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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Friday evening 22nd June 1923

“Cast me not away from Thy presence and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.” Psalm 51:11

What a mercy it is to be hungry for God, to feel that nothing can satisfy but God. What a mercy it is to have a spirit of prayer and the grace of supplications so that although we may not be enjoying God's presence, we may be praying for it. This is a heavy prayer for him who prayed it first. Sin had brought a difference and a distance between him and God, not only sin in his nature, but sin in an awful act or a series of acts, and sin is hurtful to the people of God. It grieves and vexes the Spirit of God; it brings a cloud upon the soul, upon the face of God's throne. It brings a death into the mind, a darkness and confusion and it interrupts the intimate communion that God has established in His beloved Son and brought into the experience, in a measure, of His people. Everyone who has had God's presence knows that what I say is true, knows that the absence of God, which he merits, is self-procured, and that God does not willingly grieve, nor afflict His children with His absence. Each one knows that it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against God; that to indulge sin is to indulge an enemy, and to bring death and some rebukes in the conscience. And one of the greatest of all God's mercies to people in that condition is to stir them up by conviction, to draw them in confession, to give them a living desire, a real appetite for Himself, for His return.

The presence of God is everything to the Church, everything to every individual member of the Church of God, that Church which He purchased with His own blood. The presence of God is everything, and when it is not enjoyed, when in some particular way, the absence of God is felt then there is a solemn desolation. The Psalmist knew it, and this Psalm, written under the smart of his sin, under the rebuke of his God, under the solemn conviction of what he had done, under the view that sin was an infinite evil and deserved an infinite punishment, he cries out in the whole of this Psalm and pours his heart out before God. He expresses what every child of God, in similar experience, brought about by sin, in a different, but in some way brought about, feels. This, I say, every child of God more or less distinctly can enter into. What a mercy not to be quiet when God is absent. What a mercy it is not to be left to attribute His absence to His sovereignty for to do that is to deaden the conscience. To do that is to prevent, as far as it can be, the conviction of sin and confession of it. If His absence is due only to His divine sovereignty, what is there for us to repent of? But if, when His absence is felt, we are brought to searching of heart as to what has brought it to pass, we shall be not long before we discover in divine light the cause of that absence; that gracious glorious presence and the meaning of His absence.

And then the text will be most appropriate; it will accord with every feeling and desire of our souls. It, so to speak, says to the Lord, there is no life, there is no satisfaction, there is no goodness, there is no relief for me, but Thy presence. And, seeing in Christ, by precious faith, that God can come to people who have forfeited His grace and love and mercy times without number, faith is stirred up to send out this strong cry: "Cast me not away from Thy presence", which is as if he should say, Lord, return to me graciously; return to me powerfully; bless me mercifully and smile upon me. Does this text express the desire, the feeling of anyone here? Can we say, not in form, not in a general profession, not in a way that is easy, but out of pain, hunger, conviction, feeling, fear, can we say, "Cast me not away from Thy presence". It is one of the most painful feelings, the feeling that God is not with you, but the feeling of it is mercy, for sin, having its own way, would certainly deaden us, and we should have no longing for this blessed presence. It is grace that makes people hunger for grace, hunger for God; that makes them feel they cannot rest without Him. One says - O, it is a mercy to feel it. that he cannot rest till he finds rest in God. He inly sighs for that repose. It is a good thing when we can put ourselves, so to speak, into those words. Do they express the feelings of your souls that you want, cannot rest without, the blessed presence of God. No circumstance can take His place; very pleasant the circumstance may be. No friend can take His place; there is no substitute for God to His people. I know I speak the truth; I am sure some of you believe it and feel it; there is no substitute for God to His people.

Ah, the pleasures of sin are only for a moment. David knew it; a moment's pleasure brought him the rest of his life, trouble and anguish and adversity; the sword never left his house. What a mercy that God did not leave him entirely, but came to him again. You can never express what you see and feel in respect of sin when you see and feel sin in the light of God. In that light of His teaching you can never express the anguish of your soul when you see what sin has brought to you, the darkness and the confusion and the hardness and the distance from God, and God's having gone away from you. And also you can never express the fervour of your spirit sometimes when you are looking for Him and longing for Him. This text expresses all you want; Lord, come to me and bring me to Thee. Every ornament is put off. It is a very significant, very expressive passage in the chapter which I read just now. The Lord had told the people, by Moses, to put off their ornaments, all their gold, their earrings and their rings and everything else. Put them all off and come, in that respect, come naked to Me that I may know what to do with you. Put off your ornaments. It is a great thing to have no ornaments dangling about you. Gold, whose glitter does not glitter in God's eyes; ornaments that have no beauty to Him - put them all off. It is better to be a naked creature in the sight of God than to be an ornamented one. If you ornament yourself, depend upon it, God does not see you as you see yourself. If you are decked with jewellery in His presence, you are decked with nothing but confusion. Put it all off that I may know what to do with you.

