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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 5 June 1921

PSALM 86 v 5

"For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive;
and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee"

The Psalmist was in necessity, had a sense of sin, of the need of forgiveness, and a spirit of prayer. The people of God come into such cases from time to time as to answer to the Scriptures, to this Scripture, to the Scripture which I read just now: "Bow down Thy ear O Lord, hear me". If you have the spirit of prayer you will want the Lord's ear to be opened to you. That is to say, you will want some sense of God's listening to you while you call upon His Name. It will not be sufficient for you to utter words and call them prayer; you will want access, and a sense of access, being admitted into the gracious presence of God in Christ. "I am poor and needy". Necessity is on the Lord's people from time to time. You may have sufficient in this world to meet all your needs, but, if born again, there is only One who can meet your needs, that is God in Christ. Your treasure is in heaven. Your prayer will be to the God of heaven. You will want His hand to be opened to you who opened His hand to Israel in the wilderness, and gave them manna morning by morning; whose mighty power smote the rock, the flinty rock, and gave them water for their thirst. Is the world enough for you, or do you need the God of heaven? Preserve my soul, for I am in danger. In danger of sin, in danger of the world, in danger of the devil. The world, the flesh and the devil will be ever against us, and although the saints are secure, and as sure of heaven in the Covenant of Grace as if they were there - poor, weak creatures, struggling on earth, are as certain of getting to heaven as the promise and oath of God can make them - yet in their feelings what dangers surround them and what fears arise from those dangers. "Preserve my soul for I am holy" or, as one whom Thou favourest. Sometimes a sense of being favoured of God is in the heart and a very sweet and sacred thing it is. "O Thou my God save Thy servant that trusteth in Thee". His heart went out in acts of faith to the Lord. He reclined on Him, looked to Him, depended on Him.

Temporal things, spiritual things, interests of every sort, he had, but he had a good God to go to. Snares and dangers beset us, but, if taught of the Spirit, we have a good God to go to. It is a great mercy to have such a God. "Be merciful unto me O Lord: for I cry unto Thee daily. Rejoice the soul of Thy servant: for unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul". You see, the One before the Psalmist was God. Now that is a criterion, one may say. If we are the Lord's, if we are under the Spirit's teaching, God is set before us and to Him we shall be taught to fly in every hour of need; to cleave at all times, to follow Him fully, and it was because of all that the Lord was to this good man, because of what he saw the Lord to be, and to be able to do, that he cried unto Him thus. And in the language of the text he says: "For Thou Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee". Therefore, "Give ear, O Lord, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications". The goodness of God is, in the first place, His essential and incommunicable nature. "Why callest thou Me good?" - said Christ to one who only spoke to Him apparently in a natural way - "There is none good save One and that is God". The Lord is goodness itself. Absolutely He is good, and it will be a great thing for faith to lay hold of this. It will be a great stay in trouble, a support under burdens. It will enable the soul that believes it, really to rely on the Lord, to justify Him in the most solemn circumstances, the most adverse circumstances that may come. Whatever God does is good, because He is good. His ways in providence are good, because He is good. His way toward a sinner is good, because He is good, yet that way may be in the sea; His path may be in the mighty waters; His footsteps may not be known. We may be greatly perplexed as to what God means in certain circumstances. In certain difficulties we may say from our hearts, He is good, but what He is about to do, we know not. Yet faith, holding to the goodness of God's nature, will cleave to Him and justify Him in the severest providences that may come. This surely will be an article of our faith, and a very practical thing too, as faith lays hold of it. "For Thou Lord, art good". Therefore I cry unto Thee "Be merciful unto me". Thou art good; therefore I pray Thee to preserve my soul. Thou art good; therefore "Bow down Thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I am poor and needy". What God is as He manifests Himself has a distinct bearing upon the different cases we come into. The Lord is good; and I shall just make

