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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 11 May 1919

Psalm 74 v 21

"O let not the oppressed return ashamed:
let the poor and needy praise Thy Name"

This Psalm tells us of the sad condition into which the church had fallen and, regarded as a prophecy, into which the church shall fall. It is a solemn Psalm therefore and, as true religion is a personal matter, it may meet the cases of some of God's children here. They may be feeling cast off. It is no uncommon thing among the Lord's people to feel cast off, that is, far from God, unable to get near, feel as if He resists them, will not let them come near to Him, as if His anger smokes against them. Scriptures seem bent against them, providence may appear to be against them, many temptations may come upon them, and all together they come painfully into this "O God why hast Thou cast us off for ever? Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of Thy pasture? Remember Thy congregation which Thou hast purchased of old; the rod of Thine inheritance, which Thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion wherein Thou hast dwelt". (Psalm 74 verses 1 and 2). By which, as well as by the teaching of God in our own souls we see that a very low condition of soul is consistent with a confidence that holds fast to God and His blessed work. These children of the Most High, far off as they were and cast out, still held to this great fact, that the Lord had redeemed them and brought them out of the land of Egypt, that He had set a rod, a measuring rod round about the land which He had given to them, that He had dwelt and would dwell and even did dwell in that mount Zion which He had chosen, But now they saw only desolations. It was their painful experience that there were desolations, desolations which they were unable to touch, Do not you understand that? This waste in your spirit, this trouble in your soul, this doubt, this fear, this unbelief, the unfruitfulness of your life and spirit, the desolation that temptation makes, can you touch these desolations? No! Therefore this suits well. "Lift up Thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary". "Lift

up Thy feet" is O come to us, Lord come to us; fulfil in us that blessed gospel promise - I will receive you and walk among you and ye shall be My sons and daughters saith the Lord Almighty. Is not that what some of us greatly need, what we desire? That is the remedy, God lifting up His feet. That is beginning a new dispensation to us, coming in His all covering love, in His all pardoning, cleansing blood, in the Spirit's powerful, doubt-overcoming testimony, and witness. This is the remedy. Here despair is swallowed up, here the devil is rebuked, here sin is overcome, here the conscience is purified. Be it then given us to pray this prayer "Oh lift up Thy feet unto the perpetual desolations". There is no remedy for our desolations but God's coming to us. The two disciples as they walked to Emmaus had desolations in their spirits - they walked and were sad and there was no remedy for them till Christ went and joined Himself to them. Look then at this, my friends, the case is hopeless without Christ but it is full of hope when faith sees Christ, when faith can say O come -

"O come, thou much expected Guest!

Lord Jesus, quickly come!

Enter the chamber of my breast;

Thyself prepare the room.

For shouldst Thou stay till Thou canst meet
Reception worthy Thee,

With sinners Thou wouldst never sit -

At least I'm sure with me

This is the language, this is the experience of some of God's children doubtless here. Therefore it suits them, they can pray it, as enabled "Oh lift up Thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary. Thine enemies roar in the midst of Thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs". Sometimes it seems like a roar of triumph as if the enemy shouts - it is all finished; your religion, such as it was; your hopes, such as they were; your confidence which you encouraged in yourself, are all gone. There is no help for you in God. This is the roaring of the enemy but O there is a cry in the soul and I would rather be an oppressed, beaten down soul, that has left in it and kept alive in it, one breath of prayer to Almighty God than be the stoutest

professor in the world without prayer. Envy not the stout hearted for it is written the stout hearted are spoiled. God spoils the stout hearted but He comes to the poor. Reference is made in the Psalm then to former days - "A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees", went and felled trees for the building, and beautifying of the sanctuary, but now what a contrast. "But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers". This is what the devil does, what sin does, what men are permitted to do in their opposition to Christ and His kingdom in the soul. "They have cast fire into Thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of Thy Name to the ground. They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land. We see not our signs:" Once we did. We saw God's blessed symbols, we saw the ascending smoke of accepted sacrifices, we heard on the annual day, the Day of Atonement, the bells on the high priest's garment while he was exercising his sacred office in the Holy of Holies. Now we see not these things. Perhaps some of you once saw, as you believe, grace, a broken heart within yourself, saw the Word of God and felt that it spoke to you, saw some answers to prayer, felt some delight in prayer. O what days you have had, not a full deliverance perhaps, but good days, and good things were given to you in those days and you looked on them as signs of God's favour like as when the Apostle Paul was invited to go over to Macedonia to help the saints there. He, by the vision and matters coming in connection therewith, gathered assuredly that God would have him go there, and you, by various signs of God's favour, helps, tokens for good, Scriptures made sweet, sermons blessed, hymns useful, and particular access in secret to God have thought you had evidences that the Lord had begun a good work in you and believed He would perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ, but now it is different. "We see not our signs". There is no more any profit, the ministry is not useful, the word is not applied. Things seem dead within and dead without and the Lord does not communicate His mind, does not speak His truth, does not give His Spirit as He used to do. "Neither is there among us any that knoweth how long. O God, how long shall the adversary reproach?" How long shall the devil say there is no help for us? How long shall he say all this must continue for ever and ever? How long shall he mock at our religion, mock at our prayers, mock at our hopes. How long shall he mock at the Scriptures and mock

