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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham at Zoar Chapel
London, on Thursday evening
14 February 1907

TEXT: Psalm 65 verse 4

"Blessed is the man whom Thou chooseth and
causeth to approach unto Thee, that he
may dwell in Thy courts: we shall
be satisfied with the goodness of Thy
House, even of Thy Holy Temple"

If the Holy Ghost has laid upon our hearts some sense of the glory of God, we shall be delivered from that unholy flippancy that our nature is full of, and we shall find it to be a very solemn thing to profess His great and awful Name, for He will be sanctified in all them that approach Him. There is to be an awe on the mind in prayer which can only arise from some apprehension of who and what God is. If, further, the Holy Ghost has made us realise in any measure, our alienation from God, and the infinite distance to which sin has driven us from Him, approaching, or attempting to approach Him, will be a very serious and solemn thing with us. And we shall find that until, and only, as we have some sight of Christ the Mediator between God and men, shall we have any courage to attempt to approach to God, any hope of getting near Him, of having success in so doing.

But God will have some people come to Him - "O, Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come" - so says the Psalmist in this Psalm. "Shall come" brings them; "shall come" secures their coming - whatever sin may say, however a legal heart may discourage, however a tempting devil may frighten, however some apprehension of God's greatness may seem to put away all hope, - "shall come" will bring the Lord's people to Him. This text opens beautifully - "Blessed is the man whom Thou chooseth" - Ah, had not God's choice prevented the choice of some of us, we certainly should not have been found as we have been for years - seeking the face of God. God does choose people, has chosen them from eternity, and has chosen them for a purpose -

that they might stand before Him without blame. But to stand before Him they must come to Him, and seeing they are far off and alienated, this coming is a great matter. People may say "Oh we can pray" - I think generally when people know what it is to pray, it is not so easy a thing for them to talk about it. You may say you give yourselves to prayer, but you look and see if you do, and dont conclude that you pray because you use words. See if you get answers, see if you have access - if you get any return. He is a blessed man then whom the Lord selects, who is made thereby to differ from others and from himself, who goes a way that naturally he hates, chooses things which naturally he abhors, turns His face to Him from whom naturally he daily revolts. He is a blessed man who is thus under God's eye, distinguished thus from other people who are left to themselves. Election is an amazing doctrine, a mysterious doctrine, but full of mercy and goodness. And though men say it is hard and unjust, this is true - that but for it, no men would choose God. And we see what this brings forth - in the text it is immediately stated "and causest to approach unto Thee". Think of it; has God caused you to pray? You may not have been sensible that He was doing it. You may say, "I tried to pray because necessity was on me, I didn't know that I was being drawn, I don't know that I have felt particularly sensible of being drawn, I prayed because I was obliged to pray." Well, go on that way; the day will come when you will know something more, when you will understand that word in your heart - "I drew thee with the cords of love, with the bands of a man." You may find some day that the sacred and suitable manhood of Christ, God's Son, is like cords round you to pull you from sin, and the devil, and from destruction and the world, from your own deadness of heart. And this sweet experience in you will be love, O such love. You will be like Mary making her choice - she chose to sit at the Redeemer's feet, and you will make the same happy choice and get the sweet confirmation in you of that choice which she got - "I drew thee with the cords of love" - electing love, redeeming love, love shining in Christ, love dropping now and again in sweet influence on the mind, drawing it, making the soul say "If I did but know Him, if I could but roll on Him this burden, if He would but forgive my sins, if He would but relieve me from the obdurate