When you are there, at My footstool, just in that naked condition that is proper to you, then I will deal with you. And the soul says, Lord cast me not away though vile.

Two sights affect the people of God as they get them. The first is their deformity, their defilement, and how that they have procured the solemn withdrawal of God from them. O, does not that affect a person? How it closes all the complaints, shuts them down, except the complaints against self. And the second sight is this, that great God, whose presence their sins have forfeited. "I will go to My own place", says the Lord "till they acknowledge their offence", the offence by reason of which I have left them and went to My own place; "In their affliction they will seek Me early". And then the sight of God in His blessedness, in the blessings which He has and the goodness that He has to give; in the forgiveness which is in His heart and in the hand of the Mediator; it is such a sight as greatly to affect and draw and move the sinner after Himself. That is not strange language to all of you, is it? O, it is good to be a sensible sinner; bad to be a sinner, but good to be a sensible sinner and good to have your eye filled with that that your heart longs for, namely, with God.

A man of the world has his eyes filled with the world; he sees nothing else. A lover of pleasure sees nothing but pleasure. A lover of gold sees nothing but gold. But a man of God has, though he has these sins in his nature, he has God set before him, and God fills his eyes, and then he wants God to fill his heart." O, when wilt Thou come unto me?" The presence of God is everything that His people can desire. It is written that "Christ is all and in all". It is written that "Christ is of God made unto us wisdom and righteousness and strength and sanctification and redemption". Everything you can need is there. "In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" and in Him dwells all the good pleasure of God. It is this blessed almighty One whose Names are "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace," of whose government and peace there shall be no end. His presence, the people of His love desire. O what a wonder it is to seek the presence of God, to seek it as to pray for it. When you seek His presence it is as if you can present an empty heart to God, full of ill, empty of Himself. You know what I mean; I believe some of you do. O, to go with an empty heart, a heart that once, as you felt, was filled with Himself, when you loved Him and feared His Name and revered Him and honoured Him and worshipped Him; when you felt you wanted none beside; could say: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."

But now you can say, O God, Thou hast cast us off; Thou goest not out with our armies, and therefore we are defeated on every hand, defeated by all our enemies. And when you can go and present this case to Him, a poor, empty creature, who has no substance of his own, who has put off all his ornaments, has got nothing but his deformity, nakedness and wickedness before almighty God, to mention and present; when such a creature goes with this condition before the Lord, then this prayer suits him. "Cast me not away from Thy presence". Lord, I

have no life but in Thyself. If Thou goest away, if Thou dealest with me as Thou didst with Cain, then Cain's condition and Cain's end must be mine. O, leave me not to the murderous sins of my heart. Leave me not to the guilt which I have contracted. The presence of God is life, and the presence of God was, and is, and ever shall be, the covering and defence of His poor people. Can you believe and do you follow that? - the only covering and defence of His poor people. There is no sin to which they are exposed that is not too much for them left to themselves. Do you believe it? I believe it; I know it; I know it painfully. O, but what a wonder is this, to see by faith that God can, and to pray in faith that He will, come to you and be your covering and your protection and your all and in all. By day the Israelites had the cloud, by night they had the fire. They were protected, they were covered, and God's presence was typified by that and His protection was in that and His goodness was in that to them, and the presence of God answers to all that. Dear friends, when our souls have not this presence they feel exposed to all manner of evil and have no protection against evil. Poor Samson had little thought what he had done when he complied with the wiles of that woman. He little knew what he had done until he went and said I will go and shake myself as heretofore, not wisting that the Lord had departed from him. Ah, have you fallen a prey to any sin? It will deaden you so that you won't know, for the time, for the moment, what you have lost. But when you want that presence in some particular way, as Samson did, then you say I will go as before and you will find out that your protection, your Protector, your God, has gone and all that is left to you is weakness and defeat and your enemies make mock.

