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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTIST*

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 13 April 1919

PSALM 91 v 2

"I will say of the Lord He is my refuge and
my fortress, my God, in Him will I trust"

The awful effect of the fall of Adam and of all his children is felt, painfully felt, by everyone who is born and taught of the Holy Ghost. The shame of sin is felt by them; the power of sin is felt by them. The natural consequence of the fall is two-fold in the knowledge of every child of God. First, a sense of guilt, and guilt is death. Though a man may not be executed immediately under the law which he has broken, the penalty of which for his offence is death, he is a dead man and that is felt. And the other is shame; guilt makes men ashamed. "I heard Thy voice" said Adam to an offended God, "and I was afraid and hid myself".

Blush, Christian blush; let shame abound;
If sin affects thee not with woe,

with shame, with sorrow,

Whatever spirit be in thee found
The Spirit of Christ thou dost not know

Guilt will make the oldest Christian ashamed sometimes, almost ashamed to ask for further mercy; and though that may not be permitted to prevail, there it is; guilt; how can you feel it and not be ashamed, ashamed before Him against whom you have sinned? There is yet another effect of sin which I will name, this; fear, fear, fear which hath torment, which will sometimes seize the best experienced child of God. There is an exposure by sin to God in His anger and even when one does not feel the fear of hell, yet the fear of a Father's rod, the fear of severe chastening, though heaven be in view, this fear is felt at times. One said "My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee and I am afraid of Thy judgments" Exposure to all danger makes men who realise it

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afraid. Now why do I say these things to you? First, because I know them myself, and second because there is a suitableness in you who know what I have said, for that wonderful Refuge that the Psalmist here had before him, and into which he was flying. You stand one day in a field with a clear Italian sky above you and everything smiling about you, no threat of a storm, no appearance no apprehension of an enemy about. Do you want to run away into some hiding place, some refuge? But see a storm coming, see or apprehend an enemy near who, should he reach you, would have power over you to prevail, and then hear of a refuge and see it, though it be at a distance. What do you do? Run with all the strength you have, with all the fears you have as spurs to you. You will run if haply you may reach it before the enemy reaches you.

Here in the text there is first a profession made. "I will say of the Lord". I will profess this about Him. Though I be a sinner, I will profess that God is a refuge and more - my refuge and my fortress, my God, and I will trust Him. "In Him will I trust". There is a knowledge in God's saints. It grows in some gradually, but there is a knowledge in the saints of the Most High with respect to Him, that divine Being, who has veiled His awful majesty to bearableness and has shown Himself to be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble that makes them go with the Psalmist in this, his confession - "I will say of the Lord". What a terrible thing it is to be ignorant of God in this respect as well as in other respects, and what a mercy it is to know Him in some degree as in the 9 Psalm it is said "They that know Thy Name will put their trust in Thee, for Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee." This is a great point, a vital point; the knowledge of God as a refuge and a fortress. It is a great point, I say. Also Solomon says, "that the soul be without knowledge it is not good". You may be without knowledge of many natural subjects without serious inconvenience. Of many you may be ignorant without any inconvenience; but you cannot be ignorant of God as a refuge and a fortress without most serious and awful consequences which, should you die in that ignorance, will stretch through eternity.

Faith is here. "I will say"; I will say in faith, though I have exposed myself to wrath; though my sins expose me to chastening; though my weakness and my ignorance expose me to Satan's temptations; though in respect of some providences I am much exposed to trouble; "I will say of the Lord He is my refuge". And while I have no power to avert the evils I apprehend and fear sometimes, yet I will run to this refuge; I will put my trust there. There will I confide and there will I lay all my matters down at the footstool of Him who says - "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". What a great thing it is dear friends to have some knowledge of God, God in Christ, for the refuge is there. "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary". "Let us come", says the Apostle Paul, "boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need". Look then at this point, look at it closely; see if there is in you knowledge of God in Christ as a Refuge - "A refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall". This confession is made before the Lord; you need not be particularly anxious to say much before men; the deepest exercises of the soul are frequently unuttered except in God's presence. A talking religion may well cover a dead soul. Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross. Think more of the state of your heart; think more of spirit than of speech; think of the eye of God upon your heart more than the ear of man open to your words. If you can say this before the Lord it is good. "I will say of the Lord"; I will make this profession; I will confess to Him that I have no hope but in Himself, no refuge but Himself, no hiding place, no shadow of a great rock but Himself. The Apostle Paul makes a great statement when he speaks of God, saying - wherein He is willing more abundantly to give strong consolation unto all who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them, and it is in these two immutable things, wherein it is impossible for God to lie. If then you apprehend this refuge by faith, and by faith run to it, there are two immutable things which God has set out in the Scripture in which it is impossible for Him to lie, and you will find there

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will come into your heart strong consolation as you flee for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you; set before you in the Person of Christ; in His perfect obedience, His vicarious death, His wondrous resurrection, His ascension into heaven, His intercession there. Can you say it to Him; do you say it? We sing it sometimes here

Other refuge have I none

Do we sing it in our spirits before God in secret? He is much more glorified in secret than in public. He is much more honoured by you when in your room you can say this to Him, than He is when you join with others to say it. Do not forbear to say it here, do not give up singing it but O may it most of all be the language of your hearts in secret

Other refuge have I none

'Tis a good confession to make. Let us notice that which is confessed. "I will say of the Lord He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in Him will I trust".

