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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTIST

Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton.
Sunday, February 10th, 1924.

Psalm 94 verse 19.

"In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts
delight my soul."

Divine proceedings are very often a very serious perplexity to a living soul. What the Lord is doing, what He intends by some providence, what will be the issue to ourselves. We may for some time be in grave uncertainty, and in such a case many thoughts arise in the mind. Perplexing thoughts, unbelieving hasty thoughts, temptations stirring up questions, unlawful to be asked by sinners, gloom, fear, bondage, ingratitude, many unutterable things come into the mind and perplex it, and thoughts which we cannot quell, which we cannot turn out, which we cannot control at all, to team and make a disturbance, make the heart like the troubled sea when it cannot rest.

The Psalmist appears to have been in such a case as he reveals himself in this Psalm, just as Asaph in the seventy third Psalm discovers to us his mind, what he felt, what he thought, how he regarded providence, how enviously he looked at the prosperous wicked, how painfully he regarded the afflicted saints and how he tried by thinking, considering, weighing, measuring, to understand God's proceedings. The result to himself as he discovers in the Psalm was this - It was too painful for him when he thought to know it that is to measure, to weigh up and understand God's proceedings in providence, it was too painful for him, it was too high for him, he could not attain to it. So in this Psalm the Psalmist opens with a prayer. There was a perplexity before Him, there was injustice, there were enemies about the church and he was unable to understand or to deal with these things and so he takes that course which is proper and the only safe course for any child of

God to take, namely prayer. Mind my beloved friends how you conduct yourselves in a time of perplexity. Sit down, look at the perplexing things, the crooks in the lot, the burdens on your backs, the trials before you, the uncertainties, questions - why these have come, ask how it is that some go along quietly, have no difficulties apparently, do this and God will appear strange, unfriendly to you. You may not be far from rebellion at such a moment, and if you think or attempt to understand such and such matters you will only find more painful, perplexing thoughts arise in you, but if you are enabled to take the course the Psalmist here took, it will be well with you, though for a time you may lack all satisfaction- "O God to whom vengeance belongeth, show Thyself." He was hid; clouds, darkness hid Him from the Psalmist's view; darkness is His pavilion to us often. His light which He dwells in, which is to us inexhaustible, is to us great and impenetrable darkness. So also are some of his dealings in providence. If men measure God by their own judgement, if they say we, creatures though we are, and sinful, would not do or permit, if we could help it, such and such things, can God be right who does them or permits them? - be sure of this that as you fall into such questioning, you will get a bruise, a wound, darkness and confusion, distance and guilt, but if, though God hides Himself, you are enabled to cry to Him- "Show Thyself, come forth from the cloud that hides Thee; shine through the providence that perplexes me, let me at least see Thee, though I understand not Thy dealings, this will be well. Our hearts are foolish, they are prone to pry into God's secrets, and we have to learn, painful though it is to learn it, that He giveth not account of His matters. We are creatures, we are servants, we are subjects - It is the glory of God to conceal a matter and He conceals Himself, He conceals His matters, He conceals His ways from us. Do not expect to find the track; God's way is in the mighty waters, His path is in the sea. Rather ask that He will enable you to believe that though you see Him not, that though His way is unknown, He sitteth upon the flood, He sitteth King for ever." Show Thyself. Show Thyself to be my God, my Father, my Friend. Show Thyself to be my Saviour, my Guide. Show Thyself to be the God who has sent me on pilgrimage and who has set before me a door of hope and has made me hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought at the revelation of Jesus Christ. What a mercy it is to have a God to go to. Lift up Thyself, Thou judge of the earth, render a reward to the proud.

Do not you do it; do not try to do it; may the Lord help us to leave Him to do His Own work; Render a reward to the proud. You may think you will do it, if but the opportunity be given you, you will let so and so know what it is to do an evil thing and to walk proudly. May the Lord help you to pray this prayer, "Render a reward to the proud." He sitteth upon the circle of the heaven, His eye runneth to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him. He will never be behind, never be too late, never neglect a case brought to Him by faith, never desert a sinner who.....

