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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 6 February 1921

PSALM 99 v 1

"The LORD reigneth; let the people
tremble: He sitteth between the cherubims;
let the earth be moved."

I just dropped a few hints on Friday evening at our Prayer Meeting with respect to this Scripture, but it is so beautiful in my eyes, it is so suitable to sinners, it is so, in the hand of the Spirit, calculated to comfort mourners, that I desire, as God may help me, to speak again to you, and a little more fully perhaps. It is a wonderful word, a word very contrary to human wishes, this first sentence, or number, of the text - "The LORD reigneth." There is not a man in this place, nor creature on the earth, who wants this after the flesh. Not one of you by nature can wish for this great truth, because it means that the King will have His Own way, and we want our way. We walk, by nature, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air. O may God save us from walking according to the wishes, and temptations, and aims of the devil. O, it is a dreadful thing to be a subject of the devil, but that is what we all are by nature, just the subject of the god of this world. And when the Lord will save a person experimentally, according to His eternal salvation of that person in His purpose, then He comes and binds the strong man, and turns him out, with all his goods. That is, He overthrows the authority of the devil in the heart, and conscience, and mind, and wishes of the poor sinner. Then He begins to reign, that blessed Almighty One, begins to reign. He reigns in the hearts of His people Even as He reigns in heaven, doing His will there, on earth among the children of men, and in hell controlling the movements, and the councils of devils, so, in a gracious way, He comes and reigns in the hearts of His people. If you can say you hate the ways you once loved, you would fain forsake them; you hate the things you once sought after with all your minds, and would fain never have those things before you again; if you can say, Christ only I seek, and I want Him more than my necessary food, and

long for Him to come into my soul, then I say to you that in a good measure, not yet comfortable, to your sense, but in a good measure, the Lord reigneth in you. But you will tremble. "Let the people tremble". You will tremble at His judgements in your own conscience, for His Word will judge you. You will tremble at His judgements as they may be before your eyes, looming in the distance, perhaps not far away but near to your apprehension maybe; the Judgement Seat with all its horror, and terror for the wicked. There may be providences too which make you tremble. God's hand sometimes works wonders in providence, and causes His people greatly to fear Him there. You remember the Scripture that says God will rain snares upon the wicked, and how you may fear that. If you have enough in providence to live upon, if you are comfortably placed in providence, it may even be presented to your minds - This is a snare. You may be tempted to live independently, as men speak. Other things may come and be as a snare and you will tremble. "The LORD reigneth". And see if He reigns in you, if He is first, if He is before others, if His authority is felt, if His light controls you, that is controls your thoughts, and makes you say, O, but I live before the eye that pierces me. I live before Him with whom I have to do. It will make you a very sober person. Your sins will be brought to light. And here let me say, a slight knowledge of sin always will mean, at the very most, a slight knowledge of Christ. And if a slight knowledge of sin be only natural, then the little acquaintance a person, so walking, and feeling, may obtain of Christ may only be natural. But if God wounds, if He reigns in some awful threatening in your conscience, if He reigns in the light that penetrates, and brings to your astonished view sins, awful sins, painful things, things done by you, things hissing, and claiming attention, even now, then you will tremble. Happy the man whose conscience feels the authority of God.

Now let us look at a point that is worthy of our attention, and faith, namely - "He sitteth between the cherubims". What does this mean? If you look into Exodus you will find a divine commandment given to Moses, and by him to the people, to bring presents to the Lord, gold, and silver, and various things, and shittim wood, and oil. Then you find a commandment of the Lord to Moses to make an Ark, to overlay it round about with gold, and to put into it the tables of the covenant which He gave to Moses, the second pair of tables. And

