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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 8 April 1923

PSALM 68 v 18

"Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led
captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for
men; yea for the rebellious also, that
the LORD God might dwell among them"

There are several outstanding figures in this Psalm. The first is the greatest, the most wonderful, the most glorious Person the Scripture knows, that heaven contains, even God in Christ. It is to Him the text is addressed, the same blessed One who the Apostle John saw in his vision in the Isle of Patmos, when he saw into heaven and saw the Ancient of Days sitting on a throne with a book in His hand and heard the question - "Who is worthy to take the book and to look therein?" None was found, and John wept until he was told not to weep, because the Lion of the Tribe of Judah hath prevailed to take the book and loose the seals and look therein. The same is the Lamb slain, the same is the Mighty God, Jehovah Jesus, who said "I am not come to destroy the law but to fulfil it", to magnify it, to make it honourable, and who, having accomplished the work His Father gave Him to do, said - "It is finished", was buried, and rose again by the glory of the Father and ascended into heaven, and there He sits at the right-hand of the Majesty on high expecting till all His enemies be made His footstool. Now dear friends, if it should please the Eternal Spirit to come and give to our souls a vision of faith of this Person, this Almighty God, I believe we should feel that earth, with all its things, our own earth, with all its interests, occupations, duties, and pleasures, pains, and sorrows, would sink into a proper nothingness, and our delight would be to gaze on Him. Who is this Person? it is asked by Isaiah. O, He says, I am the Lord; I travel in the greatness of My strength. This is the blessed One of this Psalm, heaven's greatest, the Church's best beloved, the helper of the helpless, the deliverer of the poor and the needy, the deliverer of His people from deceit and violence. He is that One of whom we read, all the fullness of the Godhead bodily dwelleth in Him, and He has all

the fullness that God's good pleasure has put within Him; Christ and Christ alone. In this Psalm He is the greatest; others, and everything else is subordinate to Him. Christ is made to His people "The chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely". O blessed is that sinner who can say, "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste" Of this Person, the Holy Ghost by Paul says, that He first descended into the lower parts of the earth. Who is He that ascended, but the same that descended into the lower parts of the earth. The Son of God descended. He took into union with Himself the body prepared for Him, and after His death, and burial, and resurrection, and full manifestation to His disciples, ascended into heaven. He descended first. Why did He descend? To save such poor wretches as some of us feel ourselves to be. To save us from our sins, from all the abominations of our nature, from all the guilt of the fall, and of our own wickedness. That was His great object. His Father sent Him. He obediently, voluntarily came. I am come, He said, I am come to fulfil the law. I am come to obey My Father. He has given Me a commandment to lay My life down and I have come to lay it down. No man taketh it from Me, I have power to lay it down of Myself, and I have power to take it up again. This commandment have I received of My Father. If ever you have seen into some of the depths of wickedness in your nature, if ever you have felt some of the abominations of your own thoughts, and actions - whatever they may have been before men - in the sight of God, then you have had, or yet are to have, by the same Spirit who has shown you yourself, a view of Him who came down from heaven, and what a sight it is. Almighty God sighing human breath, submitting Himself to affliction, to men's wrath, the devil's enmity, and the curse of the law, and the withholding of His Father's face. Submitting Himself to every kind of evil, and sorrow, and trouble. What a sight for a sinner. What a sight it is when a sinner is led to say

For love of me, the Son of God
Drained every drop of vital blood
Long time I after idols ran
But now my God's a martyred Man

The descent of the Son of God is the greatest of all the wonders that

ever the earth has seen or shall see. Men knew Him not. They hated Him without a cause. They turned from Him in enmity. They accused Him of evil, but He was all the while God's own, voluntary servant, efficaciously working out that salvation which God had sent Him to work out. My friends, this is the sight of sights for a sore heart, for a guilty conscience, for a bound soul, for, the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him and He anointed Him to preach good tidings unto the meek. He sent Him to bind up the broken-hearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captives, the opening of the prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God. O wonder of wonders, that the blessed Son of God should leave the bosom of His Father and come into a sin polluted world to redeem the fallen church, to bear their sins in His Own body on the tree, that they, being dead to sin, should live no longer therein, and there is no sinner here, nor in the whole world, who lives to feel the wickedness, the baseness, the filthiness, the ragedness, the deformity of his polluted nature, who shall not rise, in God's time, to see this sight, and bless God for it. O wretched sinner, what a Saviour God provided. What a Saviour He sent. You pore on yourself, you think you are the worst creature in the world, you think that no nature is as vile as yours, no conduct so bad as yours, no guilt as deep as yours, no heart so hard, no conscience so defiled, no will so perverse, no affections so idolatrous. Why, who would wish to contradict you if you called yourself the chief of sinners, because the contradiction would bring no comfort, yield no assistance to you. This is the remedy,