hardness of my heart, purge guilt from my conscience". Men little know sometimes what an influence is upon them. "With bands of a man" - the man Jesus - Almighty God - who here below sighed human breath, who now in glory reigns. Did you ever perceive the wonderful suitableness of Christ for a sinner? His suitableness to a man's bad case? We shall need, I think, eternity, to explore the wisdom and power of God in the Person of Christ shining, and to see that marvellous suitability in Christ to our extremely bad cases. This is how men are caused - two things always work when we pray. Necessity in them, and goodness in God flowing out in some operations. O, if it were only necessity in us how could we go? If a man felt only ruin in himself and saw but anger in God, how could he go to God, to His Heavenly Majesty? But, when he feels ruin in himself, and sees (and seeing, feels in a measure) kindness in God, how can he stay away? "And causest to approach". We shall have therefore to give Him the praise of praying. You must praise God for a spirit of prayer, as well as for an answer to prayer. When you get returns you wont say "I got these returns because I started in prayer and was earnest" (though it is true you did start and were earnest), but you will say "My starting was His gift, my energy was His work, my zeal He gave me, my determination not to give up came from Himself." And so He will have the praising, and as He is determined to have it, they are sometimes determined to give it to Him. When people approach God, what do they approach Him for? Also, how do they approach Him? Let me answer my second question first. They approach Him just as they find themselves. Ah, it is no little thing to go to God just as you find yourself - a guilty person, miserable, condemned, hard, often prayerless, lifeless in your judgement, without grace according to your own judgement sometimes. Yet, for all that, and in that condition, to go to Him, is, I repeat, a very great thing. But is it not a very great mercy that people may, as well as must, go just as they find themselves? You think now what it would mean to you, you who are condemned - myself a condemned man this day and always when I am at all lively - think what it would mean to us if the Lord said something like this to us - "When you have repented of your sins, when that obdurate heart of yours is more to me, then you may come. When you are more lively than you are, then you

may approach Me." What would such a condition of things mean to us? All I can say is, it would mean despair. Could you hope to manage anything in the way I have indicated - that you could rid yourselves in the least possible degree of your own hardness, and cleanse or keep alive your own spirits? Therefore if we go, whether in the first work or now as some of us can say after 40 years or more, it must be as we find ourselves - beggars, ragged creatures, disobedient, hard-hearted, often lacking in right feelings, often wanting in humility, burdened with drunkenness and surfeiting, "overcharged in your hearts with the cares of this life", very untoward, very ignorant, empty of good and full of ill, and Oh what a God He is to allow it, what a God He is to cause it, what a God to welcome such people in such cases; what a fountain of life He must have and has to cleanse away such ills, such sins! What merit to pardon such guilt! Oh what goodness to embrace such sinners! Hart says

If you tarry till you're better
You will never come at all

therefore

Let not conscience make you linger
Nor of fitness fondly dream
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him
This He gives you
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam

And what do these people approach unto Him for? For what He has to give. Yes, poor sinful worms must go - He says they shall - He takes care that they do - go to Him for what He has to give. It may seem self-seeking - Bunyan says something like that - for all that, it must be so; you must go to this good God for what He has to give. What has He to give? First, eternal life. "I give unto My sheep eternal life". This, in a felt storm, is needed: "When He to the needy and the faint His mighty aid makes known - when their languid life is spent, supplies it with His own".

O, it is wonderful to feel it sometimes - a singular and perhaps sudden change of mind, of thought, and feeling and judgment. Wonderful it is to feel not only dissatisfied, as often you may, with your state, without the least power or movement in your spirit to God; wonderful to feel that, and then to find coming upon you such an influence that you can say like the prodigal "I will arise, and go to my Father". O, it is a change, a great change. Like the thaw coming on the frostbound earth, soon there is a movement - the surface softens and then the thaw goes down and down; so sometimes life appears in the spirit and the movement is felt, influence is felt, a drawing to God is realised, the man is different; why, he says, a change has come! a great change, a welcome change - he approaches God for a new life because He has got a free supply of it. What does He come for? The forgiveness of sins. Sin is bitter and multiplying transgressions is hard work, bitter work, and sorrow making work too; as they know who are forgiven. He multiplies pardons. "If Thou Lord shouldst mark iniquity who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared and with Thee is plenteous redemption." If you believe it, if you know it, you will find yourself begging for it; and this begging is coming. "Pardon mine iniquity O Lord, for it is great". We can sin, defile our consciences, and burden them with dead works, but only the blood of God can cleanse them and purge it away. This then is an end, a mercy, that the Lord's people are caused to come for. They approach unto God for it. Who can forgive sins but God only? He can clear you again. Some of you perhaps now have been a good while without this sense of forgiveness, you may have been a good while heaping on these dead works to your conscience; and if you get any quickening you feel these dead works ten times more; you are now very miserable often, but when you get a moving - the Lord's returning, without which you never would move - your sorrow will be greater than it is now, and you will go like the Psalmist, you who have been many a month under the guilt of sin - "Pardon mine iniquity, blot out my transgressions, for they are great".

