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Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham at Galeed
Chapel, Brighton on Sunday morning 3rd January 1926.

Text: Psalm 73, verse 28.

"But it is good for me to draw near to God. I have put
my trust in the Lord God that I may declare all Thy works."

Asaph was a good man but he had been for a time looking at God's work from a wrong view-point. He had been measuring divine providence and wisdom by his own measuring line; had been weighing things in the balance of his own understanding; he had been judging God by his own natural love and the consequence was, that everything that he saw perplexed him, stumbled him, and so seriously stumbled him that he said- "As for me," the word is very emphatic, "As for me, my steps were almost gone," lost his footing, lost his balance and found himself in a distressing condition; could not understand how divine love could afflict its objects and how that men whom God would destroy for their sins, should be prospered in their sinning and this so perplexed him that he nearly fell and he nearly spoke his rebellion, but he was checked and thought that if the thoughts of his heart were expressed by him to the people of God it would stumble them, grieve them at their heart and so he was silent with respect to his trouble and perplexity and would not speak to God's people lest they should be distressed and confounded like himself. Not a bad rule for us this. We may be perplexed, we may wonder why God blesses some and does little or nothing but afflict us, we may wonder why many have no trouble, no bands, no sorrow. How they are allowed to walk in their pride and that they shake out their tongue against the heaven and speak as if they were their own. We may be very troubled by these things. Whenever we view God in His providence by our own natural vision, justice and love so-called, we shall err. You can no more understand God's peculiar dealings in providence by your own wisdom than you can understand His nature. He giveth no account of any of His matters. Do not try to understand Him that way. If you do, you will just be another Asaph in stumbling, slipping, misunderstanding and bringing yourself into great sorrow. Asaph was not the only man that thus acted and fell. Jeremiah is another

instance of this. He was so troubled by that which met his eyes, how that the wicked prospered, that God established them and the righteous were afflicted, that he went before the Lord and asked permission to speak with God concerning His judgments. The Lord dealt with him kindly and appealed to him as to his ways and said - "Now if you have been running with foot-men and they have been too fast for you, what will you do with horses, and if on the level open country you become weary and ignorant, what will you do when you come to Jordan's river where there are lions hid in the wood, what will you do then? Job was stumbled in the same way - "Wherefore doth the wicked prosper." Things of this nature do stumble the reason of the people of God, and how is it that the wicked objects of God's hatred constantly seem to thrive? It is not that they have no trouble. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble, but there are no bands of spiritual trouble and perplexity in them, and they prosper in their own ways. It was the same with David, at least he came to that in his weariness, then he said - "There is nothing better for me to do than to escape Saul by fleeing the land, let me get away from this man, and I shall be easy." So the child of God in his trouble may stumble and fall, flounder and stumble about until at last there is nothing left for him as he may think, but to lie down or get away altogether from God Jonah-like, but this good man Asaph in his observance of God's ways, as I said, had a wrong view-point; he stood on the ground of reason, natural reason, united to natural love and justice, and he was saying - "Now I would not afflict a friend of mine, least of all would I afflict a child of mine, and I would not let my enemies have their way and prosper, and if I would not do this, surely how is it that God does it. He was stumbled, he got the wrong thing, he tried to find God by reason and to understand providence by reason. May the Lord save us from this by even looking at the example that Asaph may be made to us. But God did not leave him. After allowing him to flounder as he did for a time, He graciously came and took him by the hand and led him, led him away from himself; a grand thing that is - to be led away from yourself, away from all offences that your nature takes at God and God's ways, to be led away from reason, that faulty thing, one day it will be purged from all its errors, but now it is a faulty thing. He who walks by the line of his own reason must stumble. It is a blinded thing. But now the Lord comes to Asaph and takes

