one of those exercises to which we are exhorted in the Scripture. "Examine yourselves". He who looks upon himself in a spirit of self-justification, self-praise, who is disposed in spirit to wipe his mouth and say, what have I done? who sees nothing particular in his conduct, or his heart, to bring any judgement upon himself, is a sinner who, whatever his profession may be, is more likely to get a rebuke from God, more likely to be asked "What hast thou to do to take My Covenant into thy lips or to tread My courts?" than to get answers of peace. Beware of an easy spirit in trouble. Beware of fixing your gaze intently on your trouble, diverting it from your heart sins, if there be no external sins to notice. Beware of thinking that other people have trouble, and why should not you have it? and so to make a refuge for yourself that God never intended any sinner to have. O beware of wrapping yourself up in a profession, consistent profession of religion. Lord, be merciful to us. Though we may be clean in this particular with regard to men, and in that particular, we are not clean in regard to Thyself. If God charged the angels with folly, what may He say of us, and to us? Exercise under affliction is a blessing, when that exercise is toward God. Exercise about yourself will bring you to understand a good man who said - If I were charged with robbing the Royal Mail, I should say, O Lord, what is coming? Not, I am innocent - true enough - but what is coming? What is this for? God, by a false charge brought against you, may bring to light some real sin done by you. Joseph's brethren were not thieves - they had not stolen Joseph's property - but they were murderers, and their murder of their brother Joseph in their hearts' intention, was brought to their knowledge, and their conscience, by a false charge. They may long since have forgotten, so to speak, what they had done. Now God would have them remember it. You may have forgotten something. God may have sent trouble to make you remember it, and therefore an honest spirit, a broken, self-searching spirit in affliction is not a little blessing. "I said, LORD, be merciful unto me". Deal not with me after my sins nor reward me according to mine iniquity. Think upon me for good. In Thy beloved Son there is a remedy; O apply it. There is a Saviour; make Him known to me; let Him pay me a love visit. I am sick; O, heal me. "Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish". What a good God there is on the throne of grace, and what a mercy it is to

have the heart to go to Him in the way the Psalmist went.

Mercy is welcome news indeed  
To those who guilty stand

Mercy is to be built up for ever. Where? First in God's purpose. "For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever." (Psalm 89 v 2). And where else? In the experience of sinners. New mercies come of new miseries, new troubles. When trouble comes, mercy is ready to relieve. When confessions are made, mercy is ready to fly to the confessor with consolation. Mercy is good. It is in God. With Him is mercy, everlasting mercy, and happy he whose condition is such as to make him feel he needs mercy, and, feeling the need of it, to cry for it, cry to God. Where do your troubles take you? The man who is taken into himself by his trouble is a man who will get nothing but self out of his troubles; it will be worse for him than better. But the man who, in his troubles, by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, turns to God, that man shall get good out of his trouble. The Lord, by trouble, works wonders, does good to people, brings good to their souls. It shall come to pass with every one in trouble who confesses his sin, and seeks mercy, that he shall say with the Psalmist - "It is good for me that I have been afflicted. Before I was afflicted I went astray". Sanctified mercies turn the hearts, and faces of people to God. Sanctified troubles do the same. If you get trouble sanctified it will turn you to God. O Lord, be merciful to me. I do need Thee, I come to Thee, I desire Thee. Answer my desires for Christ's sake. Nothing will do for us, but mercy. You see, it is like this with us, dear friends, we begin with sin - "I was shapen in iniquity". We bring it with us into the world and it develops with our physical and mental development. There is sin in us, and every good, honest conscience, in the grace of the Spirit, confesses, sin is mixed with all I do, and think, and say. You must wait for heaven before you get rid of this, but not wait in despair. I think Paul's religion was a beautiful religion. He says "When I would do good, evil is present with me." "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do". That, my friends, was not all. He comes to a climax. He says, in view and feeling of what he was by nature - "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He was not revelling in his corruptions; he was afflicted by

them. He was not making that experience his religion; he was afflicted. This, my friends, was not corruption; it was affliction that grace brought. Now, says he, at the climax, "Who shall deliver me?" Says faith in him - "I thank God". Think of this, look at the beauty of it. The man, rising by the exercise of faith, faith that was standing in the power of God. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord". The victory is in Him; it will be given to me. The victory was obtained by Him on the cross; it will be imparted to my soul. Yea, I shall reach heaven. "I thank God ..... So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God." I am a spiritual man; with my mind I long for Him, I follow Him, I want to embrace Him. There is none to me but Christ; no good to me but His goodness; no holiness to me but His holiness; no righteousness to me but His righteousness. "I thank God" and I serve God. Yes, gracious men do serve God with their minds. I say, that is a beautiful religion, and was not mercy in it? Yes, it was all mercy. This, his triumph, was all mercy. So in your troubles may this be your case. "I said, LORD, be merciful unto me". And he seems to gather the case up in the following petition. "Heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee".