They come for bread - they want it; the earth has none of it for them, not a crumb. The Psalmist says "Men did eat

angels' food"; and if they ate angels' food what do people want now? "The bread which cometh down from heaven" Ah, this is the bread; and men have to beg for it, it is God's ordained way; if He would have taken saints to heaven without it would have been well, but He ordained that they shall go through the world on their knees, begging manifestations of mercy, applications of His blood, and givings out of His bread. There is no scant supply from Him - have we got a little? "Prayer was appointed to convey this blessing God designed to give". Hungry soul, a storehouse is here, bread is here. If thou hast an appetite, that will be one means of thy going; if the Holy Ghost moves, that will be the crowning means. Driven by hunger, drawn by mercy, attracted by the prospect of good supply, your coming soul will be found at the footstool of God's heavenly grace, asking for this bread - "Lord give us this bread". There are many hindrances - a proud heart, independent spirit, would revolt at this way God has ordained for you to live in. Atempting devil, legal spirit, a guilty conscience say "You have behaved sobadly, what reception do you think you will get - seek to do without God for what do you think He will say if you go?" You will have many a pause in your spirit, many a counsel will you take with your own heart; and, as you take counsel with your own heart, you will find a great deal of discouragement. But, let the Spirit light in your mind and you will have some encouragement. Let a revelation be made to you of Him who is full of grace and truth, and more ready to give out of His goodness than you are to receive of it, and this will help you to go again. Ah, these people come because they want bread, and there is none in the world to satisfy them - no not a crumb. Whatever we have in the providence of God by way of supply and comfort, we shall find, sooner or later, a death upon all, especially if we try to satisfy the soul in those things. As sure as ever we decline in spiritual energy and in seeking the face of God, we begin to grovel and that grovelling brings its own reward and punishment in a deathly, miserable, burdened, barren state and sooner or later your "flesh will consume away" and as it were you will "look on your bones as they stick out" and find yourself a miserable creature. But you shall come to God - "all they shall come", and moreover for your encouragement He says He wont cast you out.

These people have to come for strength - they need it, plenty of use for it when they get it. "Thou hast a little strength" - and see how it was used there - "and hast kept My word and hast not denied My Name". You will need it if you get it to go on praying, pleading, cleaving to God in Christ as He has manifested Himself to you; to hold to His promise and plead for its fulfilment; strength to judge Him faithful and wise when things are contradictory and seem to say they cannot be fulfilled. You will need all the strength you have then. If God gives you strength He gives you some use for it. When you have got strength from God, the strength of sin will be felt, the strength of pleasure of the world, of the devil, will all be felt. Then you will say "now I want this that He has given me, and want more", and this wanting will take you to Him for more of whom this sweet testimony is given - "He giveth more grace".