mention of two or three ways of His in which He shows His goodness, and first of all He is good in giving to us the Scriptures. We shall never fully know the benefit it is to us to have the oracles of God. This nation has never fully recognised the goodness of God in giving the Scriptures to it, and perhaps never will now. The Scriptures have exalted this nation. The belief of them has made, in days past, great men, and today the belief of them makes poor sinners godly, for the belief of them is by the faith of God's operation and it gives the Scriptures a being, so to speak, and a reality in the heart and conscience. He to whom the Word of God is made the Word of God by the Spirit, finds the Scriptures having a being, a reality, an infallibility, an authority, in his conscience. God is good. The Scriptures are a revelation of God, a revelation of His Being, as it has pleased Him insofar to give it. A revelation of His subsistence in Three Persons in One God. A revelation of His will concerning the sons of men, and concerning angels. A revelation of God in providence, concerning providence. We find that the Lord doeth His will in the armies of heaven and among the children of men, and that none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest Thou. My brethren, providence is God's servant and it is the servant of the church. It is God's servant. He may send an angel from heaven, as in days past He has done, to do some mighty thing in the earth. How at times angels destroyed nations. He may send an angel to nourish you. He may send some providence to trouble you, some difficulty to perplex you, and set before you a way which flesh and blood will turn from, but all will prove in the end the declaration: "For Thou Lord, art good". In the gift of the Scriptures - it were well for us as a little people to more and more value the blessed Word of God. It gives rules for walking; it teaches us what is in our hearts, and when opened by the Holy Spirit, we see our hearts as in a mirror - Yea, more intimately even, more distinctly and deeply do we discover in the light of the Scripture applied by the Spirit what we are. But that is not all. They are the means in God's hand of great good and great comfort. The man of God is by the sent, inspired Scriptures, throughly furnished unto all good works. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." The Lord enable us to value this, His goodness, the gift to us of the Holy Scriptures. No thanks to the

Papist that we have the Scriptures open, but God has given us an open Bible and may He give us open hearts to receive the Bible and value it as His own blessed Word.

He is good in the next place in this, in that He sent His only begotten Son into the world to save the lost. What a gift is the gift of the Son of God. God sent His Son to gather His children together. He, if we are among His children, sent His Son to gather us. The gathering of the people is to be to Shiloh. God lifts up His Son and bids bitten sinners look to Him. He sent Him into the world, He made Him to be sin, He gave Him a holy, mighty, penetrating commandment to lay down His life. He sent Him thus to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He sent Him to be the way to the Father. Through His Son we have access to the Father by the Spirit. He sent Him to be "The Lord our Righteousness", to be the Rock of Ages, on which to build, and when a sinner is built on Christ he knows he is not built on a cloud, a vapour, but on a rock. He sent Him to be a prophet to reveal the things of God; to be a Priest, a Priest in every smitten, guilty conscience. A King, a King of every willing heart, a heart made willing in the day of God's power. He sent Him thus to be a foundation to the church. On this foundation every saint is built. What a wonder of goodness is the gift of Christ. If this gift has come to us, we owe God eternal thanks for it. My brethren we should all have been going headlong to perdition but for this. But God gave His children to His Son to redeem.

He is good in this thirdly, that He gives His Spirit to His children. Nehemiah, in that remarkable history - which I read - of that part of God's dealings with His people, tells again and again how that God gave His good Spirit to the people; gave them good laws, gave them good Sabbaths and gave them His good Spirit to show them the way wherein they should go. Well, this is wonderful, that God the Holy Ghost, should be sent into the heart of a sinner loved eternally, redeemed by Christ, now born again. O the goodness of God in the gift of the Spirit. Poor sinner, if you have the Holy Ghost, you have God in you, and that is the reason that you are so checked, and stopped, and led and reproved, and rebuked and taught to pray and made to believe and enabled to pour out your heart of trouble and confession unto God from time to time. The gift of the Spirit is

