

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
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PSALM 77 v 13

"Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: Who is so great
a God as our God."

This Psalm sets before us different experiences in the same person. A troubled man and in his trouble crying to God and blessed with a sense that God heard him, inclined His ear to him. An experience real, gracious and blessed. If we, in trouble, have prayer given to us, we shall find that God inclines His ear to us, and, of all the mercies a poor, troubled child of God can have while in his trouble, this is one of the sweetest of them, to find God bowing down His ear to hear their cry. The same good man in his trouble remembered God and I judge he remembered how he had behaved, and that troubled him. "I remembered God and was troubled." Can you, in any affliction remember God and have no trouble? Can you remember your unbelief and have no trouble? Your rebellion against Him, and have no trouble? Can you think of your opposition to His sovereignty in dealing with you, and not be troubled? If sin is not a trouble to you, you may indeed fear what will come to you. Bunyan says, all trouble except trouble for sin is sinful trouble. Not everyone in this congregation understands that. Trouble, if it is not trouble for sin, is sinful trouble. "I remembered God". I remembered my wickedness, I remembered that I was not reconciled to Him in His ways. I remembered that I had not submitted to His sovereignty. I remembered that I tried to put things straight which He had made crooked, and because I could not, I fretted; and that will be trouble to you. I complained of myself, I complained of my hard heart, I complained that God did not appear to listen to me, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Then God kept him at the business, kept his eyes awake, kept him in trouble; his trouble increased so that he could not speak. Then he began to consider. Confusion began to go, his mind became more steady, he thought on God, he remembered God, he considered what he had felt, what he had seen in and from God. He remembered providences which were for him, things God wrought by His

own merciful power, and his remembrance was good to him. He remembered how he used to sing in the night; that mercy was so sweet to him, so powerful in him, that he could not refrain from singing. Some of you may have had that; when perhaps you had a gracious dream, and have awakened and found yourself singing, with tears on your face,

On such love my soul still ponder
Love so great, so rich, so free;
Say, whilst lost in holy wonder,
Why O God such love to me?

And you will put the emphasis in the right place: "such love to me". "I communed with my own heart and my spirit made diligent search". Then he began to question matters. "Will the Lord cast off for ever?" He took me up; will He cast me away? He drew me to His bosom; will He reject me? He spoke kindly to me; will He withdraw what He said? "Will He be favourable no more?" I believe I got a sight of His well-pleased face; will it wear a frown for the future? "Is His mercy" - free mercy, great mercy, eternal mercy, powerful mercy, as I thought and felt, is this gone - "clean gone for ever." Shall I see it no more? Shall I never feel it again? Am I abandoned, cast away? The promise on which I relied; is that forgotten by God? You go back to a sweet word when you felt you could die on it, and now it is not fulfilled. Is it gone? Has God forgotten it? And these questions were very solemn to him, but he was, as it were, just stopped, his mind arrested; a light shined on him, into his heart, and he saw the root and source of these questions. He saw they came from his infirmity, his unbelief, his reason, his reasonings. He tried to put things straight which God had made crooked. "I said this is my infirmity". I will not indulge it any longer. You know that feeling. "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High". And so these solemn experiences may represent some of you, things you are having, or have had, or may have. Then he says, the things of God he will meditate upon. He has thought so much of himself and too much of himself, of his weakness, and his wickedness and his inability to put things straight which God had made crooked; he saw all these things. Now he said, I will meditate on God, and what He has done. My brethren, when we meditate on self there is nothing but confusion.

When we meditate on God and His works, in us and for us, there is matter for wonder, for admiration, for adoration, and for humble confidence.

Come to the text - "Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary; who is so great a God as our God". A sanctuary in Scripture is a place set apart. God had a sanctuary and a visible one in Israel. When the tabernacle was built there were two compartments, the first, the holy place, the second, the holy of holies. In the second compartment was the Ark in which were the tables of testimony; over the Ark a Mercy Seat and cherubims, between which God said He would dwell; and to Moses, when that was completed, He said: I will dwell with thee there, and will commune with thee. That is the sanctuary in the first instance that God set apart, a place where He Himself would dwell in symbol, beautiful symbol, and there He would meet with the people. There He would give forth His mind, and manifest His goodness. All the life of Israel, all the duties and the privileges and the mercies and the protection that God vouchsafed to that nation, emanated from that sanctuary. Whatever is for your good, everlasting good, will emanate from the sanctuary and that is not yourself, but God. Good must come from Him. Evil is in us. The sanctuary thus built by Moses according to the pattern shown to him in the mount, was typical. The type - it was a beautiful type, it was glorious, but the anti-type excels in glory - the type has passing glory; the anti-type has an everlasting glory. The true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man was Jesus Christ. God is in Him, God speaks by Him. Love comes from Him; forgiveness, justification, sanctification, and all good things in this life, with eternal blessedness hereafter, emanate from this glorious sanctuary. "Thy way is in the sanctuary". And there are several points I would bring to your notice in this great matter, and the first is this. Before you can see the way of God in the sanctuary, you must be in the sanctuary. Note that point, you must be in it. An example of this we have in an earlier Psalm, when Asaph was perplexed by untoward providences, things seemingly upside down, wicked men prospered, gracious men afflicted, and he was unable to understand this dealing of Jehovah with men - he thought he would know it; he tried to find it out, but it was too painful for him, too much for him, beyond him entirely - until I went, says he, into the sanctuary; then understood I their end. He was in the sanctuary. On this let me