Christ is the Friend of sinners
Be that forgotten never

He came for these. O what is all the hellishness that may be born in you, and may be infused in you from the tempter from time to time - the remedy's before thee, see it in Thy Saviour's blood. He descended. What is it for Him to descend but to become sin. One of the greatest mysteries that the Scripture reveals is in that word in the Corinthians - "He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin" This stumbles human reason. This provokes the minds of men. This brings forth protest. They declare that it is impossible, but O, what is impossible with men is possible with God. God said that He Himself

laid on Christ the iniquity of us all, iniquity that brought the curse to Him, and He, having borne it, will send a blessing to you who are taught to feel what this is. O, iniquity, vileness, hellishness, deformity, pollution of every kind, Christ bore. All sin. "He hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" And men hated Him, and we did. If we do not now, we did; that enmity is born in us. We were no better than the devil because by nature we are children of wrath, the children of the wicked one, born in sin, and shapen in iniquity. And yet love brought Him down. A sight of this will break the hardest heart and melt a sinner into contrition. A sight of this will instruct a sinner into the Apostle Paul's spirit, and language, when he said - "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." O sinner, I hope the Lord will cause you to see Christ ascended. But remember this, He first descended and you will see Him first as having descended that He might bear your sins in His Own body on the tree, a deeply humbled Christ, an infinitely willing servant, an infinitely capable substitute, a Priest, called of God to be a High Priest after the order of Melchisedec. You will see Him in that lowly position, you will see Him and be thankful for the sight. If we were led into, and were permitted, and enabled, to live in, the 53 chapter of Isaiah, we should be spiritual men and be worshipping a humbled Christ, a willing, capable substitute. And yet He is in heaven. You will never get beyond the cross in a very important sense; if you are blessed with Christ's religion, and grace, you will live at the cross. You will derive your life from the death of Christ, your righteousness from His perfect obedience, and efficacious death. You will live at the cross, and yet there will be times when you will go to heaven by faith, and in affection, and you will get a sight there of this wondrous Person. You will get a sight of God on His throne, of majesty, and eternity, and wisdom. A sight of that mysterious book which He had in His right hand, sealed with seven seals; a sight of the incapability of all holy angels and of all redeemed spirits to take hold of that book. A sight then that will dry your tears, rejoice your heart, and alleviate your mind; a sight then of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah who - having wrestled with death and overcome it; who, having borne the sin of His people and cast all behind His back - is now in heaven able to take hold of that book, break the seals, and look on that book; that book of

thunders and lightnings; that book of providence, in His hand; and what a sight. Christ in heaven, Christ in heaven at the right hand of the majesty on high, and yet with, as Hart says - His heart made of tenderness, His bowels melting with love and looking on poor sinners, and their necessities. And having His hands full of gifts for them, He sends those gifts down, even for the rebellious, that the LORD God might dwell among them. Well, this is the first sight and figure in this Psalm, the outstanding one; alone now as it were even in heaven in this His great dignity and worth. Only He could approach the I AM and take the book out of His hand to look on it. Ah, would not you like poor, helpless, foolish, unwise sinner, to feel persuaded that you, and all providences connected with you, all circumstances you have to live in, and all the difficulties that surround you, and the thunders of trouble, and the lightnings of sorrow, and piercing griefs that all these things are in His blessed hand, under His wise direction, under His omnipotent control. He said to Peter: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" Poor sinner, do you feel you love Him sometimes? Does love go out to this Person, this Almighty God, this Man, One Person? He is in heaven as a conqueror. "Thou hast ascended on high" there to rule, there to be worshipped. "Thou hast led captivity captive" When He descended He came to a world of captives, a church of captives, He took hold of their captors, the devil, sin, the law, justice; He took hold of all their enemies. The gates of hell, He broke their power. He led captivity into captivity, as it is in the Revelation. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity. He that killeth with the sword, shall be killed by the sword. Here is the faith and patience of the saints. And this devil, and this sin, that killed us, that brought us into captivity, shall be led, and was led, into captivity by this mighty God. "Who is He that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength?" He hath trodden the winepress alone of the fierceness of God's anger. This is our Lord Christ. He led captivity captive. May we reflect a moment or two here. What is the devil doing today? Walking about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Going round about the city and barking like a dog, as it is in the Psalm. Terrifying the poor pilgrims in the wilderness, threatening the city with destruction, saying, as you have it in Ezekiel - These two countries shall be mine; whereas the LORD was there. (35 v 10).