at those particular Scriptures which have been given to us, and been useful to us? How long shall he mock and nobody to tell us? God is a sovereign. Here He has fixed a time but He will have us wait in ignorance of that time. The set time will come but He does not reveal it distinctly because He will have us wait on Him. O my friends, you may have particular troubles and get no special direction and wait long and think your waiting will end in disappointment for ever and ever, but still wait on God. And so through the Psalm I might continue. We see there is a desolate condition, there is a prevalence of the enemy. A sad state, a prevalence of the enemy. He roars, he breaks down with axes and hammers the carved work. He throws down the blessed reliefs and merciful deliverances and powerful helps and the gracious hopes and the sweet, warm affections which have been within your souls; casts all down, breaks all up and perhaps if you come across it, or it might come into your mind, you could say, now I have some understanding in that Scripture "Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth." Here is a bit flying, there is a chip flying and in all directions our hopes are scattered, chopped up, by a ruthless enemy who tempts and by sin that often prevails. And what does this bring us to? To this prayer "O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise Thy Name".

O let not the bruised soul return ashamed. Bruised by many things, first by the opposition that is offered at every step by indwelling sin. Bruised by many thoughts that are dreadful, thoughts against that God you would fain love, against that Redeemer you would fain hope in, against that Holy Spirit whose work is necessary to your salvation. Bruised by such things, how helpless and how sore you feel. Helpless to change the case, the state. Helpless indeed is every child of God in his own feelings and all but hopeless. This is a case of oppression from indwelling sin. Outward sins, gross transgressions, you may be kept from, but O the grosser, unspeakably grosser things in your spirit, they bruise you. They oppress you like as the Egyptians oppressed Israel, exacted labour of them, and O what would they not have given for rest. Think of those poor Israelites oppressed by the Egyptians making brick continually. After a time, no straw supplied to them, yet the same tale of bricks demanded day by day, and the whip of the taskmasters laid upon them. This was the

oppression, this was the furnace in which they were. This was the state of the oppressed. At last they cried, they groaned. As it is said by the Lord, I have seen the affliction and have heard the groaning of My people. They cried out of their oppression, they cried out of wrong. Now you listen to this, if you can. It is an awful thing for the devil and for any creature to be involved in the cry of an oppressed sinner to God. I would not, even for a world, if I could help it, I would not be involved in the cry of an oppressed person in respect of any temporal thing, but O especially in this matter. "O let not the oppressed return ashamed", Now where is he? Where is the oppressed case? If he is to return, and that not ashamed, he must return from some place. Lord, let him not return from the throne of grace ashamed. That is a place where you will find sinners. If you want to find a miserable sinner, convinced and taught and led of the Holy Spirit, you must go there. You will often find him there. When his friends may say, we do not know where he is, you may go in your spirit to where he is. Ah many a time in the day and many an hour in the night perhaps also. If you want to get to an oppressed person you must go to the throne. There is a spot where spirits meet and this is the spot, the throne of grace. There the oppressed pours out his prayer, there he exposes his condition, there he speaks to his God, there he cries for mercy, and for forgiveness and for deliverance and for the bright shining of God and for the sweet, clear testimony of the eternal Spirit and he lives there. He does not feel that he is there always, perhaps he seldom feels it, yea he may think that it would be sin in him to go there. He may enter into Ezra's feeling "I blush and am ashamed to lift up my face unto Thee". Guilt has made many of us ashamed to kneel down. I have known that often. O guilt, guilt, guilt, is a great pressure on a living conscience and yet the man with this condition lives in his spirit, in his desire, in his aim at the throne of grace. There he is; and what does he do there? This helpless person who cannot lift a finger to help himself respecting sin and the enemy, what does he do there? You know, you can say of yourselves, we pray, we sigh, we drop the tear before God, confess sin, tell Him how afflicted we are, how wounded and how helpless and ask Him to show His mercy. Tell Him we are afraid we have never been born again, we are afraid that the Holy Ghost has never been given to us, that our strongest convictions and warmest desires were not of the Spirit. We tell Him these things; tell Him sometimes that we