comes to Him by Jesus Christ, never leave a case to be dealt with unjustly finally, though for a time He may leave His people to be as a frail reed, to be devoured, counted as sheep for the slaughter. Show Thyself, lift up Thyself. Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord, put on strength, awake as in the ancient days. Art not Thou it, that hath cut Rahab in pieces, and wounded the dragon. Can you put Him in mind of His past deeds? Can you remind Him of His covenant, and ask Him to remember it? Can you leave yourself and men and things and your providences, your concerns and your souls in His hand and feel with the Psalmist "My times are in Thy Hand? Feel even to follow the Lord Jesus and say "Into Thy hand I commit my spirit, Thou hast redeemed me O Lord God of Truth". The Psalmist asks the Lord how long the wicked shall triumph, how long they shall be allowed to utter and speak hard things, all the workers of iniquity boast themselves. He sets before the Lord some of their works - they break in pieces Thy people O Lord and afflict thine heritage, they slay the widow etc. and because sentence against them and their evil works is not speedily executed, because God is longsuffering and His ways are straight, but often apparently slow as if He were undecided as to what to do because of this they, the wicked, the proud say - The Lord shall not see neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Then the Psalmist addresses these, he says - "Understand ye brutish among the people", (his faith rose above all things that perplexed and pained him), "and ye fools when will ye be wise. He that planted the ear shall He not hear, He that formed the eye shall He not see, He that chastiseth the heathen, shall He not correct. He that teacheth men knowledge, shall not He know? The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man that they are vanity. May God help us to follow this course. Faith will lay hold of Him. Faith will commit into His hand. Faith will say that though there be oppression in the city it is not to be marvelled at because there is one who is above them all, even God, and so through this Psalm the man of God deals with the wicked in his spirit and comes at last to the text. He had been greatly disturbed, things had perturbed his mind, had been too much for his understanding and for the moment he had lacked grace to fall into the hands of God as he would do. He said "My foot slippeth", just as Asaph found himself in a perplexing condition - I said my foot slippeth" O but God was ready for this emergency, comes to his slip, sends him His good Spirit and so he said "Thy mercy held me up, I was not left a prey to the enemy, not to my own sins. Then, in the language of the text he says "In the multitude of my thoughts, within me, Thy

comforts delight my soul" Multitude of my thoughts, in the teeming thoughts of his mind, in the keen exercises of his mind, when God's providence, in all its peculiarities and mysteries, its unfathomable depths, stood before him, and he was thinking of this and that, there came streaming into his heart heavenly comfort. In the multitude of my thoughts, Learned men say that the word "thoughts" is used in this place and another place at least to express the boughs of a tree moved by the wind and entangled each with the other and there is no straightening of them, and if this be so how expressive it is. You cannot straighten out your own thoughts, they cross, they become entangled, you become confused, you do not know what to make of yourself or of your thoughts, you may even appear to yourself sometimes to be much more of an infidel than a believer, a rebel than a subject, a fretful person than a resigned child. Your thoughts are full of perplexity and you get perplexed, and there is a multitude of them and these are swayed by the wind, the wind of divine providence, so that this thought about God becomes entangled with a thought about providence, and you cannot straighten them out. Why this? Why is this allowed? Why has God permitted this? O it is a painful exercise.

I will name a few of the multitude of thoughts that will often perplex, have often perplexed some of us. First of all there are thoughts we have about our sinfulness. We are sinners. Can such sinners be saints? Can grace be in a heart where there is so much sin? Can there be faith where there is so much unbelief? Can there be love where enmity so often works, humility where pride sticks about us? Prayer, where there is so much indifference to the throne of grace? Can there be any knowledge of the Lord Jesus, when the mind is so intently fixed on self and self interest and so on? These thoughts perplex you. If you try diving into your own minds to discover whether you are christians the probability is you will come to where Asaph came when he said "I was as a beast before Thee" I could not understand my own ways, how much less could I expect to understand Thy ways? Do you know what that means? There is a multitude of thoughts sometimes about the prevalence of sin in the heart. Iniquities prevail against me. How often is this the case with some of us. Iniquities, miseries, miserable thoughts, wicked thoughts, about God and about His word, and these put you to it sorely perhaps. Could I be a child of God, could it be possible for me, being a child of God to have such and such thoughts? Then with regard to the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul, this you would