him by the hand and leads him, leads him away from himself and leads him into the sanctuary where the name of God was, where the lines of truth were, whence emanated goodness and mercy and the teaching of the Holy Spirit; and when Asaph was there he learned the thing. People do learn when God takes them into His presence. His presence teaches them. His light instructs them, His mercy melts them and they are content to leave themselves and their things, and to leave the wicked and their prosperity with God. What have we to do in God's way? What right have we to contend with the Almighty? If He contends with us there is reason for it. If He finds fault with us there is good reason for it. If He tells us we are wrong, it is so, but who are we to quarrel with Him and contend with Him. If it please Him to give you little and yet make that little enough, what reason is there for you to look at another with him and ask the Lord why the other who is wicked has more than you who are righteous. What fools we are to be offended with a good God! To be offended with the ways of infinite wisdom, at least Asaph got this teaching and he saw two things, and if we see them as he did, in the same light, by the same unction, we shall come to the same conclusion. He saw this - that the wicked, whose prosperity he had envied, was set in slippery places, only in slippery places. Not a block to stop them; not a stone or a bolder to hinder their downward course to destruction. He saw them. What a sight! Did you ever see the wicked world going down without any obstacles. No conscience to tell them they are going to hell. No conviction to tell them they have sinned against God. No conviction to show them their pride as being the greatest offence of all offences. Nothing to stop their course. "Thou did'st set them only in slippery places; how are they cast down into destruction in a moment." And when God awakes, He says, "When Thou awakest," when God, that is to say, begins to deal with them, "Thou shalt despise their image." Would you like to have an image which God, on awaking to deal with you, would despise? Would you like that God should find you walking in pride and shooting out your tongue against heaven as if you were your own; that God looking on you should despise you as an enemy? What a solemn thing to be wicked in this sense. We are wicked by nature, but to be wicked in this sense, to be living in sin, to be living in pride, to be enjoying God's gifts without thankfulness, to be calling them your own, your own procuring, what a solemn thing - "Suddenly are they cast

down as in a moment." No bands in their death, no exercise, no trembling at God's word, no wondering how it will be with them in their hearts, no wondering about it at all, just going on, never questioning the goodness of their state, never thinking of a Holy God and a Just God whom they must meet, but just walking in pride and suddenly they are cast down into destruction as in a moment. We should bless God for those boulders and blocks and difficulties that keep us from sliding into destruction. We should bless His Name for afflictions that make us sensible of our need and of our sin, and of our need of the mercy of God. That was the sight then that Asaph got, he saw the wicked. The other sight was this, that he himself had been as a beast before God, without understanding. All his perplexity and perplexing questions, all his fretfulness and viewing things from a wrong view-point, all these just coming from a man without understanding, so that he said - "I was as a beast before Thee." Did you ever get such a sight of yourself? Did you ever thus come to abandon your own wisdom? Did you ever feel that now you are not to be trusted and you would not trust yourself for a single minute if you could help it but cry to God - "Lord, keep me every moment." It is a mercy the Lord has divided days and hours into moments, and has taken a moment and said now "I will keep thee every moment." We do need it. We greatly need the Holy Spirit to keep us, to check us when we are wrong in our thoughts, to block the way when we are determined to go in a wrong way. We need Him to block the way by conviction in our consciences, to show us the folly of our own ways. We greatly need God to water us with His grace every moment lest any hurt us - any sin, any devil, any lust, any movements of pride, lest these should hurt us and cast us down to destruction. And this was a great sight for a man to get, a man who should say of himself, he is better than others, to say that he is a beast before God. Clearly he felt he had not the understanding and so he could cry out with another - "Give me understanding of myself and of Thyself; of my ruin and of Thy salvation; of my weakness and of Thy power; of my folly and of Thy wisdom. Give me understanding in Christ and I shall live." If any of you are walking in pride, mind this, listen to this - "They that walk in pride, God is able to abase." And when He abases a man in judgement there is no end to it, no forgiveness, When He comes to a saint to abase him as He went to Asaph to abase him, then there was an end to that, and the forgiveness of that, brought peace to this good man.

If you see yourself as you really are, you should, and you will one day bless God for it. This brought a conclusion into the heart of this good man, namely that he was continually with the Lord; that he had been upheld when he was slipping, and that upholding of God was the only thing that had kept him from destruction, nothing else. He saw it in the light of present teaching - "He has been my God all through." He has not let me go. He has held me up, kept me when I was slipping away from Him. Loved me when I was rebelling in my heart and thoughts against Him. He has been holding me up when I have not been conscience of it. Nevertheless, notwithstanding my foolishness, I am continually with Thee. Dear friends, if you get that sight, if I get that sight, how it will humble us. What! Did God hold me up when I was a slave to some lust, pride, vanity, unbelief? Did He hold me up when I was offended with His providence? Did He hold me up when I thought I was wise and could stand by myself, and has He brought me to see now that even my fretting has led to this - because He, to deliver me from it, has brought me into an acquaintance, closer acquaintance and more intimacy with Him? O, how thankful the saints will be one day that God held them up through all their troubles and their sins and their sinning. O sinner, if God holds you up, you will get a sight one day of your being as a beast and then you will say - How good it was of Him not to let you go. And also this was in his confidence - that God would guide him. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel." Now he would give himself up. Now he would let himself alone as it were. Now he would trample under foot his own wisdom and say constantly - "Do guide me Lord." When things are wrong as we judge, may the Lord guide us in our thoughts to what is right. We need it here. Not only in providence do we need God to guide us but we need Him to guide us in our thoughts, in our desires, in our aims. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel." Then we must walk in a good way if He counsels us. Then the way He counsels us to take is a good way. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble." That is good counsel is it not? "Casting all your care upon Him for He careth for you." That is good counsel is it not? With a gracious promise, a gracious declaration. "I will counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire." His grace, tried by the devil, tried by men, standing and coming through all, - buy this grace of Me. So when God guides a sinner he goes well. Then also his confidence went as far as heaven, "and afterwards receive