over the Ark, a covering, called the Mercy Seat, and the cherubims. The Ark, quiet, containing the tables that should no longer send forth curses, because the Mercy Seat is over, and covering. And says God to Moses, - "There I will meet with thee". Not the Ark opened, and the tables of the covenant there exposed. Nay, the Ark covered, the tables covered, covered by the Mercy Seat, with cherubims looking with their faces over this Mercy Seat. "There", says God, "I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" And we read later that when Moses went in to speak to the Lord on the Mercy Seat, he heard a voice speaking to him. "I will commune with thee". Now there it is that God reigns, sits, and in the language of Paul to the Hebrews it is this - "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need". In Jeremiah it is this - "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary". And this is in Jerusalem which is above, even in heaven, in the very midst of His people. God had His tabernacle, and His tabernacle is still with men, and that tabernacle is the Lord of life and glory, "the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man." And there sits our Saviour smiling all around, bestowing, and scattering, in great plenty, His mercies to His people. He reigns there. "He sitteth between the cherubims". Let us look a little at this, for it is a great thing. I could not live without it. The throne of judgement would strike terror and dismay into me if I had to look on it, and it, alone. How do you feel about the throne of judgement? When a man is brought there, he trembles indeed, and fears; his life hangs in doubt, and he looks for the Lord to come forth as a lion to break all his bones. That spoils a person for the world. O, I well remember being so spoiled. It is a great thing for God to take hold of a sinner in earnest and bring him to judgement, that he may judge himself and not be condemned with the wicked. Well, if the throne of judgement, if the throne of awful judgement, terrifies you, then if the Lord lets you look on this, this Mercy Seat, what a beautiful sight it will be to you. Here is a sinner, black, guilty, and the Mercy Seat appearing to him. It is great. It is the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, and it is seeing by faith a little of that infinite fullness, and love, and goodness, and mercy, and justification, that the Lord Jesus possesses. It is His death, it is His blood, it is His righteousness, it is His gospel, it is Himself. Yes, Himself put, as it were, before

the eye of faith, so that the faith of God's elect, looking on this, shall draw, and bring the sinner, as the promise is, with weeping and supplications, and this goes on all through the life of God's people. "There will I meet with thee". Not at the beginning only; No, some of us have a long, long way to go back in memory when we go back to the first visits we were favoured to pay to the Mercy Seat, but it is not an old place, not worn out yet, not unsuitable now. No, just the same and more than ever, a necessary place, a glorious place, an attractive sight - the Mercy Seat. I say Jesus sits here, smiling and giving out blessings. Let us look at some of them.

He gives out the blessing of forgiveness. "Having forgiven you all trespasses" O what a blessing that is. Not a stain, not a sin, not a fault shall be found with those who are forgiven all their trespasses, not one. "I will pardon whom I reserve" is God's word, and of all the blessings that a sinner can ever have in his heart, can there be a sweeter than this, that he should go about his daily business feeling again, and again that God has nothing against him, that in Jesus Christ he is entirely forgiven; that, although he may have plenty of trouble in providence, God does not quarrel with him; that there is no vindictive wrath in the cup of affliction he has to drink, for God has taken all His wrath away. O my dear friends, this is a wonderful thing. It strengthens the sinner to suffer; it enables him to submit to the will of God; it fills him with humility of mind. It strengthens him to wait on God and seek to honour Him in all things. It makes heavenly merry-making in the heart. It brings one to go forth in the dances of them that make merry. God grant you this. God give you hearts to seek it. And those of you who are seeking it, God grant to you a sweet discovery of it, a sweet speaking of it home upon you, the forgiveness of all sin.

And the Mercy Seat also says this, and God makes it say it in men's hearts - There is access unto God through Jesus Christ. "There will I meet with thee". You shall find Me there. If you have found God in some threatening, if you have found Him in some great affliction, and no mercy, no sweet sense of forgiveness, you have found trouble. But now if He brings you to this door open all day, as you were singing

The door of Thy mercy stands open all day
To the poor and the needy who knock
by the way