We all know, in some measure, what bodily sickness is, and so know what the need of healing is. Sin is to the child of God in his experience what sickness is to the body, and I shall speak a little of this - "I have sinned against Thee" - and then notice what the blessed healing is, that is here sought. Heal me - "Heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee". To sin against God is natural to us by the fall. "There is no man that doeth good and sinneth not". He looketh upon men. He makes, as it were, a search, if there were any to be found who did understand, and in the end this is the conclusion - "They are all gone out of the way". "There is none that understandeth". "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Romans 3) That is our case. If search were made in this chapel, if search were made in our hearts, the conclusion that God would come to would be the same as that, must be - There is not one that doeth good, that understandeth. We are altogether gone out of the way, and it is not more natural for our hearts to pulsate with life than for our natural, carnal mind, to beat with a deathly life, a life of sin against God; that is universally true. But there are some people who have a peculiar feeling of it, a real, painful sense of it; in whose eyes

sin is dreadful and in whose feelings it is bitter, and who, in certain circumstances, have been made to feel it peculiarly. Affliction has been like a light sent to bear upon, and search their innermost thoughts.

Afflictions (Hart says) make us see  
What else would scape our sight  
How very foul and dim are we  
And God how pure and bright

Do not turn your face from that sight when God holds the candle of affliction up and searches this corner and that corner of your heart, for it will do you good. It will put you out of love and conceit with yourself, and be the means of leading you to value, and prize Jesus Christ. O, who knows not this, knows nothing about Christ. We sin in thought. No Christian man would like his thoughts to be exposed to his neighbour, but they are exposed to God. We sin in our motives. Who would like the motive prompting probably his best conduct to be exposed to public gaze? We sin often in our words, hasty, bitter words. In all we do, we sin. Do you love your neighbour as yourself? O, selfishness belongs to us. Now, when all this is felt, really felt by the teaching of the Spirit, and brought to light perhaps more vividly by some affliction, then the Psalmist's prayer becomes that of a poor sinner still. Heal me, "Heal my soul". Sin is like a breach made between God and the soul, a breach which only can be healed by mercy. A breach between God and the soul prevents near approaches of the sinner to God; prevents, not prayer, but near approaches. You must, who have had any experience in your souls of this exercise, understand the difference. From the end of the earth you may cry to God - yes, and blessed be His Name, He will hear you from the end of the earth - and when you are far off upon the sea. What a mercy it is to have a spirit to pray however near hell you may be in your experience. Pray, poor sinner, pray, however dark, shut up, imprisoned; however troubled, afflicted, tormented. Pray, and the Lord God will hear you. But you will find that is one thing; a near approach, and an intimate, and sweet approach, that is another. I speak to all exercised Christians present as to whether this distinction is not a real, and a good one. You know it is. And bless God the devil, and sin cannot keep us from praying. But O, when the Lord so comes near and in

His great mercy, as it were falls upon the neck of a sinner and kisses him, that is a sweet thing. Now this breach is like sickness; it affects, it weakens, it troubles the soul. It makes a sinner say, what is the matter with me? Where have I got to? Will the Lord return to me? O he cries out of his anguish - Have mercy upon me, heal my soul. Leave me not to be where I am. Bring me out of this evil state. Have mercy Lord, heal my soul. And this healing is this, dear friends, the manifestation of mercy to a sinner's conscience, making known to him what the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, can do. A manifestation again of forgiveness whereby the sinner is admitted once more to an intimacy with his God.