think, wherever it is, would be so prevalent as that sin would be cut down and would not have the place that it has alas in you. You would think surely if the Spirit dwell in me according to Christ's promise that He should be in His disciples, I should find what is promised concerning Him - that He should be a well of water, springing up into everlasting life, instead of which you may confess you rarely feel that up-bubbling of which the Psalmist speaks saying - "My heart is inditing a good matter; I speak of the things which I have made touching the King", and a lack of this work of the Spirit as to its prevalence is a perplexity. You may then come to providences of which I have just been speaking, your own providence, something has come to you, either to your person or into your family and why it has come, what God's end in it is, whether it means mercy or judgement only, you know not. You are perplexed and the more you endeavour to straighten out so crooked a providence, the more troubled you become, the more difficult it is for you to realise that a God of love could be, in His providence, what He appears to you to be in this providence in your own house, your own person, or your business. Something painful, bitter, heavy, crooked and you cannot possibly by reasoning, thinking, looking at it, weighing it, examining it, make right. It does not comport with your ideas of what is kind or just and therefore you know not what to say. You would fain say, as for God His way is perfect, but it is hard for faith, for struggling faith, little faith, to come to so decided a point as that and therefore you are put to it, sorely put to it. With respect to God's permissions, there may be many perplexing thoughts in your minds. "Lord" said Jeremiah, "let me reason with Thee, why do the wicked prosper, why are the saints so distressed and oppressed? Let me reason with Thee of Thy judgements." Said the Lord to him "If thou has been weary in running with the footmen, how wilt thou go with horses?" If those things trouble you, what if greater things come? If these matters perplex you, what will you do when greater and more perplexed things arise? So with regard to God's permissions, you may be sorely put to it. The sweetest attitude for a child of God in perplexing circumstances and exercises of mind is falling flat into the hands of God, but we do see in the scripture, the most eminent saints had such and such thoughts respecting God's ways. Take one or two instances. Take Abraham; the Lord called him out from his own country, and from his father's house and promised to make him a great nation

and that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed. Then later the Lord said to him "Fear not Abraham, I am Thy shield and exceeding great reward" Now Abraham was perplexed, said he "Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless? How am I to be a father of many nations and I have no son? How shall all the nations of the earth be blessed in my seed when I have no seed? He knew not at the moment that God was his shield and great reward, that God was sufficient and that out of the grave as it were, that is out of a natural impossibility, God would raise up a son. He knew it not at the moment. You find David sorely put to it, though the anointing oil had been poured on him, though he had had many deliverances, he came to a point of grave perplexity, and he said "As the Lord liveth, there is but a step between me and death" What a strange case. Destined for, anointed to the throne, and now in his own apprehension about to be cut off. The best thing therefore for him to do in his own perplexed judgement was this - to flee from the land, get away from the persecutor and persecution, and do the best he could. Do you not know what that solid and solemn, yet ungrounded feeling is? So you may be troubled.

Now let us look at what here was the Psalmist's sweet turn. He got a great turn, and it appears not to even be the removal of all his perplexities by a change in circumstances, but really and purely from the Lord Himself. "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul" As if through the sea of his trouble and perplexity the gulf stream of warm, sweet mercy flowed and made itself known to him. Ah, nothing can hinder God's mercy from coming in. Nothing can prevent the sweetness of divine consolation flowing into a sinner's heart when the sacred, the appointed moment has arrived. What is this comfort that intensely delighted his soul? The first comfort that a guilty person can feel is the comfort of the atonement, that God breathes, secretly breathes into the heart. Then there is a new comfort felt when the Lord Jesus Christ dying for sin, is manifested again, when it appears to faith that He is not only above circumstances, above all thoughts, but that He sanctifies circumstances and even thoughts to His own praise and honour, because He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. This to me appears to be one of the sweetest comforts that a child of God in difficulties can experience, one of the greatest mercies that the Lord bestows, when the Saviour of sinners appears to him and when he is enabled to feel that nothing in providence alters that great work of salvation, and hinders from coming into the heart a sense of the