O what an entrance you will find. In Paul's language, this is it - "Through whom we have access by one Spirit unto the Father". And the Father invites His children to come. O, He says - "Ho everyone that thirsteth come ye to the waters." These waters are what John speaks of in the Revelations - "He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" He shows it; we see it then. We partake of it then. Well now, there is access, sweet access, and what for? To walk according to Paul's word in the Philippians - "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." That is one wonderful blessing that you have liberty to go in and pour out your hearts before the Lord, when He says - "Come unto Me". "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it". None can understand what the sacred relief is that is felt by those to whom is given this open door of access. It is set before faith. Faith becomes bold; love becomes sweetly moving, and active in the soul. "He sitteth between the cherubims". That is one thing, and then there is access, sweet access, and here I would a little enlarge, because it is a vital point in religion, the religion which God gives to His people. If you never get access it is because there is no open door set before you, and that is terrible. If you never get that open door in this world, you will never have the door of heaven opened to you. O, but when the door is opened, when the Holy Spirit says to a sinner, Enter in, go into the Holiest of all. Now the veil is removed, rent from the top to the bottom, and there is the Ark, there is the true tabernacle, there is the candlestick, there is the table of shew-bread, there is all that you need, the altar of incense, all you need. Go in. And Christ says - "I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture", and you will find pasture indeed here. You will find, not only liberty to pray, and pour out your hearts before the Lord, but you will also find matters set before you that will amaze you. People get things on their knees. People get sights on their knees, and they hear sounds, a heavenly voice speaking, on their knees. And when Moses went in to speak to Him on the Mercy Seat, he heard a voice speaking to him, and

you will find, when you get access, you will hear a voice speaking to you. Not every day perhaps, not often perhaps, but there it is, you will hear it. Yes, and what will He say? - for that is a great point in religion; there the Lord reigns in the things He says. What does He say? Well, He says to a black creature - "Thou art all fair My love". He says that to a black creature. Nobody else could. God only can call an adulteress a virgin, and He does it. God only can call a black creature, fair, and spotless, and white, and He does that on the Mercy Seat, remember. And He reigns in that. I will tell you how He reigns. You say, you might say, to all your friends, I will never believe that my black soul can be made spotless. But if God said it He would reign in it, and the authority, the unction of the word, will be so penetrating, so all-ruling over every thought, and so opposing, and overcoming all objections, as that you will say of yourself - "I am black but comely", and you will believe it. Then you will be, according to Scripture, "obedient to the faith". Yes, sweetly obedient. It is for the King to reign; it is for the subject to obey. It is for the heart to obey, and God brings this obedience. He says - "Thou art all fair", and faith says, I believe it, I feel it, I know it. It is one thing to imagine this; it is another to get it really into your very soul.

The Lord reigns in justification. Ah yes, dear friends, God reigns in justification, and justification takes the blackness away from the soul, from the conscience. Justification says to a sinner, God has nothing against you. Who shall condemn the Lord's elect? "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right-hand of God" Here He reigns. Look in the Revelation and what do you find there? A Lamb as it had been slain in the midst of the throne. And again, as the Apostle Paul says Christ entered with His Own blood into the Holiest of all; so that justification is brought home, and God reigns in it. There is not a sin you have done, there is not a lust you feel, there is not a stain that troubles you, that the justification of God will not remove; not one. If one spot were left, it would bring damnation. He says - "There is no spot in thee". And there He reigns; He reigns in this, He is the Author of it. You may bring all your sins and set them as thorns and briars before the Lord. He says -

"Who would set the briers and thorns against Me in battle? I would go through them. I would burn them together." "Fury is not in Me". Not when He burns up? No, when He burns up your objections, love does it, mercy does it, sweet mercy reigns. It is not fury. It is not fury to you when God takes an enemy out of your way, is it? When He says, I love you; when He says, You are without spot to Me, that is not fury. And that is what the Lord does.

"He sitteth between the cherubims". He has the atonement, He has the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. There is the perfect Person, and the perfect work, and the perfect love, and the perfect grace of Jesus Christ. Here the Mercy Seat. The Lord reigns then in justification.

