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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 25 September 1932

PSALM 51 verses 1, 2 and 3

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy
lovingkindness; according to the multitude
of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me
from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and
my sin is ever before me."

These verses express the painful experience of every child of God at some part of his experience in particular, but, speaking generally, a constant experience. Sin is universal, universal in a personal sense. The whole of our being is impregnated with sin. Sin in the world is the cause of all the troubles that we hear of, that we see, that we may feel in our persons and in our experiences, but it is not known except by the teaching and grace of the Holy Ghost. David lived many many months under the guilt of his sin, without any feeling of it, according to the record, but when it was said to him: "Thou art the man", then he fell under conviction. Sin in itself is of a hardening nature and the people of God are exhorted in this particular to take heed - "Take heed lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin". That, prevailing, turns the heart away from God. Lest any of you, through the influence of an evil heart of unbelief, turn from the living God. O, fellow believers, it will be our mercy if we are more or less daily exercised with this bitter, this filthy thing, sin. If we get to heaven, as we believe we shall, we shall have no more trouble with it, but the more grace we have, the more bitter sin will be to us. The Lord keep us from an easy, unexercised profession. The man whose eyes are opened the most to see his sinfulness and whose heart is exercised the most by grace to feel it, is the man who will understand more clearly and feel more deeply the prayer that I have read for a text. "Have mercy upon me, O God". He will not confine it to the Psalmist, nor to the circumstances, out of which, being convinced of his sin, the Psalmist prayed this prayer; it will be his own. Every child of God will feel

that more or less. The more grace you have, the more sin will trouble you. The more grace you have, the more you will feel the hardness of your heart and many will be your cries. "Have mercy upon me, O God".

Mercy is welcome news indeed
To those that guilty stand

Mercy is that pure river of life, clear as crystal, and may we thank God that it is not subject to flowing and ebbing. It is ever the same pure, wondrous, blessed life giving river, but its streams do not always flow to make glad the city of God. There are times when the streams are withheld, when a child of God may, regarding his own case, greatly deprecate the condition that is spoken of in Isaiah where some are said to be as a garden without water. Think of it; how I have feared that; a garden without water, the plants just drooping, ready to die. The rule by which David wanted God to have mercy upon him was the lovingkindness of God. If this were limited, hope would die. If the lovingkindness of God could in any degree change, then hope would die. Let your eyes, if it may be so with you, turn to this eternal love, love kindly made known and expressed. "Have mercy upon me, O God" - not according to my repentance, not according to my turning away from my sins; O, it would be very limited if it were that way. If God had no more mercy on us than we have repentance toward Him, it would be a poor case with us; O, it would be wonderfully bad if He did only deal with us according as we deal with Him. But no, David had a view of the infinite kindness of God and that raised him up in this beautiful prayer. Lord, Thou hast lovingkindness which is infinite; deal with me according to that. May this be the ground and source and spring and encouragement of prayer in our hearts. Poor sinner, the Lord keep you in your soul trouble from limiting His lovingkindness. It is like Himself, infinite, and therefore there is a sweetness in this petition, a life in it. Lord, I am a wretch; I am not fit to live; I am not fit to take Thy glorious, holy Name on my polluted lips; I am not worthy to think of Thee; but O, Thou hast lovingkindness infinite, and according to that, have mercy on me. My friends, the repentance we want will come this way; the broken heart we pray for, will come this way. The approach unto God that we crave will be granted this way, no other way; "according to Thy