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In noticing these important words I shall first of all speak of God as the refuge and fortress of His people and secondly notice the personal part of it. It is personal to the Psalmist that God is a refuge and a fortress; is that to him that he needs. First of all we are to notice that God is a refuge and a fortress. Well I need not go a long way round to find out what this is. The Scripture informs us immediately. God is our refuge and that is in Jesus Christ. Christ is the only begotten Son of God in our nature, without sin. The sacred humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ was begotten miraculously of the Holy Ghost and the eternal Son of God assumed spotless human nature formed, prepared for Him. And in this so wonderful Person, this glorious Person, and in the work which He accomplished in His spotless and perfect obedience and in His vicarious death on the cross and in His burial and in His resurrection, and in His ascension into heaven, taking with Him His own blood, and in His ever prevailing

intercession there, He is the alone refuge and fortress of His people. They will get driven out of every refuge of lies. Hailstones will come down upon them all and drive them out, that they may find no hope, no refuge, no hiding place, but Jesus Christ. Great is God's goodness here; great is His wisdom; infinite His love, in constituting Himself in this way the refuge of men who have sinned against Him. Great is the mercy of God to poor people in this, that He should say - "Behold Me, behold Me" You have sinned against Me; you have provoked Me to anger; you have broken My law; you have disobeyed Me from your birth: but behold Me. I am your refuge; I am your fortress. There are dangers about you; there are difficulties; there are enemies; there is a hell at the end of your life if you live in yourself and die in your sins. But as you are convinced by My Spirit; as you see your danger; as you feel it; as you mourn your condition; "Behold Me" I am a refuge; My death is a refuge from wrath, the wrath to come; My Person is a refuge from all danger; My fulness is a refuge from all poverty; My life is a refuge from all threats of death; My power is a refuge against all enemies; My wisdom is a refuge in respect of all your ignorance and perplexity. "Come to Me". O what a refuge! If the death of Christ be not vicarious we are as good as in hell. If the righteousness of Christ be not our justification, we are as good as in hell. But Christ's death was vicarious; Christ's righteousness is everlastingly sufficient for justification, and the sinner who takes refuge here, as you were singing just now (1097) shall never find the wrath of God upon him. It is the unbeliever on whom the wrath of God abides. The death of Christ is sufficient for all sins committed by those for whom He gave His life a ransom. Hence the word of Christ - "All manner of sin and blasphemy against the Son of Man shall be forgiven". And the great act of forgiveness, as that act is passed upon a sinner, brings that sinner to know what this refuge is. It secures him; there is no enemy can enter here, no plague can come near this dwelling, no death can enter a sinner who is in Christ. Christ died unto sin once. He now liveth unto God and He who takes refuge in Christ shall die no more. He that believeth on Him hath everlasting life. He that runneth into this refuge is

everlastingly safe, because Christ is that only One who did perfectly atone, and did bring in an everlasting righteousness and who is therefore "the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth". He realised the law in all its perfection, in all its claims, in all its wrath, in all its terrible power against sin and sinners. He realised the whole of it in His Person, His obedience and death. Therefore death cannot come where he is who takes refuge in the Lord Jesus. Christ is the end of the law; it will never go a step beyond Christ; it will never make a demand on a sinner who is found in Christ; it will never ask any sort of perfection from a sinner who is found in Christ, for all the perfection it can possibly require, all the claims it can make on men are found in the blessed Person and the vicarious work and death of Jesus Christ.