And then He will reign in your heart sometimes in an experience of sanctification. You get troubled by sin. Sin mars your peace, breaks your happiness, dries up your strength, makes you afraid, afraid of God, afraid of providence, afraid of judgements. Makes you afraid of everything. Afraid of yourself, afraid of evil tidings. Not that you have lived an ungodly life amongst men, but it is what is within, your own heart's sins. Heart sins are dreadful things, and heart sins are noticed by honest people, by tender consciences. They are noticed. Men look on the outward part, and the appearance, and they say it is alright. They may say of you, Why he lives a godly life, why does he complain? You say, I am an ungodly person. You measure yourself as you see, and feel sin in your nature, and working in your mind. "The Lord reigneth". Poor sinner, "The Lord reigneth", and I will tell you one or two things in which you may find His reign here in this painful experience. One is this, that the love of holiness brings you trouble. It is not sin that gives trouble, it is the feeling of it. It is the love of holiness that makes sin a trouble, and the Lord reigns in keeping that love of holiness alive. There is enough sin in all of us to drown it, kill it; quite enough, but God keeps it alive. When the devil is pouring water on the fire, what keeps the fire burning? O, says Mr Interpreter in Bunyan's house, Come behind the wall, and he lets you see one pouring oil upon the fire. And if the Lord's grace keeps alive your love of holiness, no water of sin, nor temptation shall put it out. The Lord reigns in that living fire, that love of holiness, and that love of holiness

makes you hate sin, and makes sin troublesome. O, I would bless the Lord that sin is troublesome to me. I have plenty of it, but it is troublesome, very troublesome, and very painful. "The Lord reigneth". And reigns where? For a trembling sinner, on the Mercy Seat. Gives out grace; as it were says, this love of holiness shall not die. I will give more grace to it, more strength.

Then also in this painful experience He reigns in another point, namely He gives you power to confess it. "Mine iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD". Grace reigns here. Every time you honestly confess your sins you go against a proud heart, against a tempting devil, against the hardening influence of sin. You go against the whole of your nature, and that is by the reign of God in your spirit.

"The Lord reigneth". He reigns on this throne, the throne of grace. It is for a King to do as He will, and our King, our glorious King wills this, that a poor sinner who has grace enough to hate sin shall have also grace enough to come and confess it. Yes, blessed be the name of God for grace reigning, reigning over sin. Ah, it is one thing for sin to live in you; it is another, and different thing, for you to live in sin. Now God does not let you live in sin. He lets sin live in you, He lets it trouble you, He lets it come to weaken you, He lets it come that you may not grow careless, indifferent to Himself, and to His presence, and to His mercy. Then He gives power to confess it. "Only acknowledge thine iniquity". A lack of that spirit is a bar between God and a child of His for a time, but when He will bring you near to Himself, and draw near to you, then He will fulfil that promise by Jeremiah - "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them". When God will take an enemy away from His church, what does He do? He says - I will put My hook his nose, and My bridle in his lips. (Isaiah 37 v 29) He leads him away. When He will lead a sinner to Himself, what does He do? He puts that in him which is just as a bridle. "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them". James says, we turn about a ship with a very little helm, and God turns about the soul with this helm of prayer. Says He "Come unto Me". "Open your mouth wide". Come for blessings, come for grace, come for mercy. I reign here. I love this sinner and I reign in him by My mercy. You notice these things.

Perhaps your eye is set on the fulfilling of your desire that Christ and His Father should come and take up their abode in you, and may you never lose that desire, but notice the way to it. "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them". Ah, the gospel will be before you sometimes, and that will be like a bridle; it will turn you to God. Away from yourself, and from your gloom, and your doubts, and your fears, and lead you to that blessed place of which we here read - "He sitteth between the cherubims" - and you will say sometimes to your soul, March on my soul, march boldly on, to this blessed spot, and then He will give you your heart's desire, and reign in that. One word that Christ spoke is very wonderful. "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you". O my dear friends, when Christ speaks a cleansing word it is very great. He has been cutting, reproofing, wounding, letting the vine bleed awhile for its own health, and His glory. Now He comes and cleanses away those things which we feared would overcome us. "Ye are clean". It is said of God that He sends out His word and melts the stone and the ice. He sends out His gospel and melts a hard heart and takes away vile affections, as to their dominion, and begins to move the soul so as that it says, What a change there is in me. Why, whereas I was discontented with God's ways and with my place in providence, and other things, and whereas I had this evil, and that lust to trouble, and plague, and defile me, I now feel like a child before its parent, and with its parent; I feel humbled, and crumbled, and broken, and tender. I feel love in my soul for the Lord, and His ways, and His people. Whence this change? Why - "Ye are clean" through some cleansing word, through the holy gospel brought to you by the Eternal Spirit. You are cleansed. The Lord reigns here, on this throne of grace, sitting between the cherubims. Blessed be His Name. He works this great thing in the soul. The work of grace is a mysterious work, but a very great work. Mysterious as to the motions of love, and the operations of the Spirit, but it is a very great work whereby people are brought unto God, and made to fear Him, and to follow Him.