"Approach unto Him" - Oh, what a thing it is to have dealings with God! What a wonder it is for God to have dealings with us! O, highly favoured man is he who has dealings with the Almighty, who can say sometimes - "at last", "now I know that the Lord saveth His anointed and He will hear him" - "I love the Lord because He hath heard my voice and my supplication", and can feel a holy resolution formed in his spirit by this experience "Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live". This man must go also for something else - for safety, to be sheltered, to be hid in the day of danger. "Come My people enter thou into thy chambers, shut they doors about thee, hide thyself as it were for a little moment until the indignation be past" - and they want it, plenty of danger; danger here more than anywhere else - We may look with horror (God give us grace to do so) we may look with horror at the heresies of today, but I have looked here and found them all here, in my heart. I wish I had never felt them, but I have. Now, how is a man to escape? Suppose your judgment is sufficiently informed to preserve you from some of those more gruesome, horrible things that are being said, what of the errors of spirit that you have got and perhaps do not understand? Who can understand his errors? "Oh, cleanse Thou me from secret

faults". We need the Lord to shelter us by His teaching, by His grace, in the Man Christ Jesus the refuge made known. We need Him to cover us, to hold us up, to preserve us, that we may "keep the field and never yield, but firmly eye the Saviour". Happy he who gets through, who doesn't fall a prey to evil of any sort or kind, though full of every sort and kind himself. "Causest to approach unto Thee". Then it is for this end - "that he may dwell in Thy courts." There was the Holy of Holies, there was the Holy place, and there was the court and the worshippers came here and, so to say, dwelt here when they brought their offerings as commanded. There are two ways of dwelling in the Courts of the Lord. One is in your heart - your disposition, in faith, that is, in affection - when with the whole mind and will and affections the sinner hangs about God, about the atonement, feels his heart fixed, as the Psalmist felt his - "O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise;" when you are so persuaded of the atonement and of its sufficiency that there is to you no more sense of sins for by one Offering in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. On Thy side am I, O Lord Jesus, and here let my heart and judgment and thoughts abide. He dwells there in that way, and yet, though thus dwelling there, he may be like a man who is away from home - he may say "I don't get the communion I want in my experience; I am not there as I would be; Oh the days when I am afar off; Oh the weeks when I go without hearing God, without a sight of Him. Some of you may say "O the months I have been without Him." Cold, away from the sun, dark shut out from the light, hungry because I am out of the house where bread is, and far off - Yet being loyal and having real faith, as a husband may say from home - "I live at home; though so many miles are between me and my home, I live there, my thoughts are there, and I wish myself back; my mind is there and my thoughts revolve about the place and in it". So sometimes a child of God may say: that is where I should like to get. I know what peace is, for I have felt it, I know the face of God, because I have seen it, I know the sweet water of life, for I have been favoured to drink it, I know what love and communion are, for I have enjoyed them; and now, though my thoughts hang there and seem to live there, I am a long way off; I want to come and dwell there

in a very sweet, living, powerful, present experience. When he dwells there he is satisfied with the goodness of God's House because it is everlasting goodness, because it is powerful goodness, leading to repentance, because it is goodness which does satisfy. Here he has got what he wants, and all he wants, and he finds it makes the things of the world truly beggarly. He doesn't want lightly to say they are beggarly because he likes them too much, but now when these divine realities, this divine goodness satisfies his heart, he says I have got what I want, I am satisfied. "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house even of Thy Holy Temple". Now you know the temple had God's glory in it, the Shekinah; and in the ark were the golden pot of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and so on, and there was God's glory, and this sets forth Christ. If then you are brought to this temple, you will have this satisfaction. Why do we, some of us, so soon gad after any tinsel that may be dangled before our eyes by the devil and our own hearts? Well, if I were to speak of my own case, I should say this to my own judgment - the reason is this, that I do not know much about being in this temple; because the little I have known about it makes me know this, that when I am there, a little tinsel of worldly vanity is unable to attract; a sight of the Lord will hold me. No sense of sins, of my badness, will hold me nor you; but a sight and sense of the glory of God in this temple will catch us and will hold us. I wish the Lord may give it us, that we may be satisfied with the goodness of His house. Perhaps one effect of this more than any other, if it has any effect at all, will be this, to show how little you know; and that won't be bad if it is followed by this, to make you cry for more to that God who has more to give. May it be so.

AMEN.