lovingkindness". Let me stress it as I might be helped a little. How is this made known?; in the gospel. What is the gospel; it is the purpose of infinite love to elected sinners; it is the purpose of Christ who left His throne, His radiant throne on high, to become a poor, suffering man, a dying surety, a High Priest over the house of God. It is the love and condescension of the Holy Ghost in coming to, as Dr Goodwin expresses it, to rake into the dunghills of our hearts. This is God's lovingkindness; it knows no limit; it is an eternal ocean, and it has sweet, wonderful vent in streams of mercy coming to the vilest of sinners. Look at this as it is especially set out in Holy Scripture, in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. It is a wonderful word, passed over generally with perhaps no understanding or thought: "The Son of Man came to save that which was lost". What do you understand by that great word of four letters "lost"? It is a great word. Are we lost? Of course, one says, everyone is. That is true, but that is not the sense in which Jesus used the word there. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." A lost person, a sinner, in that sense is just a man convinced of sin, to whose pained gaze the Holy Ghost sets his sins in the light of God, with whom is the fountain of life. That conviction of itself works bondage and tends toward despair. Then, when the sinner is killed, has no hope, no strength, no wisdom, no goodness - not a thread of goodness - then he is in a lost condition and to save such the Lord Jesus Christ came; the Son of Man came. Mercy is here; the Apostle Paul, writing of the Lord Jesus, says: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor that ye through His poverty might be rich". Well then, here is the rule - "According to Thy lovingkindness". If this comes, with a touch to your hard heart, it will raise a hope in you. If this comes in the light of the Spirit's teaching it will show you something in God that will preserve you from despair. It will show you a little of the heart of God that will make you say, O could I but get there, could I but approach the divine Majesty, unworthy as I am and though I am, I could then hope in His mercy. This is wider than the earth, broader, higher, deeper, than all our conceptions - the lovingkindness of the Lord. How free it is, how infinite it is, how effectual it is, how sweet it is, when it is a little made known by the Holy Ghost. "According unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies". Words heaped on words to express a little to poor sinners of what God is, and the

rule by which He deals with His people, sinners. "Sinners", Hart has a great word, "Sinners are high in His esteem". They do not think it. It seems impossible for them to believe it, that such as they feel and know themselves to be, should be esteemed by the Lord Jesus, but so it is. "Sinners are high in His esteem". When I became a sinner, and that is a good deal more than 60 years ago, that word I have just quoted was a revelation that I could scarcely believe - "Sinners are high in His esteem". Well, if any of you are sinners in the Scripture sense of that word, this may come to you - the Lord grant it even now if it were His will - that you will see this loving kindness, the esteem the Lord Jesus has for sinners. To get them He came from heaven and became a poor Man; to save them He became their High Priest and their High Priest must have an offering and that offering was Himself. To bring them to heaven He died. "According unto the multitude". You limit Him; I do. The multitude of sins discovered to a sinner will make him say, O but these are more than can be reached. No, if you cannot reckon your sins up I am sure you cannot reckon up God's lovingkindness and multitudes of tender mercies. A mole hill your sins; a mountain the lovingkindness of God. "Tender mercies", mercies for our miseries. Tender mercies, tenderly made known and expressed. Coming as a plaster of figs on a sore boil, as good news from heaven, a kind word from God breaks the hardest heart.

O, a kind word from God is better than all the plaudits of men and all the commendations, even of good men. A kind word from God, tender, tenderly spoken, just dropped like a soft rain upon the hard piece of soil; it penetrates, it soaks through all. So a word spoken in season by God soaks into a sinner's soul. He thinks he can never be repentant, but he is repenting at once. He thinks he could never flow down in contrition, but he is doing it immediately that the soft word, the tender word, of Christ is expressed to him and in him. "According to the multitude". How many mercies have you had? You people of God, how many mercies have you had? You say you cannot reckon them up; there is an infinitude behind yet, more than all creation could receive. Creation cannot contain all God; a multitude of tender mercies. Nobody can reckon up God's tenderness. There is a force that never can be reckoned up in God's tenderness. He is not a hard Master; He is too good and too tender ever to be hard to His people. Although He chastises them He does it in tender mercy. Though He holds them at a distance from His footstool sometimes, He does it in

tender mercy. And this is the rule that the Psalmist prays God would deal with him by. If you put your rule up you will put your wickedness up; O, how often I do that. O, these sins, these iniquities, these backslidings, this hardness of heart. O, the nursing of wrong thoughts, O, the wicked things you cherish in your mind, and all these things you sometimes set before the Lord, as if a barrier to Him can be made by these things. David got that feeling; the moment he was convinced by Nathan's word, that moment he said, I have sinned, I shall die. That is just what you feel when convinced by God; I have sinned, I shall die. No, said the Lord by Nathan to David; "The Lord hath put away thy sin", He has forgiven you. Tender love brought that message to him, tender love will bring it to every penitent sinner made penitent by the Holy Spirit. "According to the multitude" - you cannot count them. All the sand of all the sea shores in the world would fall short in the reckoning and counting of these. Amazing word - multitudes of tender mercies. Speaking of the prodigal Hart says, rather asks - "What treatment since he came?" This prodigal, this polluted creature, this extravagant son who had spent his living in wickedness with harlots:

What treatment since he came?