me to glory." That is the end. that is what is in the view of some of us at times, that when the Lord has done with us here, when we have lived our day, done what He would have us do, suffered what He has laid upon us, then He would receive us to Himself. Perhaps you may think sometimes to yourself - now I wonder how much longer I have to live. Then you may get checked and think this - It is not a good enquiry if you make it without any special reference to God. This is the best - "So teach us to ~~number~~ our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." The end is coming, it is coming and then when all is at an end here "Thou shalt receive me to glory." Glory which has been seen by faith here. Which has been anticipated sometimes, even here. Glory in and with God. The Spirit of God and of glory rests on the saints now in a measure but then when they are received into glory, then they will enter on that kingdom that was prepared for them from the foundation of the world. And this divine teaching that the Psalmist had, wrought another thing in him, to which, let me draw your attention for a moment, a miserable thing to have to do with. When you have to do with sinful self, you will get nothing but confusion, defilement and death. I need not say this to some of you, you know it too well, but now drawn away from this wretched self, he finds that he has another, he has another, loses himself in Jesus. He says "Whom have I in heaven but Thee and there's none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." O that god fallen reason, now is broken that foul god pride, crushed beneath the goodness of God and now one God only. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee." Why sinner if you can say that, you are rich, It would not matter what privations you might have here you are rich, you will be rich and there is none upon earth whose society, presence, favour, love guidance, teaching, that I desire beside Thee. You may have to do with yourself. We have to do with one another, have to walk with men in this world, but the supreme object, the one over all, above all, one with whom you would hold converse is God. "None upon earth that I desire beside Thee." He saw his mortality "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever." Lo they that are far from Thee shall perish and Thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from Thee." "But it is good for me to draw near to God. I have put my trust in the Lord God that I may declare all Thy works."

To draw near to God means this first - That there is a way in which you can do it. Yes, there is a way. That very beautiful and express and emphatic scripture in the Hebrews sets this

before us. "Having therefore brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say His flesh and having an High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near." That is the way. "I" said the Saviour "am the way, No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Look at the infinite disparity there is between this Holy God, whom and whose ways we cannot understand and ourselves vile creatures. It would be a great thing and is a great thing for holy angels to be in the presence of God. It would have been a great thing for pure Adam in Eden to constantly have had access to his Maker and all under the terms of the natural covenant made with Adam; to have conversed with his Maker and his lawgiver. There was no shame in creatureship in Adam. There is no shame in pure creatureship in angels and though there is an infinite difference and distance between pure creature and a glorious Creator, there is no shame attaching to the former and therefore though it is an infinite stoop, still it is what the Lord must do in justice, notice the work of His own hands, but when that is all gone, when angels fell and fell hopelessly, no remedy. When man fell and hopelessly in self, to nature, without remedy in respect of the church in Adam as a head, when all that goodness was gone, that shut man from God, that made the way impossible for him to return by the law, then, then the dear Son of God came into the world - "The seed of the woman was promised to bruise the serpents head. "By the blood of Jesus." How else could a sinner come to God. Every real prayer that the child of God prays has in it the spirit of repentance and the spirit of faith in the blood of Jesus. These two things accompany the saints to Jordan, "For there is no man that doeth good and sinneth not." How then can a man who does no good without some sin, approach a holy God without repentance and how can he ever get converse with God without the blood of Jesus. So my brethren, the way you must go all through your pilgrimage, every prayer, every time of access, every sweet communication that you make to God, for there are sweet communications made to Him by sinners, must be with repentance and in the faith of Jesus. Faith in His precious blood, and if we go like that, will, can God reject us? You say you are the vilest of all creatures and who would contradict you, except one should say I am worse, but though it be true, here is the way. Hope concerning us in our need - here is the way.