observe, first of all, it is a solemn thing to approach God. When two of the sons of Aaron presumed to take censers and offer unbidden, improper fire to God, a fire came out from God and destroyed them. The Apostle Paul, by divine inspiration, said "God is not mocked". Proper approach to God is by the Holy Spirit, and is very solemn. Prayer, real prayer, comes out of two things - to speak just generally now - comes out of some true apprehension of God, out of some true feeling of a need of those things which God has to give and it is very solemn to pray. Trouble will drive you sometimes, according to God's mercy to you, but the Spirit will help you to worship well. That is, you will feel, "God is a Spirit" and He seeks such to worship Him who are favoured with sincerity and truth in their worship. What a mercy it is to pray. All prayer is coming into the sanctuary. You must be here. When men approach God they approach Him with reverence and godly fear. "He is to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him" Here you will find, when you are led to pray, self goes down, God rises. Reasoning about providence ceases and confidence in His wisdom and goodness prevails. Here you will find submission to His divine sovereignty, to His holy will. You may kneel down feeling like a rebel, but when the Holy Spirit helps you, you will be a submissive person; a loving, submissive, humble child of God, though you may not realise that you are a child of God. You will submit to Him; humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. You will seek blessings from Him. There are two blessings which we daily need, even though we are old, in Christ. First, He is exalted to give repentance. Second He is exalted to give forgiveness. "God hath highly exalted Him at His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." When you are in the sanctuary you worship, you adore, you believe, you trust God. You commit yourself to Him. He is too wise to err. You believe He makes no mistakes, that He cannot make a mistake. And in the sanctuary you see these things. You see God. It is very great to see God. We all have before us signs of His eternal Godhead and power. Creation bears testimony to God. Hidden things, things hidden before creation, are manifested by creation, even His eternal power and Godhead. What confusion, what guilt will swallow up the Evolutionist and the men who do not see God, but only their wisdom, when He reveals Himself. When we are in the sanctuary we see divine purposes, decrees, sovereign decrees. The decree to create man, the decree to permit the Fall; ^{an} _h opposer, this,

to reason. You try to work it out and put it straight on your own ideas of justice and you will be a fool and filled with confusion to the end. But when faith perceives God it perceives that He is just and right and holy and to be adored and worshipped in His way. "Thy way is in the sanctuary". Were you ever there? Did you ever see God there in divine purposes? Did you ever see that wonderful purpose to give His only begotten Son who, in the fullness of the time appointed should be made of a woman, made under the law, that He might redeem them that were under the law, and even a hope that He might redeem you, a poor captive, a captive to sin and Satan. Christ came to redeem captives, purchasing them with His own blood; bringing them into a condition of concern and trouble about their immortal state. A great sight this. "Thy way"; Thy eternal way, made manifest in Thy own way and time in Jesus Christ.

Another thing is seen, namely providence. We say naturally we will do this or we will do that, but the Spirit by the Apostle James reproves that. He says, "We ought to say if the Lord will". Think of it; "If the Lord will we shall live and do this or that." In whose hand is your breath? In whom do you live and move and have your being? This will be seen in the sanctuary. Asaph said: "I was as a beast before Thee", when I was outside the sanctuary, when I was looking at providence and all the crooked things in it, when I was wondering why some people are prospered and why others are constantly afflicted. It was too painful for me to pursue the investigation. I could not understand it and I was, behaving myself, as a beast before Thee. Then God took him in hand; then God led him into the sanctuary; then the Spirit of God led him to the Father through the Son as you have it in the Ephesians: "For through Him we both have access by One Spirit unto the Father." That is through Christ. Then he got a sight. O he said I have behaved basely. Now I see that I am in Thy hand. "My times are in Thy hand". The church is in Thy hand. Providence is in Thy hand. So everything went down into death and nothingness to him. So he said: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee". That was the slaying of his infidelity, his incredulity, his reason, his reasonings, and he came to be as a bit of clay in the hands of the divine Potter. Happy man who is led into the sanctuary to see providence as well as grace; time as well as eternity; good and evil altogether in the hands of this great God.

"Thy way O God is in the sanctuary". See then, dear hearers, first of all if you have ever been into this sanctuary; if ever God has led you here, and given you to see what "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him". In another Psalm we have this word: "They have seen Thy goings in the sanctuary."