would, if we could, love Him, would cleave to Him, would be found in Him, would have His righteousness, would have His precious blood, would have a part and lot with Him in the matter of salvation. We tell Him these things. And go on telling Him them as well as you can. It is not vain repetition to be exposing your case, your heart and conscience and your desires before the Lord. When the heart is engaged in the matter of prayer there is no vain repetition though you may say the same thing many times.

O let not the oppressed return from the Scriptures ashamed. You do live in them sometimes don't you? That is, you can say with Dr Watts, that your eyes are on the sacred page if haply you might light on some sweet promise. This Book is a real Book; it is no tale, no fiction; an inspired manifestation of God, a revelation of His heart and will concerning sinners who are called to repentance. It is a blessed statement of a truth that amazingly meets some people. I mean this "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." It is here you will find an oppressed man sometimes. He goes, sometimes, to the experience of good men, and measures himself by them, and gets worse for, says he, I have not what they had, and he goes to the ministry that God may have given him, and says sometimes it seems to meet me. I even feel sometimes when hearing as if I am the very person described, but I do not get deliverance. He says then I go to a friend and compare notes with him and that helps me, but the best place I can get to sometimes I find to be the Scriptures. I look at them, I look into them, the Psalms which have been compared to the heart, the rest of the Scriptures being the body. The Psalms, how they speak to the soul, to the case. How they set out a bad case, a wicked man, a rebellious Asaph, a fallen David, a desolated church, a dark soul, an oppressed sinner, an oppressing devil, distracting thoughts, many fears; these are all in this Book. And go to the Book and there you are with it sometimes. This is my case. But the enemy says, O but there is a spot in you that is different from all that you read about in the Scriptures of saints. Still the man is there. He is in the Scriptures. His eye, his heart, his affections, his desires, are in this blessed Book. Sometimes you will find him in providence, in trouble. Oh what does this mean he says. O why is the Lord contending with me like this? What is to become of me? What will the end of this

be, this perplexity, this oppression, this being so painfully dealt with? And you find the man will be here sometimes. "O Lord correct me but with judgment, not in anger lest Thou bring me to nothing". Have not you been there sometimes? O Lord, you have said, again "I know that the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." You design this, God designs the contrary, and your efforts to be what you design bring about the very opposite to which God had designed. You find the man in providence - Lord do not let me break loose. If this trouble is like the stocks to keep my feet from wandering wider let me not get out, O let me not end this dispensation wrongly. Bless this trouble, sanctify this affliction to me. Be with me, be about me, shield me, guard me, guide me, uphold me, teach me, deliver me from evil that it may not grieve me. You find the person in providence thus exercised and wanting yet to say I know

Paul speaks the truth when he says, no affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous. Nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby, and the Scripture speaks to you and it says, do not expect good if there is no exercise. Do not look for good without trouble. Paul says "exercised thereby". If you get trouble and it passes away from you, if it is like water poured on a piece of marble, what good will come out of it? But if it enters, if it brings you to searchings of heart and questions are asked by you of the Lord, O why this? and, bless me in this and bring me well out of this for Thy praise and my profit, then you will get good. "To them which are exercised thereby".

And now let not the oppressed return ashamed. O, but one of you may say, I do return to the throne of grace and I am ashamed. Let me remind you what I said, this man lives there, not in his feelings, but in his spirit and his desire, his aim. He lives there. "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary". You are oftener there than you are kneeling are you not? Oftener there than you are speaking, are you not? Many a man prays when he is walking, when he is on his bed. Many a child of God is praying while he is working with his hands, got something to do and his mind must be in it also, yet O the ejaculations, "Lord do help me, do save me. Bless me; O leave me not. Now this man is not returned from this place ashamed. Let me show you what I mean by a case. Take Hannah.