atonement work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is the Comforter, He is the comfort, and He sends His Spirit, the other Comforter whom He promised - "I will send you another Comforter" He had comforted them so far, now He was to leave them; He said "I will send you another Comforter" That other Comforter is the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost as the Comforter is His chief work - I may use that word I believe - His chief work in showing the things which belong to Jesus Christ. He, says Christ, promising Him, shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you, and the chief of the works of the Lord Jesus was the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of Himself and the chief of the works of the Spirit is the manifesting to faith that wondrous, that all-sufficient atonement, the blood of Christ, that brings peace, that gives union with God, that gives access to God, that gives a prevailing plea, that affords an argument that God Himself will never disregard. That blessed work, on which the poorest may plead and are led to plead, that precious blood, the Holy Spirit in all the virtue of it, causes to flow into the conscience, and this is a great delight. Why, there is no providence you cannot leave with God when you find He comforts your conscience with the blood of Christ. What else matters when you know that all things are straight between God and your soul? My brethren, there is nothing wrong with you, I venture to say, nothing wrong with you in your judgement and in your affections and in your desire and in your aims and wishes, when the blood of Jesus Christ is in your conscience. All is well, all is well. You feel the presence of God within; you feel something of what Moses had in such a sweet and wonderful measure - "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest" Rest! That is not in providence, it is not in self. Providence may be most sweet and you have no rest in yourself. It may be most bitter and you have perfect rest in your conscience. If sin does not disturb, what can? Thy comforts, this comfort, delights the soul, and the word delight is very intense here, as if he should say this delight overpowers all distress, overtops all perplexing thoughts. This delight leaves nothing to be desired, I have all I want. May the atonement be our bed, our rest, our refreshment, our delight. All is well where the atonement is; all is well, Jesus shed His precious blood. The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin; the blood of Christ takes away all frowns from the face of God and all frowns from providence, and makes everything a friend. Losses, crosses, staffs or rods, all are turned into friends where the blood of Jesus Christ is. This delights the soul. A good Scotch divine on his

death-bed said "He was pained without a pain" and you may find yourself comforted and without pain in the midst of your pains, in the midst of your distresses if you have the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ with you, in you. Be this therefore sought by us above all else. Seek this above all else. The whole world could not make us happy if it were ours. All men could not give you rest if they were your friends, but the world against you and men opposing you could not disturb you if the sweet peace of God which passeth all understanding be in your conscience by the blood of Jesus Christ.

The blood of Christ, O precious blood,
Cleanses from all sin, doubt it not,
And reconciles the soul to God,
From every folly, every fault.

Precious blood! It is my plea, my hope, my comfort, my peace, my all and you can say the same, I believe, many of you, at least you can say you desire it to be so.

Another comfort is that the Holy Spirit descends to bring into the heart through faith, a sense of the unerring wisdom of God. There is no errancy in God's ways, because they are all wisdom's ways. The scripture is inerrant, providence is inerrant, though both today, the first to the critic and the latter to a perplexed child of God, may seem in doubt. How can there be wisdom in all these upside down things? How can there be wisdom in God's permissions when the wicked prevail and the righteous are oppressed? These are questions that may come into the mind of a saint. O the misery of this world, born of sin really, but apparently born of God's permission only, but these miseries coming to us in some form and in some measure brings to an end of all our wisdom. Try as you may, think as you can, consider as you are enabled, ponder to the utmost of your power to ponder and you will remain perplexed and at doubt in grievous doubt, and when the Spirit says "Rest in the Lord in God only wise", when He takes you as He took Asaph into the Sanctuary of God and causes you to see that the wicked who have triumphed for a time, are even always set in slippery places, and that they are always without knowing it, sliding to destruction and suddenly descend into it, when He lets you see that the righteous, and you a murmuring and perplexed Asah, are in the hands of God for good, and that nothing can by any means hurt them, Asaph like you will fall into His hands and say It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good. You will be content to be in His