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Also Christ is a refuge from trouble of every sort and kind. All providential trouble, trouble that may come to your person, to your family, to your business. He is a refuge in respect of all trouble. "God" they confessed of old as you read in the Psalm, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." "Though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof", we will not fear. And why not? O what heart is stout enough to look upon a moving earth and a raging sea, and tumbling mountains, without fear? O, said they, "God is our refuge", we will run to Him. He is sufficient; He can cover us; He can control these movements. All the rage of the sea, and all its roaring; He can control all. He is the One to whom we go in our troubles. That experience did not end with the man who wrote it as his own. It lives today. There are men today who find the same God to be as effectual a security against trouble and evil as did the Psalmist. "God is our refuge". Trouble has come; God has also come. Trouble has threatened and God has covered us with His wings. Trouble has said we should die and the Lord has said we should live, and we have lived and do live. "God is our refuge and strength". O what a mercy to know it! He is a refuge in respect of Satan, that fallen spirit,

"who walketh about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour". He comes and touches these inward sins, ever ready to move against us. He comes with suggestions, with violent temptations, with subtleties we cannot understand. He comes and tempts, aims to allure and draw out of the narrow path the feet of pilgrims and like Apollyon in Bunyan's case, he straddles across the way and tells a pilgrim that he shall go no further; he will have his life. "God is our refuge". "I will say of the Lord He is my refuge" when the tempter comes, that tempter of whom I have often been afraid; that adversary who has pointed out to me my filthy garments; who has said to me "There is no help for you in God". Against all his power, all his subtlety, all his malice, God is my refuge. And in respect of one enemy that awaits us all, one enemy we must face, God alone is our refuge. To the saint it is better to die than to live, but dying is a serious business. We have got to know that changing worlds is no trifling matter. You may trifle with your consciences; you may trifle with providence; you may trifle, as do many, with the Word of God; but when the last enemy comes, he wont be trifled with. A dying bed is a serious thing. You will come close to things then, and they may come close to you, and what will you do? Will you think of facing a Holy God as you are? Will you think of saying to Him what you might perhaps say to your fellow men "I have done my duty and I am not afraid" You may not be afraid of the policeman as you walk home this morning from this place, but what when you have walked into eternity? Will you not be afraid of God? Men who are exercised about dying, and who is not that has the fear of God in his heart, want to know that there is One between them and God in whom they will find righteousness and redemption and holiness and this is the refuge, Jesus Christ.

Hide me O my Saviour hide
Till the storm of life be past
Safe into the haven guide
O receive my soul at last

"I will say of the Lord" I have no hope but in Christ; I have no hope of entering into heaven but what Christ affords me; I have

no hope of standing as a justified person without sin, but in the righteousness of Christ; I have no hope of being holy and made fit for the presence of God but Jesus Christ. I have no hope of anyone answering for me except Jesus Christ. O, dear friends, what a refuge is God to His children in all things.

Now look in the next place at the personal part of it. "I will say"; I, the Psalmist, and some here, each for himself, I will say; I, a fallen man, a fallen woman; I, sensible of my sins, my guilt, my weakness, my wickedness, my innumerable lapses, my backslidings, my enmity, and all the things which plague me and shame me, and of which I am ashamed before God; I will say; what, a man who owns that by the law he ought to be in hell, and confesses that if he were sent there, God would be just in the act of sending him there; God would be holy?; that man lifts his face up to God and says 'Lord, Thou art my refuge; I flee unto Thee to hide me. Thou art my fortress; I know danger is about me, it confronts me, it is around me, but Thou art my refuge. Armies of enemies may come; Thou art my fortress. Covered by righteousness, blessed with an interest in the atonement, favoured to receive Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit revealing Him; Thou art my refuge; Thou art my fortress; I will not fear. 'Tis great to have a personal religion; 'tis great to have things in your heart as from the Lord and a confidence in Him which the Holy Spirit can give.

Now take the cases I have just spoken about and may the Lord help us to look at them as respects ourselves. First of all there is sin, sin done against God. There is the consequence of it, guilt, which is death. By sin and guilt we are exposed, more exposed than even a person with the deepest conviction wrought in him by the Spirit fully realises. A just God offended; a holy law broken, its terrible sentence incurred. And now says the sinner, here I stand, there is nothing between me and a deserved death but Christ, and I want nothing else; I want none other: I look to none other; Christ and Christ alone is the refuge I go to, I run into, and would ever be running into. Ah, sinner, no avenger of blood will overtake and slay you if your heart be set