Well, if it be so with you, may you remember this, this devil is a captive; he can go no further than his Lord, his Creator, and his Judge, will allow him. He allows him to do much. He allowed him to stir up a mighty wind, to move the Chaldeans and the Sabeans and to send fire from heaven to destroy all the substance of Job. He allowed him to move Job's wife to give ungodly counsel. He allowed him to touch Job's body and afflict it with sore boils. It was all by permission, as you read. Satan, when the sons of God met together, was among them, and the Lord spoke to him, and he showed his enmity against Job, his design, and his desire to swallow Job, and the Lord said, Do this, and no more. Touch his body, but not his life. You may be tempted, and afflicted greatly. You may be sorely put to it. He may stir up the wind of your vile affections; he may blow up the fire of your lusts; he may turn your heart this way, and that, but, child of God, he is only a servant, he is a captive; he can do no more than His Creator, and sovereign Lord allows him to do. We little know what power God allows the enemy, the devil to exercise in this world, even amongst the Lord's people. It seems as if he is let loose today in regard to the world, and men's passion, and enmity against Christ are unbounded, but the poor people of God suffer, and they will suffer, but not more than the Lord sees fit, and for their good. And O, the mercy of being interested in one Scripture. "God" - said Paul to the Romans - "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly". The foot shall tread down the lofty city. "The lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, even to the ground; The foot shall tread it down" - Christ trampled it under foot when He was on the cross, and said: "It is finished"; you, O poor child of God, shall put your foot upon it in God's own time - "even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy". Their steps of faith shall tread down the lofty city. He led captivity captive. Thousands and thousands of angels attended Him and chariots were there. O what a convoy Christ had when He ascended on high. And poor men thought to keep Him here, and they thought to keep Him in the grave by sealing it with a great stone and setting a watch. They thought to keep the King of kings in the grave. Ah, and you may think sometimes, He wont come, and cannot come, to such as you, so wicked, so unbelieving, so hypocritical, so abominable, so full of all manner of evil; how can He come and bless you. Ah my friends, He came to save the lost, and you wont be more than that. That takes in all your badness, and all your griefs, and

sorrows, and fears, and sinkings, and doubts. It takes them all in - "lost". "The Son of Man came to save that which was lost", and when He comes to you, you will find that that devil that tempted you, was only Christ's captive and servant. What an amazing mercy it is, that the devil is in the hand of Christ, that is, under His sovereign control, just to do what Christ will have him. And O, how the Lord turns the design of the enemy, and the very gates of hell to a good account. Take the instance of Balaam who loved the wages of unrighteousness. How he wanted to go and comply with the hellish wish of Balak the son of Zippor. God told him not to go, but he was determined to go, though he seemed as if he would not go. Then he went by divine permission, had altars built, and sacrifices offered, in order to persuade God if he could to let him curse the people; he goes and seeks enchantments and divinations against these poor people. What did it all issue in? In that that Balak said to him. I brought thee to curse the people and thou hast blessed them altogether. And that will be just the same with you in your manner. The devil seeks to curse and destroy you, and God will cause the whole to be a blessing altogether. Good comes out of evil. The wind is in Christ's fist, the waters are in the hollow of His hand. This great One whom we adore will turn evil into good in the experience of His people. It was just the same when Joseph's brethren sold him into Egypt. They meant it for evil. He said to them afterwards - You meant it for evil but be not grieved, God meant it for good. He sent me to save you alive and to nourish you all. So when the devil seeks evil and endeavours to bring it upon a poor child of God, the whole turns to good. He led captivity captive; so Berridge rightly says - "The furnace shall not singe thy hair"

The lions will not roar
The billows cannot heave
The furnace shall not singe thy hair
Till Jesus give them leave

May we have faith to put our bad cases into Christ's good hand, to bring our poor, sinful hearts to Him. We have nothing better to offer Him, and He is kindly pleased to take such a poor offering and manage the whole. It may be a teaching to us if we consider this wonderful thing that all the enemies of the church, all the captors who refused to let them go, are in the hand of Christ, and that Christ will, in

His Own time, rise up to thoroughly plead the cause of the poor, and the needy. We have a great King to worship my friends, a great Christ, a great God. A legion of devils that had possessed a man could only go - when they were commanded to leave the man - could only go into the herd of swine by divine permission. Nothing without Christ. Nothing without Christ. the King in Zion, and His Own King. "Yet have I set My King on My holy hill of Zion". We may well, therefore, do as Hart exhorts, as many of us as fear the Lord

To trust Him endeavour
The work is His Own
He makes the believer
And gives him his crown