hand, content and thankful to feel "My times are in Thy hands" "Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of Truth, into Thy hand I commit my spirit" Then I say you have intense delight, powerful comfort, comfort more powerful than all the troubles which have so tried you. Thy comforts, the comfort of wisdom, wisdom divine. "I wisdom dwell with prudence and find out knowledge of witty inventions," and you will find this that when God permits a thousand thousand to go against a few hundred Israelites and allows them to come to the point of victory, even that shall turn to good for the destruction of the enemy, the confusion of the enemy, and the establishment of the faith of the child of God. Ah it is nothing with the Lord to manage things my friends, but He will let us try to manage them till we have hurt ourselves, and we are nothing but fools, weakness also. Then he arises. We have said "Make haste O God because we are now at an end of our own resources. Come and pluck Thy hand out of Thy bosom, even Thy right hand and come and save us." When we can say with the Psalmist in the first verse of this Psalm and the first verse of the 80th Psalm "Shine forth" Thou hast hid Thyself long enough Lord. We have been perplexed, and are perplexed. Come, shine forth. O what a change comes into the heart. Can you rest on wisdom divine? Can you leave yourself with God? Can you leave your matters with Him? Your bodies, your souls, your businesses and all matters. My times are in Thy hand. One would judge that it was one of the sweetest consolations that the Psalmist ever had when in his deepest distress, being driven from his home and his throne by his unnatural son Absalom, he said to those who had taken the Ark out of the city to him "Carry back the Ark of God into the city" carry that to its place, let that be where it ought to be. I am in God's hand, and if He say "I have no pleasure in thee, here am I, but if He take pleasure in me, He will bring me again to my house and my throne and I shall see both it, the Ark which you now have carried back, and his habitation." I say it was a great consolation to his distressed heart. Circumstances for the moment were adverse, warped, likely to change to all appearances not in his favour, "O" but" said he "I am in God's hands" That was a comfort, like a stream, sweetly, silently stealing its own way into his distressed heart. Here I am, Lord I am in Thy hand, I am a poor child, I am a poor unbelieving christian, I do not know what to do, I am greatly distressed. I am deeply depressed but I am in Thy hand, and here I leave myself, do with me

as seemeth Thee good, only at the end take me home to abide with Thyself and so he had that comfort.

Thirdly, the comfort of love. "If" says Paul "there be any comfort of love" If there be. That was a demonstration not a doubt. If there be. Why, God is love. Is there any comfort in it? Is there any comfort to a sinner when he is told by God's own mouth that God has loved him? Is there any comfort of love when the Spirit shows a sinner Jesus in His place? Jesus in the traitor's place. Jesus suffering the death due to the sinner? Comfort of love. Is there any comfort of love when the Spirit shows a risen Saviour in heaven? Says Paul, in his preaching in the Acts of the Apostles "by Him" that is by this Man whom God raised from the dead, is preached unto you the forgiveness of sin" and by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." Any comfort of love when you have love for your convoy, love for your provision, love for your sweetness, love to sanctify you, to hold you up, to carry you through, love to control you, and take care of you, love to chasten you betimes lest you destroy yourself, love that expresses itself thus "I will love him freely" O there is comfort in this. There is no bitterness left in any providence however adverse it may be when this comes in, this comfort of love. Love that has ordered your birth, and your place in providence and in life, ordered your relationships, ordered your steps into the family of the Most High God. Why comfort of love, love everlasting, love that having started it God will not leave off. Love having given a promise out will certainly make it good in a blessed fulfilment. Any comfort of love. Do you know it? Brethren what comfort is to be compared with this what earthly comfort? "Thy comforts delight my soul".

And next the comfort of omnipotence clothed in our own nature, omnipotence in human form in Jesus Christ, who sits, that sitteth upon the flood, that sitteth king for ever; our Lord Jesus Christ. Who is it that ruleth the raging of the sea, when the waves thereof lift up themselves? O what a typical act was that that the Lord Jesus did when He said "Be still" and there was a great calm. "Be still" O waves of corruption. Be still, O tempting devil. Be still O troubled heart. Omnipotence, what can it not accomplish? Trust in Him. To trust Him endeavour, the work is His own. All things shall declare Him to be good and wise, and loving and almighty in the issue. May the power thus comfort you, the comfort of love. One

more word and I conclude. One would say from the petition in the beginning of the Psalm "Show Thyself, Lift up Thyself" that now after the time of perplexity, the Lord had come and answered the prayer "Show Thyself" and the eyes, wet with tears of trouble and pain and uncertainty and perplexity, gazed on the Lord Jesus. He saw Him come. The coming of the Messiah was seen by him in faith. He got what he wanted. He got what was in the twenty seventh Psalm prayed for "One thing have I desired" One would say he got it in this way. So he expressed himself "Thy comforts" The comfort of Thy presence, delights him immensely. Moses got it "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest" You will be satisfied when you have that. Content all honour and earthly good to forego if you have the gracious, living, mighty, condescending presence of your Saviour Jesus Christ.

Look then for these blessed comforts in the midst of things which you are not able to understand, the crooks which you cannot straighten out, the difficulties which you do not know what to do with or to reckon them up and straighten them with God's kindness. In the midst of all these things look out for these comforts and they will come into every living soul in God's own time and in God's own measure.

May the Lord graciously grant these blessing.