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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham at Galeed
Chapel, Brighton on Wednesday Evening 12th December
1923

TEXT: Psalm 62 verse 4

"They only consult to cast Him down from His excellency,
they delight in lies; they bless with their mouth,
but they curse inwardly"

"They only consult to cast Him down from His excellency"
It is this part of the text I purpose to speak from. The
Psalmist was in perplexity, trouble and apparently
under persecution. He charges his soul, or says that
his soul waits only on God. "Truly" or "only, my soul
waiteth on God" He knew that from God came his help, from
Him cometh my salvation. This is the experience of every
child of God, more or less distinctly, especially when in
trouble, we are shut up to God. He intends it should be
so and He makes it a sweet thing that we have none to whom we
may go, from whom we may expect help and deliverance
and salvation, but Himself. This is the condition of
spirit into which we are brought by means of circumstances
and by the operation of the Holy Ghost. "He only is my
rock and my salvation, He is my defence I shall not be
greatly moved." A remarkable word this, growing
out of a very blessed confidence, a certainty in his heart
of what God was to him. It is good to be made sure
of things. O that we may never rest until and only rest
insofar as we are made sure of things; sure of what God
is; sure of what He is to us. We can never be settled
without certainty; some certainty respecting
God; some certainty respecting His relationship to
us. Wherein, no matter what the point is, wherein we are
uncertain, there we are unsettled, and if we are
not settled by the Spirit that God is our rock, then we
are moved, greatly moved. The shaking of a leaf
moves us. Every little thing that comes against us moves
us greatly, but if, by the Spirit's testimony within us,
we are sure that God is our rock, then on Him we

build; we build our hopes and our confidence and we can say He only, to the utter and everlasting exclusion of all others, He only is my rock, and my salvation; He is my defence when I am engaged in warfare; when enemies come against me; when difficulties arise, when I know not, in myself or in my circumstances, what to do, He is my defence. Therefore, though the earth be removed, though the mountains shake with the swelling of a raging sea, I shall not be greatly moved. It is a great mercy my friends to be brought to this point, seek certainty. Seek to be certified on every point of your religion, your hope, by the Holy Spirit. Do not try to persuade yourselves into anything. Seek the sweet witness, the assuring whisper and the confirming testimony of the Holy Ghost in all things relating to eternity and to your own souls. Lacking that certainty you can never stand. You will be like the people of whom the Apostle speaks in the Ephesians saying "Be not children, tossed about with every wind of doctrine" Nothing can keep us from being so tossed about unless it is this, the certainty that here is expressed by the Psalmist. Many of the Lord's people lack this to-day. May it please Him to bring us to this point.

Then the Psalmist as it were addresses his enemies. "How long will ye imagine mischief against a man" In another Psalm you remember he says "Why boastest thou thyself in mischief O mighty man, the goodness of God endureth continually" So here "How long will you go on in your imaginations against me as if I were a tottering fence and a wall bowing down, but you shall be like the bowing wall and the tottering fence, ye shall be slain all of you as a bowing wall ye shall be, ready just with your own hand to be pushed down as a tottering fence." Then he says in the text "They only consult to cast Him down from His excellency." The first thing to notice in this word is what is the excellency of a person, secondly what is it for him to be cast down from that and thirdly the consultation with this particular end in view "They only consult to cast him down from his excellency."

First what is the excellency of man. Man had an

excellency in his creation. He was made after the image of God and in the likeness of God. That was an excellency, an honour beyond all expression. Great indeed was the condescension of our Creator to make us of the dust of the earth and to breathe into our nostrils the breath of life and speak of us as being made in His image and likeness. A wonderful thing that. No other creature has this said of him. Elect angels are before Him but this appears to be the exclusive right or privilege of man to have been made in the image and likeness of God; at least he only had this spoken of him. We lost it; early we lost it. That image was defaced; that likeness was blotted out and all that belongs to us now is deformity, the deformity of sin. Morally or spiritually as you may call it, there is just a dreadful deformity, no likeness to the Almighty in us; our affections are gone and set on wrong objects, idols; our understanding is darkened; we have no proper judgment of God or of life or of self or of eternity and therefore we say light is darkness and darkness is light; sweet is bitter and bitter is sweet; the will is deformed and goes in acts of rebellion against God; the affections are set on wrong objects and therefore disobedience belongs to us; it is the fruit of an inward disposition of our depravity, so there is no excellency belonging to us by nature; this is testified of in the scriptures, in the Psalms. It is said "Every man at his best state is altogether vanity" We are a lie. We are said to go astray as soon as we are born, speaking lies.