"Repenting saints the Saviour own", and the Saviour owns them., and this is peculiar to the gospel. Brethren this is peculiar to the gospel. The law allows no repentance. Under the Mosaic dispensation with all its severity, with all its restrictions as to worship, with everything of a rankled sort cutting a man off from the service of God for the moment, with all that severity, there was just this always - blood was shed, and the sinner must come that way and so in the anti-type with all that we may feel of sin cutting of communications, all the defilement that comes to us from time to time, this stands out. This is the gospel for sinners that the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. This gives right of access. O believer, seek to hold this right. Seek to walk in this blessed way. It is good to draw near in this way, otherwise you will be no better than Abihu, no better than one taking false fire and offering it to God. I love this way and I think I can say I love to speak of it to you. It is such a comforting way; such an assuring way, such a strong way, such a holy way, the holiest of all. We have a right to enter into, liberty to enter into by the blood of Jesus. Sin, however great, however foul, however dreadful in the judgement, in the experience of the sinner, does not shut him out. "Come near to Me. Come near, I will be sanctified in all them that come nigh unto Me," saith the Lord, and this is how He is sanctified, and this is how we are sanctified, by the blood of Jesus. Are you in trouble? This way says - "Bring it to God and come with it to Me." Are you perplexed, Asaph-like? Go into the Sanctuary, and He will draw you there. Are you reasoning? God alone, by the blood of Jesus can take away the power of that false reasoning, and give you faith to cast all your care upon Him, and an assurance that He careth for you. This one way will do, no other will. "Come boldly to the throne of grace ye wretched sinners come." Why, what is the ground? says one. The blood of Jesus. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." O may the love of God, in shedding His own blood, whereby He purchased the church, be made visible to our faith. It is so wonderful. A sinner of the deepest dye, whose sins are innumerable, like mountains, may come, come by this precious blood, in this new and living way, whereby sinners have access. "You, that were sometime far off, yet now, hath He made nigh by the blood of Christ." "Through Him, we both have access by one Spirit unto the

Father." So my friends, Pour not on yourself too long, God grant that sweetness to you, to me, that He gave to Asaph. He let him flounder for a time, then pulled him out of it. He let him reason, and then drew him away into submission. Took him into the Sanctuary. What a place! What a place for a sinner! What is the anti-type of the Sanctuary? Jesus Christ, a minister of the Sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man. Thus, a holy God can be approached. Thus, a sinner can be blessed and is blessed. Tis good for me to draw near to God. Nobody knows what this word near means in respect of God, but a sinner who is convinced of sin. Such a sinner knows what distance means. God has spoken to us in terms of measurement - near and far off to meet our understanding, so small is it, and now, one who has felt himself at a distance is a grieved one. You must grieve if you feel at a distance. If you feel far from God it can only be a source of sorrow to you, and you may say sometimes - "Shall I never get near?" Then you will cry out - "O, when wilt Thou come unto me." But may I come to a holy God? There is the Minister of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man. The true tabernacle is the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ, and this was seen as John in the Revelation tells us. "The tabernacle of God is with men and He will dwell with them." Think of it. O sinner think of it. That will turn you wonderfully out of yourself. You will see that no merit and no demerit can have any influence here. Only faith reigns and says to the sinner - "Go in the name and by the blood of Jesus." This is very encouraging, very beautiful, very wonderful to those who see it. The fountain of the Saviour's merit rises high and drowns the hills; has neither shore nor bound, now if we search to find our sins, our sins can ne'er be found.

Good to draw near to God in the true Sanctuary. I would keep that before you. May the Holy Ghost set it before you. In the true Tabernacle. Our tabernacle is in the dust and will soon be removed. This true tabernacle is the Lord Jesus, the sacred Person of the Saviour in whom God is and in whom God is approached and worshipped by his poor people. To draw near is to be believing. Faith honours God. Faith honours God, honours Christ, honours the Spirit. It honours the blood of Christ. It brings a soul to rest entirely and alone on that blood. "But I have got a load" says one, "of sin." If you come without it, what need would there be in you for the Saviour.