He led captivity captive, and that is not all. It is much, O, it is much, that the winds are in the fist of Christ; it is much, that the tempter cannot breathe a syllable of hellish temptation into our minds, without divine permission; it is much, that the devil is a chained lion though he is a terrifying lion to a poor, feeble heart, but there is more than that

tt "Thou hast received gifts for men"; received gifts for men. When the Jews under Esther were delivered there was rejoicing and portions were sent here and there. Well, you may have some portion to send to a poor child of God, but here is one who has gifts for men, gifts in abundance, as much as they need, suitable gifts. Ah His eye sees us, His ear hears our cry. His full hand will send, as needed, the suitable blessing down. "Gifts for men". First of all, the gift of the Holy Ghost, that all-inclusive gift. Inclusive, I mean, in respect of our being taught, and led, and anointed, and united to Christ. Every needful thing that a soul can pray for is included in that, that the Holy Spirit is given to be a teacher, a guide into truth and to anoint, and to give sweet, and sensible union with the Lord Jesus. Ah, depend upon it, that Holy Ghost religion that we want, that we pray for at times, is the sweet gift of Jesus Christ. The gift of the Spirit. "The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth." That is the gift that brings the sweet new birth to a poor child of God. The new birth, that is not known when it

comes, is not known, perhaps, for a long time in some cases as the new birth, but is known in the effect of it. One can say - without being able to say, God has anointed my eyes - I was blind, but I now see. I was blind to God, but I see there is a God, and I see a little into His character. I was blind to my sinfulness, but I see it now. I was blind to the law, and its great, and just claims on me, but I see both it, and them, now. I was blind to a hell that I deserved, but now I believe in a hell, and I am afraid I shall be there one day. O, what an anointing is the anointing of the eyes of a sinner by the Holy Ghost. And though he may see, for a long time, but men as trees walking, he has sight. Sight to see his need, and at times to see Him who can supply his need. Blessed gift is this. Has Christ given this gift to us? One may say, I do not think He has given it me; I wish He would; I pray Him to do it; I would prize that gift above all the world if I might but have it. O, but you may not be able to judge, yet the day will come when every child of God shall understand that Scripture of Christ where, promising the Spirit, He says, Ye shall know Him, for He shall be with you and dwell in you, and it is a great day to a person when he can see the Holy Spirit by His indwelling. "Gifts", the gift of the Spirit, what a gift. The gift of prayer, rather first the gift of faith, the faith that believes the testimony of God, the faith that believes in the Bible as the Word of God; that believes in God on His throne of judgement; that believes in God as the Giver of the Law, that holy, and just, and good law; that believes in the sinner's wickedness, and that he deserves that endless hell that is threatened to the wicked; that believes these things so as that they live in him and they trouble him, and grieve, and burden, and distract him. They stop him in his sinful course. They make him sorry because he cannot overcome the sins that work in him. It is a great thing to have faith, that mysterious gift, that wonderful grace that lives and labours under load, that never dies, though it is often damped; that blessed gift. "Hast thou faith?" poor sinner. Then thou hast heaven and yet it may only be hell that thou feelest for the most part. But faith, God-given faith brings a sinner to heaven through Jesus Christ. Faith that reckons God to be right in everything, however wrong matters may seem to be for a time. Faith that will never listen to an evil report that a wicked heart will bring up of God. Faith that will sometimes say with Caleb, We are able. The cities are indeed walled, high as heaven, and the inhabitants are as giants, and we are but as

grasshoppers, still we are able to go and take the land because God is with us. Faith is a wondrous gift, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith that believes the testimony of the Scriptures concerning Him. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin". Then says a sinner, I want that, I long for that. You cannot long for anything better. This is that gate into heaven, the entrance into holiness. It is that blessed reconciliation to God, that comfort of love, that fellowship of the Spirit, that purifying of the conscience that the child of God longs for above all else.

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

O what did Christ when He said "It is finished", when He poured out His soul unto death, when He left nothing to be done. He sends His good Spirit to bear witness to that which He did, to make it efficacious in a guilty, wounded conscience. The gift of faith.

And the gift of prayer.