She went to the throne of grace. Did she return ashamed? No, she took back, as it were, to that blessed throne what she had obtained there. She got a promise; she took back the promise in the son. "For this child I prayed". And she said the stout-hearted are spoiled. "They that were full have hired themselves out for bread". The hungry He fills and has filled me. He strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong so that the spoiled come up against the fortress. And, as you get an answer, when God lifts up His feet to your desolations, when He says now there is to come an end to this, when Jesus comes and pardon and a new bright inshining is experienced and you feel that sweet presence of Christ for which you have prayed, where has shame gone? As in an earlier Psalm it is said "They looked unto Him and were lightened and their faces were not ashamed." Ashamed, how could they be ashamed of Jesus? Ashamed when they have got what they asked for, when they have their God with them, their Saviour in their hearts. O no. Then this prayer shall be answered. O let not the oppressed return ashamed from that blessed throne. What says the Lord? "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me". They said of old, as Isaiah tells us, Lo this is our God, we have waited for Him. This is the Lord, we have waited for Him. We will be glad and rejoice in His Name. O Christ is the sweeter for the delay, the face shines brighter for the shame that has covered it. Confidence is the sweeter, and the sustaining, for all the tossings and wants to which it has been exposed, and the new vision that the sinner gets in his heart, is greater and the brighter and sweeter and the more lively and wonderful for all the falling, and fearing of hell and trouble. The oppressed shall not return. O says the Psalm, let him not. Poor disturbed sinner, poor sinner perhaps on the verge of despair, thinking you have never been right and that you never can be right, this awaits you - a vision that you will have, I was going to say, some difficulty to retain when it comes, at least to contain. O Christ is the vision

O Christ, He is the fountain
The deep, sweet well of love

and you will say

The streams on earth I've tasted

More deep I'll drink above

You will feel that and you won't return from the Bible ashamed. My friends, as you can stick to it, let your eyes pore on the page. As your heart is led by the Spirit you will never be ashamed of the Bible. You will say, O that promise has been made good. "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out". Why, He has come and given me bread to eat and water to drink, even Himself; given me to drink of the water of life and to eat of the fruit of that tree that grows on either bank of the river. And this, this is the glory of a sinner. If you prove one Scripture to be true in your soul's experience how can you be ashamed, for that proof is God's work, that proof is God's blessed gift to you. We could not prove the Scriptures true unless He proved them true to us first. "That Thou givest them they gather". We could never obey an invitation without the Inviter giving us power to do it and, viewing the matter thus, we can say to the Lord "Give what Thou commandest and command what Thou wilt".

And let not the oppressed return ashamed from his providential trials. No, no. He that goeth forth and weepeth bearing precious seed shall doubtless come again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him. Ah many a time the enemy may have said do you think anyone loved of God would have the trouble you have? Do you think God would knock a person down, beat him about in providence as you are knocked down and beaten about if God loved him? And you have no answer. You have no answer perhaps until you return. They shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and shall say it was good for me that I was afflicted that I might learn Thy statutes. My friends, untouched, missing afflictions, people are wide in their wanderings. They learn God's statutes are limitations. We do not limit our spirits do we? We do not hold them in - anywhere but inside God's Word, anywhere but inside the trouble - till the Lord takes us in hand and teaches us, and then we find inside the statutes there is plenty of room for us.

"O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise Thy Name." What for? The same people, poor people, needy people, full of trouble by oppression of the enemy, let them praise Thy Name. What for? For deliverance, for relief. "He shall deliver

the needy when he crieth, the poor also and him that hath no helper." And now, as this poor person has wept in his trouble, he shall weep in his thankfulness. He shall bless God for His mercies. Let him praise Thy Name. O said the people of old in the Psalm "Bless the Lord O my soul: and all that is within me bless His holy Name. Bless the Lord O my soul Who forgiveth all thine iniquities Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies." And here the man who sat in dust and ashes and scattered dust upon his own head, now has raiment of needlework and a robe of righteousness and a crown of pure gold set on his head. What do you say, poor sinful, troubled creature, what do you say? You cannot hope for this, but God can give it you

Struggle hard, and call aloud
On the great Physician.
Wait till thy disease He cleanse,
Begging, trusting, cleaving;
When, and where, and by what means,
To His wisdom leaving

and the matter shall fall out according to your desire, the matter shall fall out according to your prayer, for the Lord heareth the poor and despiseth not his prisoners.

AMEN.