very great, and a necessity for salvation. So when the Apostle met twelve men he said to them - they had been baptised - he said to them have ye received the Holy Ghost? Have you got a Holy Ghost religion? that is the question. Thou art good. O how good it is for God to give to a sinner His Holy Spirit, for He convinces of sin, He brings down high looks, He brings sinners into the dust, He brings them to the throne of grace, He gives them access through Christ unto the Father. He opens the treasures of love, and mercy. He opens justification, He reveals divine righteousness, He reveals the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness to sinners and these manifestations draw and teach and supple and comfort and enlarge all to whom they are given. "For Thou Lord, art good" And this clearly, by the context, is a reason why sinners should pray. The Psalmist evidently felt that the goodness of God was both a ground and a reason for his coming to God. Lord, I am poor and needy; I come with my poverty and my need to Thee because Thou art good. Lord, I need preserving for I am in danger, and I come to Thee with my sense of danger, because Thou art good, and I ask Thee to preserve me. Lord, I am lost, but Thou art a Saviour and I come to Thee to save me. This is a great thing then for us to observe, the goodness of God is a reason for prayer. And that goodness which in the third place I have named, is an especial part of it at this point to notice, because it is by the Spirit that people pray. Prayer does not grow in our hearts. We have an aversion from prayer as we have from all that is good. I expect some of you too will understand me when I say, we have an aversion from prayer. O how the mind pulls away from God. How the enmity of the heart pulls away from prayer. Dear friends, you understand it, do not you? Now what is it that enables us to go to God in the face of this aversion, in defiance of this, and notwithstanding this aversion? If you say the goodness of God and take it absolutely, you wont find any influence from that. But if you take it relatively, if you take it as it relates to God's manifestation of goodness, and if you take it in relation to the gift of His Spirit and that Holy Spirit is in you, then you will find the goodness of God most drawing. You wont be able to keep away. The very aversion that you feel from prayer will be a kind of reason why you should pray. Lord, give me prayer, O give me prayer. Teach me to pray; give me the spirit of grace and of supplications. Let me bring my case to Thee. Teach me how to come with my wants, my distresses, my interests, my weakness, my dangers, for Thou art good. Goodness

compasses sinners, goodness envelops sinners, goodness divine satisfies sinners, goodness divine preserves sinners. For Thou art good.

And the Lord is good in His providence. There is an intimate connection in the church of God between grace and providence. I might add there, an intimate connection between providence and eternal ruin in the cases of all the reprobate, but I will leave that except just to say that it is a terrible thing when God lays a snare, in His judicial wrath, to a sinner; when he rains snares on people, when He makes their table a snare, and their blessings a trap. I do not know if any of you have ever feared that fearful judgement, but there is an intimate connection between grace and providence in the working out of the holy will of God in the church, in the hearts and lives of the people of God. You take, for instance, - just to name this one instance - the case of David and Saul. Look through all the persecutions of Saul when he was hunting David, having the strength of the kingdom on his side, and David a poor, forlorn man, with a few disappointed followers. What kept David? He prayed, he cried, he sought his God. What did the Lord do over and over again? The Lord interposed, put Saul into David's hand and gave David grace enough not to touch him. And just one instance more. David was almost in the hand of Saul. Saul was on one side of the mountain and David on the other. It might soon have been, naturally, that Saul would have captured his prey. And what did the Lord do? He sent the Philistines into the land and one came to Saul and said, the Philistines have invaded the land. And what must Saul do? Leave David and look after his throne. My friends, what goodness was here to David - two things - grace in David's heart making David fear the Lord, making him afraid of putting his hand forth to touch the Lord's anointed, giving him faith to say, the Lord will take care of me, let the Lord do it, and the interposing so singularly in His providential dealings, so that David was secured. He was not secure - he said on one day, I shall fall by the hand of the enemy - but he was secured, and Saul never took him. The Lord was good. If you can watch the providence of God you will see sometimes a very wonderful connection between that and His love to your souls. When He empties you in some way, it is that He may fill you. When He troubles you in some things, it is that He may comfort you with His love and mercy. When He gives

you to feel weak, it is that you may see the mighty One of Jacob to be on your side, to uphold you. When necessities press of some sort, it is that they may drive you to Him, in whom all fullness dwells. "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knoweth them that trust in Him."