Prayer was appointed to convey
The blessings God designed to give

After promising, by the prophet Ezekiel, all covenant blessings, the Lord concludes by saying, "Yet for these things will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do them for them." Prayer merits nothing, but prayer is that means which God uses to bring into the soul the blessings which are designed by God to be given to the soul. He teaches - and that is wonderful - He teaches sinners to pray. He teaches them to pray according to the will of God. The most ignorant, illiterate person with respect to the mind of God and His eternal counsel, is led by the Holy Ghost to pray for those very things which, in Eternity, God designed to give him. And this is, as I have sometimes said, one of the most wonderful things in the experience of God's people. A miracle of grace that one who does not know God's mind concerning himself says in his heart, and in prayer, those very things God had designed him to say; asks for those blessings God has designed

to bestow upon him. O, what a gift is prayer, and Christ has that gift, and He gives it to His people; He teaches them - Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples. Then He says that astonishing word - Say this, "after this manner pray ye, Our Father which art in heaven". Why, says a child of God, I am a child of wrath I feel, a child of the devil. I am a thousand times more like the devil than I am like a saint of God. O, says Christ to this sinner, say this - "Our Father which art in heaven". He says to a rebel, say this - "Thy will be done". And the poor child of God says, Why Lord, I want my own will. I am more after my own will than I am after Thine, a great deal, and yet faith prevails, grace prevails, and the sinner says - "Thy will be done" And Christ says, say this in prayer - "Thy kingdom come". O says a sinner, Why I want to rule myself, I want to manage myself, I want many things in my own hand, and I fret because this is not in my own hand, and I rebel because I cannot control that providence. O, but faith comes, and grace comes, and these working, move the sinner to say - "Thy kingdom come". Lord, rule this wicked heart, manage these abominable things of my nature, cast out the devil, and break his power, and let my soul be under Thy blessed rule and kingdom. - "Thy kingdom come". What a mercy it is to want to have Christ's kingdom set up in your heart. He received gifts for men. He gives them real prayer, prayer that will go up to God as a sweet savour because mingled with the much incense of Christ's infinite merit. Your prayer may, to you, be like the chattering of a poor creature without life, without grace. O, but it is different to God, when the poor breathings of a distracted heart, when the sighs of a wounded conscience, go up to God mingled with the much incense that is in the golden censer. When faith looks at that incense it is not stumbled at the poverty of prayer. It is not stumbled at the poor chatterings of the mind. It looks to that merit, and says, I hope that therein, and thereby, my poor petitions will rise with acceptance to God, and I shall get an answer. Bless God for the gift of prayer which has brought many things down. Look into the Hebrews, the 11 chapter, and you will find faith and prayer wonderful in their movements, and in their acquirements, in their achievements. Heaven, as it were, came down to earth, and weaklings were made strong, and waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Kingdoms were subdued, and righteousness was wrought, and Christ gave all that to these poor people, and He gives the same

blessings in measure to people today. The gift of prayer.

Pray if thou canst or canst not speak
But pray with faith in Jesus' Name

Make all thy wants and wishes known

Let the worst go out. It will be so with you. You will say in secret to God what you would never think of uttering to your nearest in this world, and the Lord hears. "Let Thine eyes be open and Thine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place." And the Lord says - "Then My eyes shall be open and My ears attent to the prayer that is made in this place."

This is God's blessed gift, and now I must, just in conclusion, mention that gift that brings heaven to earth, that brings peace to a troubled conscience, life to a sensibly dead creature, holiness to one who is painfully aware of his pollution, namely the gift of forgiveness. This is in Christ's hand, and you will remember that when the Apostles were so powerfully witnessing to the resurrection of Christ, Peter said - "Him hath God exalted at His right-hand to be a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." That is the blessing, that is the blessing. O, it seals a sinner comfortably, it seals his heart, it takes away his death, his curse, his bondage, his fear, his alarm, his sins. It takes away, for the time being, his vile affections. It comforts him with all the comforts of love. It wraps him up in the Covenant of Grace, in a way of experience. And this free gift is for the worst. One says

This I, the worst, receive

and everyone will say the same who gets it. The worst of sinners receiving the best of blessings. And Christ has this, He multiplies it, constantly multiplies it. We multiply sins, and they rise up as high as heaven. O, if one may so speak, what work we give Him to do, but He does it, He does it. He has received gifts for men. Now I have occupied all this time on one of the outstanding figures of this Psalm. I must just say that the second outstanding figure is the

Church of God, Zion, matched against the hill of Bashan, and there are other subordinate figures in the Psalm as the captives, the captivity, the captors of poor sinners led captive, but here I must just leave it with that observation, and may God grant faith to us in this bleeding, once dying, and buried, but now risen, and exalted Saviour of whom it is said - "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men" - and as if this were not enough, as if some would put themselves outside the pale of that word - "yea" He says "for the rebellious also". The out of the way sinner, the more than ordinary sinner, the creature who is so outrageously wicked that he is beyond the ordinary sinner. And "for the rebellious also" - and for this end - "that the LORD God" - the blessed Trinity - "might dwell among them."