Love tenderly expressed

What robe is brought to hide his shame?

The best, the very best

As if His father could not be kind enough or show sufficiently the love of his heart to this prodigal. So are the tender mercies of God; so great, so sweet, so beautiful so loving, so lovely, so fitting are these tender mercies. Scriptures are turned into tender mercies when here and there they fall upon the troubled soul. They are turned into streams to make the sinner glad; promises, tender streams, living streams, suitable streams for sinners who are sorry for their sins. "I said", said the Psalmist in another Psalm, "I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord" (Psalm 32 v 5) and as he says in yet another Psalm (Psalm 38 v 18) "I will be sorry for my sin" "and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32 v 5) O, what a connection; when you are sorry, when you are asking to be made sorry - and even asking to be made sorry, has some sorrow in it - and God sees it. When you are asking this in sorrow, then mercy will

flow. The exercised sinner is afraid of taking anything that God does not give him, but when the mercy flows in then says the sinner, with Rutherford: "I did not love Him, but He would love me, and I could not refuse to be loved." And that is just what God does; He shows a sinner his unwillingness; He shows a sinner the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush, and the sinner says, I cannot refuse to be loved; I want to be loved; I have prayed to be loved; I do pray to be loved, and this lovingkindness flows in. "According to the multitude" A legal spirit says in you, this is all very well for the saints, but what of myself? Saints are made out of sinners; believers are made out of unbelievers; clean people are made out of polluted people, and this is done by tender mercies. Jesus said "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly". The limitation of God by us is very grievous; it was a sin that Israel was guilty of, and of that sin, God took notice. It is very common to a legal spirit, to a convinced child of God under the law, to set his sins up and his hardness of heart and his want of repentance, to set them all up against God like briars and thorns. Can He come through all these? And then the Lord says He would do it. Who would set the briars and thorns against Me in battle; I would go through them, I would burn them. Or, let this legal sinner, let this legal sinner, make peace with Me. "Let him take hold of My strength" - which is Christ - "Let him take hold of My strength and make peace with Me, and he shall make peace with Me." When you can give credence to Christ, when your heart is made willing - in the day of His power - to be saved as a lost person, not as a good person; to be saved as an impenitent person, not as a penitent; to be saved out of your hardness and out of all your sins and in respect of them all, then you will find that word: "Let him make peace with Me and he shall make peace with Me." None shall prevent it; no sin, no devil, no guilt, shall prevent that sweet, divine peace flowing like a river into the soul. "According to the multitude" O, if I could but count them a bit to you. Love in eternity set on a sinner; love in eternity giving Jesus Christ for that sinner; love in Jesus Christ coming to save that sinner; love in the Son of God in love entering the womb of the virgin to take our nature into union with Himself. Love in the Saviour becoming a poor, afflicted Man, having God's law, broken law, put as a holy law into His heart that He might obey it and did obey it. Love in humbling Himself, or suffering in the day of His humiliation; love going to

the cross. O lovingkindnesses, tender mercies; a multitude of them. Love in the Holy Spirit saying, arrest that man, sending the law to chasten him out of the world and out of himself; then sending mercy in a sweet stream. My brethren, we need this; the oldest child of God, after all the Lord has done for him, needs this to be repeated. One says of the saints - they enter heaven by prayer. HERE

And now what does he want? He has got the rule by faith, namely the lovingkindnesses, the multitude of tender mercies. Now what does he want? "Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin". He is brought to this point; nothing else would restore him; nothing else could satisfy him, and so he brings it up before the Lord. Lord, I have committed adultery, I have committed murder; by the law of the land, by the law of the Jews, I ought to be stoned; God commanded that. I ought to be in hell. Do you believe that? Do you believe it for yourself? I believe it for myself. Now he brings this up; he brings his transgressions before God; he brings his iniquity before God. He is ashamed of them but he brings them before God. "My sin is ever before me"; now Lord I bring it before Thee. My transgressions - I was born in sin; I lived in sin for a long time; I was blessed with grace and I have fallen; I have fallen most foully and I have given to the enemies of God occasion to blaspheme, but O, Thy mercies are more than my sins; blot them out. It is a great point to come to; blot them out. He believed they could be blotted out; that is a great point in religion, when a man, convinced of sin, really believes that his sin is forgiveable. If you do not believe that, O, the bondage that you are in and the misery you feel, but when you have got that point in your heart by the Spirit you have got a real point. Can I mention my sins to the Lord? one may say. Yes and you will do it, as you are under the teaching of the Spirit. You have got so far; you have got a rule in your conscience, in your understanding, and in your feelings. That rule is, according to God's lovingkindness, according to the multitude of His tender mercies. And now you come to this point, Lord I need, I crave forgiveness; I want to hear that joyful sound - "Thy sins are forgiven"; to hear that beautiful word - "I am thy salvation"; to hear the voice of the Redeemer - "I, even I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions as a thick cloud, and as a cloud, thy sins." This is a point. Is it a point with you? Are you brought to this - now Lord, I