We like, when we are in it, the liberty of the gospel. I am very fond of liberty. I like natural liberty, and above all I like spiritual liberty. A man of God is free in his spirit, though not in his feelings, when he is among the dead, and has a spirit of prayer, like as Solomon says. If, when thy people are taken captive, when they are in an enemy's land, when famine, and mildew, and blasting, and locust, and caterpillar, and all kinds of evils shall come upon them, if, in that case they turn toward this house and pray, then hear Thou in heaven, and He does. Says God, I will hear. Mine eyes shall be open. But O how different that cry from the approach and the access and the intimacy a sinner feels when he is healed, and it is this that the man of God here wanted. O Lord, bring me near; take away the sin that is between my soul and Thyself. It is a sad thing not to know what a bar sin is between God and a sinner. It is very sad not to know the difference between being far off and being made nigh by the blood of Christ. This healing then is manifested mercy in its power felt in the conscience, as Paul speaks to the Ephesians. "But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ". That brings near - "A people near unto Him". One can use the words "nearness" and "distance". The people must have the experience to understand what one would convey. It is singular and it is more or less indescribable, this nearness to God that is brought by healing. "Heal my soul". Sin is distance; grace brings the sinner near to God. There is this in it. If you have mercy, you have righteousness. The righteousness of Christ is brought near according to God's Word - "I bring near My righteousness". Now when that is brought near to a sinner he experiences something of

justification, and being justified, he has access, a sense of being freed from condemnation, and, being freed from condemnation, what is there to keep him, and his Justifier, even God, apart? Just look at this. If God be the Justifier of you, O sinner, and gives you a sense - keep that in mind all through - gives you a sense of that justification by the righteousness of Christ, what is there to keep you at a distance from Him? What is there - still more important - what is there to keep Him from you? He will be familiar with men; He is familiar with men, and, of all the amazing acts of God's goodness, of all the mysteries of divine grace in a sinner's soul, this is one of the greatest, and sweetest, that God can be, and is, familiar with sinners. Blessed be His Name for that gracious familiarity He exercises at times. When He is familiar, there is no controversy. It seems to be expressed in the case of David of whom we read this, after the Lord, by Nathan, had promised to give him a house for a great while to come. "Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" He went in and sat down. It is a beautiful way of putting it; the Majesty of heaven had, as it were, bidden him be seated. If you were ushered into the presence of our king, you would not immediately go and sit down. If he told you to be seated, then you would sit down, and when the King of kings, as it were, said to David, sit down, David was at ease; nothing between God and David then but intercourse, sweet intercourse; David speaking, and God smiling; David praising and God accepting his praises; David near to his God. He was healed, and when you get this blessed healing, that in some degree will be your experience. God does heal sinners. He heals the soul. It is a sad experience to be far off. I know this, as some of you do. To kneel and pray, or to pray with these ejaculations that more or less live in your heart all the day, and yet not get near. But when the time comes for God to bring you near, and you go in and sit before Him, what a change it is. It is very sensible - it is very sweet to your sense, that is to say - very sweet that there should be nothing at all of shyness. Sweet, and deep reverence, but not shyness of unbelief in your soul toward God. Joseph's brothers were very shy, they were so afraid of his anger, just anger. But when he kissed them all and had spoken to them, and had said to them - "Now come near to me" - then they talked with him. Let that be first in experience, God kissing, blessing; then you will talk with Him, talk

in a sweet way. So may the Lord heal our souls. "Heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee,"

Another thing in this blessed healing is the love of God. The Apostle speaks of the love of God in the Romans being shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. That shows it is one thing for a person to read of it, to talk about it, and quite a different thing for it to be shed abroad, to come in as a sweet stream, as a warm, living power, as an expression to you of God's purpose of love, and mercy, of salvation. When it comes in you say

On such love my soul still ponder  
Love so great, so rich, so free  
Say, whilst lost in holy wonder,  
Why O Lord such love to me?

This will be it, this will be the healing. All change is brought by this. The man's sick soul is a healed soul. His sore conscience is a purged conscience. His heart, that was hard, is melted, and his mind, that was contracted is enlarged, by this blessed healing. God has wrought the mighty wonder.