Now here is another view of the matter before us, namely that not only do we see things, not only are things put straight and right to our own mind and soul and heart and reason, but that God works in the sanctuary and He works several wonderful things. He gives, first of all, a sight of His goodness in Christ. Unless men get that they can never conceive it, that God is good in Christ, and this goodness is expressed in that great doctrine of forgiveness. "There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." Now that work was wrought, first of all, in and by Christ. A wonderful sight is the sight of Christ sent by His Father. That is a great work. The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure in them, and this is one of the sights that God, in the fullness of time, sent forth His Son. A divine operation, a wonderful thing, that the holy God should love sinners of mankind, give them to His Son to redeem, and then, in the fullness of time, send His Son to redeem them. O dear friends, if we are captives in our own judgement and feeling, the sight of the Redeemer will be to us a glad sight. Even though we may not know He was sent to redeem us, yet it will be wonderful to see a Redeemer. Hope begins to rise then. A Redeemer. God redeeming sinners from their sins, transgressions, from their guilt, from their liability to hell? Yes, that was the sight that they get who are in the sanctuary. This is better than the world. The whole world is nothing to a poor, guilty, praying person, compared with this sight. What would you give, said Christ, in exchange for your soul? If a man gain the whole world and lose his own soul what is it? No gain, but an eternal loss; and so this is a sight. Another sight is this, God is love. He loves when He smites you. He loves when He corrects you. He loves when He treats you as if He were your enemy. "I have chastised him with the chastisement of a cruel one". Anything but love seems to be written on that chastisement, but that is what it is, love. He loves and is a God of love to you when He draws you. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with

lovingkindness have I drawn thee". When you are drawn, you are drawn away from that wretched thing, self; drawn to that glorious Person, Jesus Christ. Drawn to His precious atonement, drawn to His compassion and pity. Drawn to His power and goodness. "Thy way is in the sanctuary". Every beam of light comes from the sun. Every good thing comes from the sanctuary. Waters of life issue from the sanctuary whose gate is toward the East. Waters of life and love come from the sanctuary. When God works in us these things are seen. There is another thing; He graciously corrects us in our false judgements. Very solemn were the questions, and very false they were. They impugned God. "Is His mercy clean gone for ever?" You see this; when you judge Him to be against you, He teaches you that He was for you. When you felt that all His dealings were contrary to your interests, He teaches you that they were for you; that they were furthering your best interests. When you have felt that God was drawing you and giving you a sight of His wisdom in providence, you said in your heart, He can make no mistake. "Too wise to err, too good to be unkind." You may say, why did God give me such a mind, place me in such circumstances, order me to be this or that or to be the other? When He teaches you and deals with you in the sanctuary, you see how wise He was. No mistake can possibly attach to His dealings in your own judgement when you see Him in the sanctuary. You will be a fool till you get there, and you will be wise when you get there. "So foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before Thee." But now I am taught, providence is right; nothing wrong that God does.

"Who is so great a God as our God". You see in the sanctuary another thing; that better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof. That it will be better for you, as being in the hands of God and under His teaching, when you come to the end of a dispensation, of a dealing of His with you. We see that in Job. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job and have seen the end of the Lord." What petulant speeches Job uttered; what mistakes he made in replying to his foolish friends; but God came to him. Then Job was in the sanctuary and he saw things then; he saw God then. He saw everything right then; and so you will see, and you will see this, better is the end of a trouble than the beginning. Better is that gracious dealing of God with you than you thought it could possibly be. "Thy way". Though contrary to my reason, though beyond my understanding, though

apparently wrong and altogether crooked. Thy way is in the sea, Thy path in the mighty waters. Do not let me judge Thee according to the waves, but according to the Scripture, according to Thy promise.

"Who is so great a God as our God". He does not mean that there were other gods beside Himself, but that there is no creature can compete with Him. I am God and beside Me there is none else; I know not any. Who is so great in love, so great in mercy, so great in wisdom, so great in goodness. And when you get the power of God in your soul you will perceive it to be just altogether right. I know in some little measure what I am saying is true. We, fools as we are by our nature, and like the wild ass's colt, we will be wise, yet when God takes us in hand mercifully He deals with us so as that we come to conclude this, He is right, we are wrong. Do you believe it? You will if God teaches you. Everywhere, every way, in everything, we are wrong. Everywhere, in every way, in everything, He is right. All things are of God, and to His people this is a wonderful thing. "All things are yours" - God has made them over to you - "whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas"; that is the ministry is yours - "or the world", with its enmity and its poverty and sin; God has given that to you for your good in a way you may not yet understand. "Or life" - while you live to be His by manifestation. "Or death" - when you change worlds and in the prospect of death you will sometimes get favour. You may see the testimonies of God in your conscience and say, I can die on these. You may find the atonement brought to your view, and you can say, I can die on this. My brethren God has a place in which He deals with men; He has a method of dealing with men. He has a place and a method of dealing with His own people; in righteousness, in peace, in goodness manifested. May the Lord help us to believe this. Thy way - wrong though I am - Thy way is right, being in the sanctuary. "Who is so great a God as our God." If we have faith we shall embrace this word in the light and power of the Holy Spirit.

AMEN.