am a sinner, I am a lost sinner; I ought to be in hell by the law, but O forgive this, my sin, my transgressions. The man who is at a point like this is on good ground. Let me tell you what the ground is; the atonement; the High Priestly sacrifice of the High Priest, the Lord Jesus. Stand there, abide there, pray there, groan there, put your case before God there; that will bear everything. "Blot out my transgressions". What saith the Scripture about remission of sins? This; "Without shedding of blood is no remission". Whose blood was shed for the remission of sins? The blood of Christ.

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

Well, what a point this is. Here comes the sinner, naked, guilty, ruined and lost before God, without a word of excuse, without any extenuating circumstances; the Adamic spirit that was in him is killed. He cannot say, Lord this prevented me from doing what I ought and that came and drove me into wrong. No, he says, "I have sinned; I, myself, have sinned". Ah it would be a grand congregation this, if every member of it could say that in spirit - "I have sinned; I shall die". The congregation then would hear sooner or later, the word "Thou shall not die". I have died, thou shall live. I gave Myself for you, guilty, wretched, undone soul; thou shall not die. When this forgiveness is spoken home, the sinner hears it, feels it, is delivered from bondage. Then the prison is opened, the captive goes free; beauty is given for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. O, what a blessed God we have to go to, a sin-pardoning God and there is as much justice in forgiveness as there is mercy. A just God; O, how terrible alone, but to a guilty creature confessing his sins, this is sweet beyond all expression; a just God and a Saviour. Think of it; you have trembled at a just God, have you not? may be trembling now. O, when the Spirit adds that - and a Saviour - then you will go on your way rejoicing like the Eunuch. A Saviour, saving from sin, from guilt, from pollution, from law, from damnation, from condemnation, from the devil and all evil. Well, what a gospel this is.

"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin". You have got sincerity. Every burnt sacrifice under the old law, the creature was cut into pieces and this is significant; the inwards and the legs were washed, and when you get forgiveness you will get that, the inwards, your heart, your conscience, washed and your legs washed, and you will walk in peace with God; you will walk in peace with Him. He that is washed in the washing of regeneration only needs this washing that comes by the blood of Christ brought by the Holy Spirit. His legs are washed, conscience washed, heart and every faculty of the soul cleansed from all sin. Now see what the man is continuing to do. "I acknowledge my transgressions". Whoso confesseth his sin shall have mercy. He that hideth his sin shall not prosper. And here comes this poor sinner; he is confessing, confessing, confessing; all day and in the night when awake he is confessing his sins. O I do like to be confessing; there is a freedom in it, a sweetness in it, a blessedness in it. Confessing sin is not legal bondage; confessing sin comes from conviction and conviction comes from the Holy Spirit, and conviction leads to the Lord Jesus. Go on my friends. The light-hearted professor is always singing, meaninglessly, thoughtlessly, but this sinner is always confessing sin; ashamed of doing what I do, of doing what I should not do. Well it is pleasing to God. Is confession pleasing? Yes. Is that Scriptural? Yes. Says God, by Jeremiah, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity". Lack of confession may sometimes be a bar between you and God. The Spirit, by John, says "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". "I acknowledge"; I do not hide them; I do not hide my transgressions. "My sin is ever before me". What a sight; what a shameful sight; what a shaming sight; what a depressing sight, and yet mercy comes over all. God does not contradict confession but He does disallow the conclusion that sometimes a confessing sinner arrives at about himself. I have never found God contradict any confessions I have made, and you will never find that He will contradict your confessions, but when you say, I shall die, He wont allow that. I have put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

"Have mercy upon me O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." Where are they? Cast behind His back into the

depths of the sea. I will remember their sins no more is His gracious word. "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me"

AMEN.