In the chapter, 23rd Romans, I read, you see our image, a perfectly drawn image; our inward condition is just deformity, pollution, and guilt. We have nothing to boast of then as we are the descendants of Adam, Adam fallen. We have nothing to boast of. We have lost our inheritance. We have lost our home. We lost the image and likeness of God. We lost every particle of goodness and now, although by our nature in the providence of God, we have natural affection, and there are natural excellencies belonging to us which are profitable to us and to our neighbours; personal and family excellencies;

excellencies as a nation; but in the sight of God these are only for a moment and they have no respect to eternity and come from no sweet relationship to Him. If this be the case, the excellency of any person must be of another nature; come from another head, namely from the Lord Jesus. He is the excellency of His people.

"Thy God, thy glory" All the beauty of the church is in Him. A wondrous exchange takes place between Christ and His people. It is thus written that God made Him, His beloved Son, to be sin for us, that He, Jesus Christ, might be our righteousness. He took our wickedness and gave us His righteousness. This is the excellency of the church of God, the excellency of every individual member of that church. Let us try as enabled a little to trace this out, as it is a great doctrine, and as it becomes by the Spirit, a sweet experience. As it is a doctrine it means that federal union, the eternal goodness that God set up between Christ and His body; the Head and the body; the Representative and the represented; the Lord of life and the body to be made alive that has life; the true Vine and the branches living by union with Him. This is the root and source of all the beauty and excellency and uplifting of sinners, bringing them out of the ruins of the fall and making them acceptable to God, and a wonderful thing it is, It undoes the work of sin, the work of Satan. It undoes every evil in our nature, rooting it out in time, for eternity shall find no fault, no depravity in any child of God. It will end with this life. That fearful thing, sin in our members. O what a beauty is this, what an uplifting, what an excellency to have union with the church's living Head, the Head of the body, to be united to Him who is the image of the invisible God; who possesses the fulness of the Godhead bodily; in whom it has pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. All the beauty of holiness is here; all the perfection of righteousness is here; all the power of an endless life is here; all the acceptableness of the church with God is here; all her standing, her suitability, you have here. Her nourishment

is here. Beloved friends, God make us sure of this as it is a doctrine, for the least removal from Christ is the removal from excellency. The Apostle said to the Galatians "He marvelled that they were so soon moved away from Him that had called them to another gospel which was not another" There is no excellency to be found anywhere; such excellency as shall please God, benefit the soul, and ensure its entrance into the presence and bliss and glory of God, save that which the Lord Jesus Christ is. Now this blessed doctrine is fruitful. God's design is that doctrine shall be as a fountain of experience, a foundation of experience. Luther, as I have often quoted to you

said "doctrine is heaven" and so it is.

Everything that makes heaven is contained in this doctrine; everything that fits a person for heaven is in this doctrine; everything that gives a title to heaven is in this doctrine of federal union with the Lord Jesus. Are we settled in this? Are we fixed here? Hart says

Fix there my heart

And for the rest

Under Thy forming hand, my God

Give me that frame which Thou lik'st best

Has God settled us in this doctrine, that the beauty of the church is in, and is derived only from, the Lord Jesus. Now from this comes all experience that is worth having when one, by the Spirit's grace, is born again. Regeneration is a great foundation for experimental religion. When one, born again, enters into the chapter I read as his own experience, pain and shame, then he is prepared to receive the excellency which is in God, just that. Are we settled in that? Have we, with pain and shame, as it were, subscribed with our hands to that chapter of the Romans? O it is a close thing. It is very solemn to have your mouth closed, very solemn to say "I am that person, my feet are swift to shed blood; my throat is an open sepulchre. Very solemn, and yet until we, in some measure, come into that, we cannot know what the righteousness of God is which is manifested without the law; cannot know what it is to be justified freely by His grace, through the redemption

that is in Christ Jesus. Now the excellency of a person in the sight of God is in his innocence, that is to say, in his not having anything attaching to him that would be shameful, polluting, that would be guilt. Can you reach this? Can I reach this? Am I persuaded of it? I believe I am. I believe I am persuaded of that by the scripture and by my own painful experience of what it is to have exactly the opposite of it and in a measure of what it is to have that innocence, for he who is justified is innocent; he who is sanctified is innocent; he who against whom God's holy law can bring no charge, is innocent. O but we do not run into this if we are rightly led. We do not leap into it in a minute; we come into it by degrees for the most part. We come into it by pain, and the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force, for they get opposed at every step and have, so to speak, to fight their way into this. To be in this excellency then is to have the Son of God made over to us; to have Him revealed in us, so revealed as that we subscribe with our hands and with our hearts to the God of Israel and humbly hope that we can say to Him and of Him "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength" and there is sometimes such a sweet sense of being under the saving smile of God as that the soul is comforted, exceedingly comforted against the pain and shame of sin. Sin belongs to us; it will live in us as long as we live. We shall never root out one sin by our own hand. We shall never kill the root. God will kill it in every child of His when the time to depart from this world comes, but as long as we live there will be this awful, bitter, root and very frequently a painful sense of its bearing grapes of wormwood and gall. But this does not undo the blessed truth that a sinner is accepted in the Beloved, and to be accepted in the Beloved is to be regarded by the Lord as being without spot or blame or any such thing. When faith lays hold of this, she gets hold of a truth that brings her before the Lord. The sinner looks up to Him; if I may speak so familiarly, looks up into the very face of God and says with Hart "I'm clean, just God, I'm clean." O perhaps some of you may, even at this moment, be feeling that that is what you often would have, that