"The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: He sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved." He reigns in the affections. He has many rivals, but He will brook none of them. Altogether He has many rivals and I think if I name one of them I shall name them all. Rutherford names that one. He says - "O that I had not a myself". Did

you ever say it from your heart? "O that I had not a myself". This is the rival of Christ. You say the devil is, and you have got the devil. There is a devil of sin in every man, and the men of God feel it. They feel it, they believe it, And you put yourself up. There is your will, that strong thing, your own will. I will go here, I will go into this city, I will dwell there a year, and I will buy, and sell, and get gain. This strong will. I will do this, and I wont do that. I will have this, and I wont have that. I speak, I expect I speak, the language of some of your hearts. I will, I will, I will not. Well, and perhaps for a time the Lord does not reprove it. He lets you go on, and you harden yourself in your ways. Then He comes near to you, and sends some rebuke. O, how He reigns in that. No friend, no friends can turn you from your self-wilfulness, but a single word dropped down into your heart by the Lord turns you at once, and turns you to Himself. He is reigning. Yes, "the Lord reigneth", reigneth in this. He comes and lets you see the evil of your ways. He sets your ways in order before you. "I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works: for they shall not profit thee". I will declare to you your ways, that they are not good. He went, as Hosea tells us, and found a wayward creature. He says - "I will hedge up thy way with thorns". And He says then, when He has hedged the way up, and broken the reigning power of self-will - "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness", and she shall follow Me. She said before she would go after her lovers, she would have her own way. Now He says, she shall come into the wilderness. Will He drive her there? No. What will He do? "I will allure her". She shall not find her paths. Now "I will allure her", she shall come after Me in the wilderness. I will make Myself so necessary to her that she shall be allured, and even go into trouble to find Me. And there she shall sing. He sitteth on the Mercy Seat. There she shall sing, where she has been allured, even in the wilderness. And in Hosea you have again His great reign of mercy when He says - "O, ISRAEL, thou hast fallen by thine iniquity". You have gone astray from Me. "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity". Now "Take with you words, and turn to the LORD". The Lord will have you now come back. He wants you, therefore He will gain you. "Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips". The whole passage is very beautiful, and full of grace, and reigning mercy. "Asshur shall not save us; we will not

ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy". And what does the Lord say? O, He says I have heard him, heard his confessions, heard his moaning. I have heard him and observed him; found his heart sincere, for I have given him the sincerity. Found him repenting, for I have wrought it in him. "I am like a green fir tree, from Me is thy fruit found". "He sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved." And this moves you, moves your very heart, and soul. It moves you to repent, and smite upon your thigh. It moves you to hate yourself, and hate your sins, and love the Lord, and follow Him fully. "He sitteth between the cherubims". Did you ever see Him there? When you have been mourning over your barrenness, and wickedness, and waywardness, did He ever turn your eyes to Himself, and just let you see His very nature expressing itself in that Mercy Seat, His heart and His love; expressing Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ. If He ever did that you got a sight of all sights, God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. God in Christ sitting there, loving, helping, drawing, teaching, comforting, and, in all these things, reigning.

"The LORD reigneth". He reigns in providence. Yes, He wont let people whom He loves have all their own way. No, He will send some providences that shall bring them to their knees, trembling, fearful, fearful of what God may be about to do with them. Then He reigns and brings their hearts down with labour so that they say, each one for himself,

Reign o'er us as King, accomplish Thy will,
And powerfully bring us forth from all ill;
Till, falling before Thee, we laud Thy loved Name,
Ascribing the glory to God and the Lamb (129)

May the Lord give us to see this great sight, a reigning God on the Mercy Seat, a crowned King, a crowned Priest on the Mercy Seat, saying to poor, miserable, bondaged, guilty, helpless, yet longing, praying people - "Come unto Me and I will give you rest".

AMEN.