to this refuge. Difficulties you will find in the running, great stones and boulders in the way, depressions into which you may fall; you will find many of these probably; it will be no easy thing to get to heaven. It is so easy in one respect, namely that a sinner has nothing to do at all, but it is so difficult in this respect that he has to run for his life, and knows he must answer justice and meet God. But the difficulties arise from himself. God has put no bar; He allows no tax to be levied on the way. He has made a good way, Jesus Christ Himself. "I am the way". But you will find difficulties and the preacher who would say otherwise would be a deceiver. Christ, the Prince of preachers, said "In the world ye shall have tribulation", and you will find it as you flee to Him. Sin in you will always oppose any movement heavenward. Every step that you take toward heaven will be more or less disputed. You may grow in religion and there be no disputing in your heart, but you cannot grow in grace and you cannot take the steps of faith to Christ without having someone, some sin, to dispute with you. Either your right to go or the spirit in which you go, you will find the enemy touching upon - Now you have not a good beginning; now you have got hypocrisy; now you have indulged in that sin; now you have cast that unlawful look; now you have neglected prayer. Then you have neglected the Bible; then you felt some enmity to God in this and in that providence. O, there will be endless difficulties, and yet you will be running, ever running, ever fleeing, ever going Godward, through the operation of the Holy Ghost. And it will come to this - you will say 'There is my only hope'. Not a naked profession; but a living cry, sometimes a wail and a sob in your spirit will go out to God that He would take you in, for you are weary. You are weary, utterly weary, and Jesus Christ, seeing this, this state of your heart, will drop in the word, at least the substance of it, that is in the gospel of Matthew. "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". "Come unto Me". The poor lingering creature, hearing such a word, finds himself instantly with Jesus Christ. It is written that when the disciples received Jesus into the ship immediately they were at the other side. They got at once to where they were going. And the moment

you receive Him you will find yourself just in the place you have been seeking to reach. You will find yourself at rest and peace. The peace of God which passeth all understanding will keep your heart and mind by Jesus Christ.

"My refuge". Take justification; is He your refuge in that respect? Is Christ your righteousness? "One shall say surely in the Lord have I righteousness". This must be had or condemnation abide upon you; no middle way. Either you are justified or you are damned, one of the two. Either you stand in Christ or you stand in yourself. And if you stand in yourself what will become of you? What will become of you? But if Jesus becomes your righteousness; if you flee to Him with all your rags, and all your shame and all your guilt, and all the turpitude of your fallen nature, then you will find a holy boldness in your spirit - "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength". And I will say this, says the Psalmist, I will say "the Lord is my refuge". Do not say it, says the enemy, do not say it. O, but faith will go this way. First she struggles to say it, and then she says it. "I will say of the Lord". No, says a guilty conscience, you must not. Says faith "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge". Says a fearing heart, I cannot say it; I do not know that I have a right to say it; I am afraid I ought not to say it. Poor sinner

Venture on Him, venture wholly
Let no other trust intrude

It will be well. Whoever trusted in the Lord, whoever threw himself on the illimitable ocean of God's mercy in Jesus Christ respecting justification and was put to confusion? What sinner ever was put to confusion whose faith went to Christ for righteousness? With respect to pardon and sanctification, is God your refuge? Pardon is an act of God; it is received by the sinner; it flows as a stream of life into a sinner's heart. But with respect to this he finds himself running to God for it. "O Lord pardon mine iniquity for it is great". He says - "If sin be pardoned I'm secure". O that I may be pardoned. O that God

would forgive my sins. It is no form with a convinced sinner; he knows he needs forgiveness; he realises it; he needs it; and so he wants to say this - He is my refuge from the wrath to come; He is my refuge with respect to forgiveness. He sees that testimony of the Apostle concerning Christ - "Him hath God exalted at His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins". There is the fulness of pardon; there is a free pardon; there the Lord Jesus is a glorious high throne from the beginning, to be the place of our sanctuary, our refuge. Can you say this? One may say, I long to say it, and God takes the longing. The wisher for this is a lover of Christ, and he who pants for forgiveness, with the eye of his faith toward Him who alone can forgive sins, is a person who shall not find himself outside the refuge in the great storm. I will say of the Lord He is my refuge in these respects.

One more word this morning, in respect of holiness. Our religion is a holy religion, but it does not make people holy in one respect in this life, that is to say, it does not take the being of sin out of their nature. That is to come. Sin is separable from the sinner and shall be separated from him in God's great day, but we must bear that while we live. Can one then be holy? O yes. Said the Apostle Paul, who had more conflict and trouble with and by sin than most people - "When I would do good evil is present with me and how to perform that which is good I find not". But this also he said - "It is no more I that do it"; no more I, Paul, the Christian and minister of Jesus Christ, "but sin that dwelleth in me"; sin that mars my happiness, that takes my strength away at times; sin that confuses my mind, and darkens my soul and defiles my conscience. It dwells in me; it lusts to envy; but it is no more I, born again, justified and sanctified in the Name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. "I with my mind serve the law of God". Christ is the holiness of his children. You may cut off this excrescence and get rid of that impropriety and remain just a mass of sin and never be anything more but O if you are brought to the dear Saviour of sinners whose holiness sanctifies all His church, then you will find that you have holiness. And a refuge

from all that troubles you, you have in this blessed Jesus Christ. Now beloved friends, may the Lord cause us in faith to say we have this refuge and this fortress this God in whom we will trust. The Lord grant it for His great Name's sake.

AMEN.