your very hearts are moved after it. O that I might come into it, you may be saying. O that it might be mine. You may think perhaps, and it may be very true, that you have now and again a sweet feeling, a sweet hope, a boding in your spirit, a moving after God, but you want this - to be accepted in the Beloved. Here is the excellency "Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children to Himself by Jesus Christ" and so on. Now all this is in this word excellency. A lifting up of a person from his low estate by Him who regarded him in that low estate. The Trinity is here dear friends; the Father in His electing love, the Son in His redeeming work and the Spirit in His regeneration and His operation and teaching and leading into all truth and causing these happy people to have access to the Father through the Son, as it is in the Ephesians "By whom we have access unto the Father by the Spirit". Now this excellency does not escape the notice of the devil; it sets the subjects of it apart for God. The men with Christ are men wondered at even as He himself is wondered at and the devil hates Christ and he hates all who belong to Him and who stand at His side clothed in this excellency and the gates of hell become engaged and are always as they have been engaged in consultation in this matter. O if you be the Lord's you have got an enemy, not only in your heart, but in the devil; you have got an enemy and he will never, never, never relax his energies and efforts to throw you down, never. As permitted he will always be at this hellish business, consulting to cast you down and his consultations may be spoken of in the following manner. First he consults to corrupt a pure mind from the doctrine of Christ, to corrupt an expanded soul from Christ the Lord and husband. Said Paul to the Corinthians I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy lest Satan should have beguiled you as he beguiled Eve. What was the jealousy pointed out? Why this - lest you should be beguiled away from Him to whom I have espoused you as a chaste virgin. The consultation took painful

effect in the Galatian churches. "I marvel" said the Apostle "that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel"; so soon turned aside. That is one form in which this consultation shows itself, a consultation of the gates of hell, to corrupt the pure minds of the Lord's people, that they may seek to unite something of their own with Christ. But, says Paul to those Galatians, I tell you that if you put yourselves under the law, you are debtors to do the whole law, you are fallen from grace, Christ is of no effect unto you, whosoever you are who are under the law. And this is very solemn, a very grave word is this. "Ye are fallen from grace" that is from the profession of it; you put yourselves under the law; rendered yourselves, by your defection, subjects of the law, and you are debtors to do it. The slightest deviation from the Lord Jesus by any child of His is a very serious thing and brings much trouble, much trouble, grief and rebuke. It brings leanness of soul, hardness of heart, and many wrong things and out of this grows another thing, namely the consultation in the gates of hell takes hold of erroneous teachers and they are sent forth by Satan, being permitted to do this, sent forth by him as angels of light. He transforms himself into an angel of light when he sends forth ministers, so called, to teach false doctrine to set men down in themselves, and it behoves us, believing this, to be wary, watchful, careful, as God may give us grace, lest we ourselves should be beguiled and drawn away from this wondrous perfection of the text. "They only consult to cast him down from his excellency" This is the aim of Satan; this is the aim of men, the aim of men to-day, who take from us the Scriptures by denying their inspiration; who take from us the Saviour by denying His divinity; who take from us the atonement by denying its vicarious nature; who take from us the hope of resurrection by denying the resurrection of Christ; who take from us all vital religion by making religion nothing more than walking after the example of Christ. They consult to cast us down from our excellency.