Seek my soul no other healing  
But in Jesus' balmy blood

"Heal my soul" of its unbelief, that mighty sin; that, as Philpot speaks, that strong limb of the old man, that does such harm. That chief of sins of the Lord's people. "Of all my sins the chief", one says, and it is a wicked thing, after God has spoken and dealt so kindly, and graciously, then for unbelief to spring up and again say "Hath God said?" Will He do this? Can He do this? Unbelief is a daring thing, a hard wretch, a beast in the soul, a pollution in the mind, dishonouring God, confusing the heart, and bringing great barrenness. Now when this is healed, O what a change takes place; when God removes its power from you and you say, I believe God that it shall be even as He said unto me. I believe we shall all land safely though the ship is to be broken. I believe that whatever trouble comes, God will help me through, and I shall get honourably to my grave. I believe that -



More happy, but not more secure,  
The glorified spirits in heaven

That the Lord, whatever I want, will appear for me, and bestow upon me; that, though hell and death obstruct the way, I shall be brought home. Faith gives joy; faith works the most sacred confidence in God. It takes the heart and thoughts away from yourself and fixes all on God. "My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise." Nothing wrong when faith is in exercise, and strong enough to triumph over all. It will triumph over hell, and therefore it will triumph over death, and all temporal difficulties that may stand in your way. "I said, LORD, heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee".

It will heal you of all your wandering, and backsliding. Nothing is more dreadful to the child of God than his backslidings. He can look back upon his days of unregeneracy with a kind of quietness, but when he reflects upon, and feels the evil of, his backslidings, O he is disturbed exceedingly. They are like a disease, an eruption deforming, and defiling him altogether, and he says he knows painfully that he has no might against this dreadful thing, this tendency to backslide. Now he wants healing. I only know of one thing that will really fix the heart on God, and it is His lovingkindness made known in Jesus Christ. "O God", says one, "my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise." And I tell you this, that with all the attractions you may have in this life, with all the things you may have to gather, and hold your affections, if Jesus Christ and Him crucified should sweetly be manifested to you; if the Spirit should set up the cross in all its glory to you; then these attractions would lose their attraction, their hold of you, and your heart would be just like a dove would be lien among the pots. Wings would be spread, and the shining sun would show feathers of silver covered with gold, and you would fly away to the bosom of your Redeemer, and say

Here's my heart, Lord take and seal it

You would say, here's my conscience, my affections, my will, my

path, my circumstances; take all, take all, manage me, manage them. Your heart would be fixed and this would be something of what Paul speaks when he speaks of being spiritually minded. "To be spiritually minded is life and peace".

It is not a mere thinking about religion, a walking in a profession. It is a solid, and solemn, and sweet fixedness of heart upon the dear Redeemer, answering to Christ's Own word - "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also" - and you come, and you do commit yourself, and all your things, into the hands of that blessed Redeemer. "Heal my soul". This may be, with your circumstances as sick as they ever were. The Psalmist said - "Carry back the Ark of God into the city". You know they took it out to him. Carry it back, he said "If I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, He will bring me again, and shew me both it, and His habitation". O he would see it, and where it was placed. "I shall see both it, and His habitation". "But if He thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him." I believe that David was in a good place when he spoke thus, that his soul was really healed, that his will was brought into blessed unison with the holy will of God, that he wanted nothing but what the Lord wanted. He was healed. His thoughts, affections, mind, disposition, everything, now straight with God. He might not have known, did not know, according to the word really what the Lord would do. He was content to be in the hands of God as in another case he said: "Let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great are His mercies." So here, heal me Lord, heal me. Though my circumstances be sick, though there be much that is wrong, O heal my soul, and all will be well.

Well, may the Lord bring us to this. We have much to trouble us, many things to cause us grave anxiety, and whether the Lord will heal us at present in our circumstances we know not. Things do not promise well at all, and with the constant destruction that must be felt by most of us, if not all - we are all touched in some way, some more nearly than others - with all the constant destruction as to these external things, there can be - blessed be God there sometimes is - a most gracious healing of the soul. You may say now I do not know what the Lord is going to do with me in my family; I have this one, I have that one away, and what God may do I do not know. I do not know what he

is going to do with me in my circumstances; this is wrong, and that is gone, and whether He will again restore to me what He has taken away, I know not. But if, with all that, we can say, in faith, now Lord, here we are, we have sinned, we have sinned as persons, we have sinned as families, we have sinned as communities, as churches; we have sinned as parts of the nation, and Thou art angry with us, do heal our souls, and help us to wait on Thee and to commit to Thee everything else and leave self and all other things in Thy most merciful hands, that will be a comfort. It will be a stay to our minds, it will bring us to some experience of that in the prophecy of Isaiah. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." "Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Thus may the Lord be with us, help us, and do us good. "I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee."

AMEN.