Well, but then God has, in the blessed gospel of His grace, opened up this great mercy. He says, "I will see you again". That is a mercy. A gospel promise enables a guilty sinner to pray. It was that that strengthened Moses to go on praying for, said the Lord to him, make an Ark and a Mercy Seat and put the law into that Ark, and I will meet you at that Mercy Seat, and this emboldened him to pray. And when a poor, guilty creature sees through the cloud of his guilt, the covenant of grace and the free gospel promise enables him again to cry to God. God had nothing to offer; God did not intend any sacrifice for David's sin. David should have been stoned for his sin according to the law; no mercy for that sin. So he says in this Psalm: "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it. Thou delightest not in burnt offering". O, a king, and rich as he was, what would he not have taken to God in sacrifice; O, the sacrifices he would have offered. But then the law had not ordered any; he was just a dead man in the law, so he is thrown on mercy and that is where you will have to come and where you will be glad to come, where I am and am glad to come. You will say 'Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask, this is the total sum.'

Ah, but it is a struggle because you cannot come with things when God is dealing with you; and until you get a view of Christ's blessed sacrifice and how the Lord can come, in and by that to you, you will be sorely put to it. Then this cry will be in your heart: "Cast me not away

from Thy presence". The gospel answers our need; nothing else can. The blessed gospel of God's grace answers the need of a guilty person.

And the presence of God in the next place is the joy of His people. So when He is absent, and when we feel that we have to mourn His absence, this being procured by sin, we mourn that wonderful experience in the loss of it- rather what we have had of His presence but then we have lost all joy. Mourning an absent God, Job said, he stood up in the congregation and he cried, for he was without God to his feeling and without joy. There was no sun, there can be no sun to us, if the Sun of Righteousness hides His face. If He commands the sun not to shine by reason of the cloud that cometh betwixt, all joy is gone; there is nothing in the world can give you joy when your great and only true joy is away from you. That is to say, if God has mercy, and will keep you alive and exercised, you will find no substitute. I say it again, we have lost all. Said the Psalmist, in an earlier Psalm, "O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy" Yes, it is an exceeding joy to have God's presence which fills every gap, every place in your soul. It fills your conscience with peace, your understanding with light, your affections with love, and your will with conformity to His will. The presence of God is the joy of His people and when He is not with them that joy is lacking. And may the Lord never let us have any joy, and hold any joy, but this. Other joys are sanctified by this. Even natural things are better and sweeter when we have the presence of God. When He is absent the natural joys and sweetness of this life are lacking. David found it so. He said that he mingled his tears with his drink, and that he had eaten ashes like bread because the Lord had cast him down. He wanted the presence of God, and the presence of God is strength.

Christ is made strength to His people. He is their strength, their only real strength. Strength to believe, strength to believe that the promise must be made good. To believe that, though the way of the Lord to you is in the sea and His path in the mighty waters and His footsteps are not known to you, yet He will be with you to the end. The presence of God will so preach this in your heart, that you can doubt nothing for the time being. A little of this presence of God makes you strong in faith. There is a sweet union between faith and feeling at this time. David found God to be his exceeding joy when he was led to the holy hill of God and to the tabernacles and to the altar of God; God, his exceeding joy. Ah, it will sanctify every trouble; it will sanctify every bitter thing; it will sanctify your weakness; it will make you rejoice and glory in your weakness that the power of God may rest upon you. So, if we perceive the presence of God to mean all this, then the cry will be fervent and continued, while we have this perception with us. "Cast me not away from Thy presence". You cannot express your bitter reflection on the sins which procured His absence, when He goes away, when He says: "I will go and return to My own place". O, your reflections are very painful. O, your folly,

your wickedness; to think that when you have been so blessed and favoured you should turn against Him, who had done so much for you and blessed you so sweetly. This, I say, occasions the most bitter, painful reflections. But these reflections are wholesome for us; they keep us from being easy in this experience of God being away from us. These reflections bring us to a healthy condition of mind, namely a condition of confession. "If we confess our sin." Confession is wonderful in this, but then this does not make up the thing that we want; it is not God's presence. It is confession of what procured His removal, but it is not the restoration of His presence.

"Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me". The Holy Spirit is promised by Christ to be in His people a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The Holy Spirit in a person's heart is the cause of prayer, the cause of longing, of hunger of thirst after righteousness. The Holy Spirit is that great sanctifier of sinners in their affections, in their petitions. He it is who constrains faith to follow hard after God. My dear friends, it is an amazing mercy to have the Holy Spirit in us. He is in His children; He is in them as the Spirit of Christ, to testify of Christ, to bring near Christ, to bear witness of His Person and of His work in the heart of a sinner, and if He, that divine Spirit, be not present, O what a case we are in. What a sad case he is in who has not the Holy Spirit in him. Well may we cry this, how often has it been my petition? how often has it been yours? Some of you may say - "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me". All light is gone, all truth, as to our perception of it in its beauty and blessedness, all gone if the Spirit is not with us; and that is why it is that sometimes, when reading in the Scriptures, we see nothing in them. Is it not solemnly sad that one who has had the enlightening influence of the Spirit dwelling in him should be so deprived of that as a chastisement for his sins, as that when he reads the blessed Word of God, he sees nothing in it. And if any of you have always been in this condition and never in any other condition respecting God's holy truth, it is very solemn and a sad evidence that you are not born again. But, for those in whom the Spirit has been, and He is still there really for He never goes away; but as to His teaching and enlightening influence He is absent. I say to such, it is a very sad experience. How solemnly true it is, we who are the Lord's people can lie insensible under the deadening power of some sin or sins; lie as if we had never been born again. What a proof it is of the deadening nature of sin.