And then a great wonder was set before the eye of faith in David, a great miracle, namely forgiveness, and God's readiness to extend forgiveness. "And ready to forgive". "Ready". Why, some of you may say, I have been seeking that for years and have not got it yet, and how can the Lord be ready. "The Lord", said Hezekiah when he found Him, "was ready to save me." But Christ had an instruction to His disciples once when He said "Your time is always ready". The readiness of God is in His wisdom. The readiness of God is in His mercy, and He has fixed the day when He will show Himself ready to save as it is said in a Psalm. "The set time," "the set time" comes. Paul said, you will reap if you faint not. In due time we shall reap. "He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting ." Perhaps you are not ready to be forgiven. O but you say I am sure I am. Are you quite sure? Do you know what it is to be emptied? You may feel empty but perhaps you are not half emptied. You may feel lost, but perhaps you are not half enough lost. Perhaps you have got some happiness, perhaps some worldliness, perhaps something is before you that you wish to attain and the Lord wont let you attain to it. "Ready to forgive". It means that He is full of forgiveness. It means that when the time comes when a sinner is to be forgiven, there shall then be no hindrance; no obstacle shall keep forgiveness out, for God will cause His forgiveness to make its way into the sinner's soul. Forgiveness. Why it is the beginning of heaven, it is a joyful sound, it is the glory of God. It is the application of the death of Christ. It takes no notice of things that we notice. It wont have a qualification in the sinner except this qualification, utter ruin, destitution, a forlorn state of soul. Often when a sinner is forgiven it is just at the point when he is about to despair. When he is forgiven it comes as a very great surprise. Forgiveness is not once only. Many offences and many times as in the Psalm we read. "Yea many a time forgave He their iniquity and did not stir up all His wrath." "Many a time". And the Apostle's word "many offences" will be extended to many a time. As said Nehemiah, and Thou didst forgive

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them. Thou forgavest them. Thou wast ready to save them; when they came low enough, there was the arm of God; when they were bad enough, there was the goodness of God. When they were diseased enough, there was the healing, and when they were lost enough, there was the Saviour. So it is still. It is a great thing to be reduced to self-despair. "Ready to forgive". To forgive you some rebellion, some wicked thoughts, some abominations nursed by yourself. "Ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee." This plenteous mercy extends through the lifetime of every child of God. It began in manifestation when Adam fell. It stretches to the end of time when the last elected sinner shall be forgiven and the whole church gathered and taken home to be for ever with the Lord. And this extensive mercy, stretching itself out, comes in rich streams into the hearts of the saints of the high God from time to time, and I have found this, and you have found it, some of you, and will find it to the end, that your perplexity, your guilt, your weakness, your misery, God will make use of as a means to prepare you for this great thing, the free mercy of God. It is freer than we can understand, It is freer than we are able to believe sometimes. O how free it is.

Bring no money, price or aught
No good deeds or pleasing frames
Mercy never can be bought
Grace is free, and all's the Lamb's

And it is a difficult thing to believe this sometimes. When your guilt stands up before you, when your unworthiness presses you into the dust, and your polluted nature is before you, and felt by you, O how difficult it is then to hold fast and believe that the Lord has plenteous mercy. This plenteousness is in God's infinity. It is in God's infinite goodness. Plenteous redemption is all the merit of Christ. Plenteous mercy is all the mercy of God; not a part, but all. And I say again, this stretches and will stretch to the end of every child of God's life and struggles. No matter how long he lives, nor how much struggling he may have, this mercy will stretch itself out to the very end. Therefore says the Psalmist "Give ear O Lord". O merciful God open Thine ear to such a wretch. Heal me, for I have sinned; save me for I am lost; deliver me, for I am a captive;

strengthen me, for I am weak; go before me, for I know not which way to turn. Heal me. What a wonderful thing, healing there is in God's mercy. Now may the Lord make this clear to us, that we may really believe in His goodness, and cleave to Him and pray for the manifestation of His goodness and of His forgiveness that it may be well with us.

AMEN.