Now to be cast down from our excellency is first

of all to have some error dropped into our mind; to have within some violent temptation and I think under these two words come all those things that perplex us. Take for instance that scripture in the Psalm "He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence." Deceit comes from a deceitful heart, and a deceitful tongue and the devil appears to men, influences men to go with deceitful teaching to corrupt the minds, the pure minds, of God's dear children and in the view of this I feel myself, and want to say it to you, that one of the most important things for us is, as God may lead us to do it, to beg of Him to make us sure. Bunyan's word, rather the advice his minister used to give to his people, holy Mr. Gifford, Bunyan calls him, the pastor of the church at Bedford; holy Mr Gifford, he said, used to say, beg God to set you well down in every divine truth, for be assured that whatever you take on trust will fail you in a time of trouble. That is true dear friends. So if the Lord sets us down in any particular divine truth we are highly favoured. Let us see if He has. Let us examine ourselves, and see if in any single doctrine of the gospel, any branch of heavenly truth, God has set us well down. Has He, having convinced us of sin, set us well down in this doctrine of the perfect atonement of Jesus Christ. It may seem to some of you a rudiment, as if it is one of the things we learn at the beginning, and so it is, but we learn it at the end too, and all through. If we did not sin after being pardoned, then the case would be finished, but we are always sinning and therefore we are always needing the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. If I did not sin since the day that the Lord put my sin away first, then I should not be subject to any liability of defection from the atonement, but then I have always been sinning, woe unto me and shame unto me, and this is true of you all who fear God. Therefore to be set down here, so as when fresh contracted guilt comes and when temptation seizes you and when some of the consultations of the gates of hell come against you in the form of an error, in the form of the least belittling, or something to belittle the atonement

of Christ, that is an effort to cast you down from the excellency that the atonement brings; that is part of the business of the devil to corrupt your mind away from the simplicity of the atonement and the beauty and the blessedness and the glory of the atonement, whereby your conscience is purified and your soul is straight with God's requirements. That is one thing. The devil will try to drop in slyly some corrupt thing to cast you down from that place you once were put in, that elevation of your soul, not, I mean, not the elevation as people may talk about, their fictions and all that visionary sort of thing they boast of, but I mean the real uplifting of your soul and conscience from the dust and dunghill and setting you with princes, even the princes of God's people, making you inherit the throne of glory.

Another way may be this. When some violent working comes of Satan and your own corruptions as if you were about to be driven from the ground on which you have been placed; the anchorage where you have taken hold, by the mercy of God, through faith; when the enemy would roar in your heart and say there is no God, no Christ, no atonement. O that great effort of the enemy. He consults to cast a child of God down from his union with Christ, from the sweetness and the mercy and the greatness and the glory of Christ. He seeks to do this. If you escape this violence, be thankful, but if you experience it, then redemption is before you. If you have experienced it, then you have experienced redemption from it. He shall redeem their soul from violence, the violence of this plotter, this arch plotter, who uses men and means to effect his great ends. Or he may in some way plot against your liveliness and exercise of mind to make you easy and carnally minded and to bring you into a deathly state of soul, where neither sin nor Christ have anything to do with you for the time. You are easy and your sins and corruptions do not affect and afflict you. You are quiet; you dwell quietly and tread with nobody in spiritual things. Like that city that dwelt alone and quietly, open to attack and that state of mind may come to any of us. I know it. I

knew it sadly once. Ah you may dwell alone and have no dealing with any child of God as to spiritual communion, and liveliness and no dealings with God in secret, as to petitioning Him and getting answers from Him and that perhaps is one of the worst states into which a child of God can sink and all his excellencies, excellent faith and hope and love in their exercises, dead as it were; not effectual in any particular thing to move him after God. He is just a poor, apparently dead professor. If you have never been there, God give you a strong cry against that state, that condition of mind and if any of you should be there now, the devil has got an amazing hold and your corruptions have gained a grievous victory and for a time you may live as you are. Even now you may say that I ought not to be so particular. You may think this is intended for you, and this for you, but depend upon it, when the day comes for your restoration you will say O what a fool have I been made or rather made myself. Now these are, in a very brief and feeble word, these are some of the ways in which consultations against you may be manifested in you and to you, when you find your soul in some way in danger or alarmed or under some deceitful movement of sin and Satan. May the Lord grant that you may be stirred up to that diligence of which the Apostle Peter speaks "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." And if you are afraid of this, then may you come to this "only" of the Psalmist. "My soul waiteth only upon God". "Truly" or "only" my soul waiteth upon God, for preservation, for help, for salvation. "He only is my rock" I have no defence in myself, I cannot deliver myself. I cannot help myself; I can do nothing without the Lord. I cannot bring myself out of a bad state or keep myself out of a bad state, but "He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved." "They only consult to cast him down" How men envied the Psalmist; how Saul envied him and others envied him and sought to cast him

down from that position in which God had placed him. But that is small compared with the spiritual matter of our soul's welfare, and salvation. And so, under any persecutions of the devil and of men, or if any false teaching should come to our ears so as to consult to cast us down from simplicity and Christ, may it be given us to cry "Save me O God" Save me from deceit, save me from violence.