Here was David, so deadened and hardened, that when his sin was repeated to him in a parable he could not see it. He could see some wicked man in the land, and of him he said: He shall die. It had to be spoken straight to him, to his own soul, by the prophet of God. "Thou art the man", and that is just the case with all of us who become hardened by any sin. Well may the Lord say in the Scriptures, and may He mercifully say it to us: "Take heed lest ye be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin". Take heed, my brethren, may I be enabled to do the same - take heed. It hardens every feeling, the conscience, the will, the affections; every

faculty of the soul is hardened when any sin prevails. O then, for the Spirit to return to us ..I am come to Jerusalem with mercies, for Him to return and prick and wound and cut into the conscience with the word: "Thou art the man". To come and breathe prayer into the soul and carry the soul on the wings of His own divine power and grace to the throne of God's heavenly grace, enabling it to say: "Have mercy upon me O God, according to Thy lovingkindness."

He looked now at infinite mercy; he looked at an infinite ocean of goodness. "According to Thy lovingkindness." Ah what a wonder, O what a wonder to see this infinite ocean, shoreless mercy, lovingkindness. "According unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" . Who indited these prayers? How could a finite man lay hold of infinitude without the Holy Spirit? How could a poor, sin-bound sinner cry, though he might be looking into the infinite mercies of God, without the Holy Spirit? So may we take courage if we have a sight of the lovingkindnesses and tender mercies of God. "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me", as a Spirit of power. How we need this. Sin has been too much for us, has had more power to overcome than we have power to resist. Now the Spirit is a Spirit of power, and He gives power to a sinner to return to God and power to that sinner to cry to God and to return to him, for these two must meet together again. My friends, if you cannot be happy without God, I will say this, God will never be content without you. How can He lack any member of His mystical body? How can He want any poor sinner who has been bought by Him, quickened by His Spirit, and led to the throne of grace and that has been driven by some sin far away? How can the Lord be content until that poor sinner comes back in the power of His good Spirit? The prodigal was brought back, and God brings us back from time to time. We can say we are 'Weary of wandering from the Lord,

And now made ready to return.'

Think of it, a poor sinner, weary of the thing that he wanted naturally, the thing he liked, the thing he would have, so to speak; weary of it. It is very true, very solemnly true, that our backslidings correct us and our own iniquities reprove us, and we get weary in them and wearied of them. And now comes the kindness, the lovingkindness of the Holy Ghost, and He is as a Spirit of power to return, a power to lay hold of God, and so come to Him. "Cast me not away from Thy presence. Take not Thy Holy Spirit" of power "from me". And here is one of the most sacred mysteries of our holy religion, that a worm arises and has power with God and prevails to get Him back again. Here are strong cries born of the Spirit; here is the fervent belief of a poor sinner; here is the way in which He is enabled to deal with God. "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That encouragement the gospel affords us. O, what encouragement a sight of Jesus Christ affords us. It is like power, new life put into faith, new hope put into the soul,

and new feelings. O, the sweet feeling of a child of God sometimes, for there is a sweetness in it, that he cannot let the Lord go, cannot let Him alone, because he wants Him and must have Him. "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

"Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me" as a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. I would be here myself, I would speak of this to you constantly. This is the coming from under the rod, passing into the bond of the covenant; the revelation of the dear Saviour of sinners. And if you have had Him you want Him again. O, said the Psalmist, in another Psalm "When wilt Thou come unto me?" This is done sweetly, freely, powerfully, gloriously, when the eternal Spirit makes Christ so real, so near, so dear, so precious, as that the sinner says, and says, so far as he knows himself: 'I could from all things parted be, But never, never, Lord from Thee.'

Now this is a great point. Some of you may say that when I insist on this I leave you behind. Well, what would you like? Would you wish that I should lower the standard of the Scriptures that is by me, or would you wish to be brought up to it?

Regrettably the concluding lines are missing.