"Come needy, come loathsome, come filthy, come bare." This is how a sinner has to come. No other way open for him. To draw near is to come with humble confession. "O", said the Psalmist, "I was as a beast before Thee." Not a pleasing sensation in your own heart is it, concerning yourself as a beast, without any reason or understanding. So said the Psalmist. He felt himself to be, and you will make the confession. He made the confession here. Not before he went into the Sanctuary, but when he was there, when he was under divine teaching, when the light shined. Ah, when the light shines on you, you see yourself. People may say that a minister does talk too much about sin but when a sinner goes into the sanctuary under the leading of the Holy Ghost, it is not a question of so and so talking too much about sin, he says this - "Nobody ever set forth nor could set forth half of my pollution, half of my wickedness and rebellion. It is in God's light we see light. In God's light we see hell. In God's light we see pollution. In God's light we see purity. No other light will show us these things. O sinner, I could not describe the half of what you are for wickedness and if you come under the brightness of God's light, you will see what I say is true, and this is a peculiarity in the saints, that while they could not, would not dare to utter one single tithe of the wickedness they feel and perceive to be in themselves, they are glad that all of it is exposed to God's gaze. You understand me who have been under divine teaching for any time. Now take that remarkable passage in the Hebrews - "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace." Who are the people? Who are the people who are to come boldly? Good people? Obedient people? Clean people? Listen to the context. "For the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart; for there is no creature that is not exposed to God's eye." "All things," says that passage are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Sinner you would not contradict that would you, as having been, as being under the light of God? God's character, God's word, God's searching, you would not contradict that would you? "Then I am shut up. I am shut out." says one, "No.No.No." says the Spirit in that passage - "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." The feeling of sorrow and grief and repentance and contrition that the teaching of God

bestows and begets in a person, "Let us come boldly." These very people. These searched people. These people who are exposed to the gaze of their faith by the light of God and His blessed teaching. "Let us come boldly." O sinner, what a gospel we have! A sinner's gospel. I will keep repeating it to you. A gospel for sinners, "Let us come boldly." Asaph came boldly. Job, Jeremiah and all others like these came boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. I have admired Rutherford's word where he speaks of the imperious love of Christ. Imperious lusts have to give way to that love. Bless God for His love manifested in the shedding of His blood.

Draw near poor sinner, it is cold and a wilderness and darkness and death without. Draw near. Here is life, here is love, here is peace, here is heaven. It is good for me to draw near. "I have no evidence in my favour." says a sinner. And that is not a reason against coming, for if you were enabled to draw near and feel you had no evidences, then you will ask for them - "Show me some token Lord for good." And if you feel honestly that you have no evidences, then Newton's word may suit you -

"Marks of grace I cannot show,
all polluted is my breast,
yet I weary am I know,
and the wear long for rest."

Does that meet you? :

Draw near. It is good for me to draw near to God. You may draw near to your friends and get no help. If you draw near to God you will get help. O the attractions of the Saviour are invincible. "I if I be lifted up will draw all men unto Me." No man can come unto the Father, but by the Son, and the Father who sent the Son, draws sinners to Himself through the Son, and the Son says- "All that the Father giveth Me, shall come to Me and him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out." Here then is the remedy. Here is the beginning of heaven. Here is the promised seed of the woman inviting poor wretched creatures to come to Him. "A new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh." Consecration is by Christ. Consecration is taking your hands full. Think of it. That is what the word is in the Old Testament when Aaron and his sons were consecrated it was that they took the sacrifices ordained and commanded in their hands. Then some may be

saying "We cannot go." And why not? Because we have nothing to go with. Can you sing with Toplady- "Nothing in my hand I bring." Well here is One who consecrated the way Himself. His hands full of His Own merit, His Own mercy, His Own love, His Own goodness and He went to God with all that. With His infinite love, His infinite merit in the sacrifice of Himself and He consecrated this way, that poor sinners, empty of good and full of sin, might come and come acceptably and be accepted. A new and living way. Ah, it is good to come here and to come this way. There is one thing you will never find, you may fear you will find it, but you will never find it, this namely, you will never find a frown on God's face when you come this way. Go to Sinai you will get plenty of thunder and terror. If you come by the cross you will only see a smile of God's well pleased face. What a way! What a way!

"I am no christian", says one. Christ can make you one. They were called christians first at Antioch because they had been with Christ and He can make you a christian. If you go as a christian, then perhaps, in your own judgement, as a christian, then there is nothing for Him to do, but if you go a sinner, if you can confess out of a feeling heart with Erskine - "I am more a devil than a saint." Christ can make a saint of you. That is His business, and the best material that He has out of which to make a saint is a sinner. He has no other material. When He will have a christian, He takes an unchristian man and makes a christian of him and when He will make a saint, He takes a sinner and of a sinner makes a saint. Draw near then, with all the deformity of sin and the guilt of it, you will find it good.

May the Lord help us to draw near by the blood of Jesus.

Amen.
