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Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening, 28th. May, 1922.

Text: Revelations 2. v. 7.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

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As I spoke this morning about the first part of the text, I would, by the help of God, this evening notice the second part. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

It was the death of our beloved friend Mr. Dickens that has, I think, brought this Scripture to my mind, and looking upon him as an overcomer I began a little to meditate upon this passage. It is well to be where he is, may we be safely landed one day. In looking at this Scripture I would first draw your attention to the enemies of the people of God, secondly notice the conflict, and thirdly the overcoming - the victory, and in the last place, observe what is said here by Christ, that to an overcomer He will "give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

First, we are to look at the enemies that the people of God have. Unless we know them, if we think we fight, we are only beating the air. If we are really fighting the good fight of faith, we know something about with whom we are fighting; who they are; something of their strength; something of their schemes; the gates of hell; something of their intentions - our ruin. The first enemy for me to name is, as you will of course instantly think - sin. Sin that dwelleth in us; sin that aims at God; disbelieves His every word: disbelieves in His glorious character. Whatever is named of Him in the Scripture, sin in us will question or fight against. This is a desperate foe. A foe we all have. A foe which the saints know something about at every turn, in every possible way, either by deceipt so that we are blinded people, not seeing him; or by open assault so that though we see our enemy, we feel perhaps battered and beaten down by his power. Sin in some form, will be

ever at us if our faces are set steadfastly to go to heaven. This is a desperate enemy I say. it hardens the heart; it is a daring foe; it dares to speak against God, like the devil in Eden, "Hath God said?" 'God knows you wont die but that your eyes will be opened.' It will contradict the Lord Almighty. It will fight against prayer, and tell you that things are all governed by a fate that you cannot work against; that has fixed matters, so that if you never pray at all, things will come out just as they would if you prayed. It will fight against holiness and say it is nothing but a figment, or if you are too religious naturally, to be beguiled that way, it will seek to foist upon you a specious, a false holiness, as in the case of papists and others; it will fight against Christ and be a very Herod in our minds. Herod sought to destroy the young child's life, and sin will seek to destroy Him who came to destroy the kingdom of Satan in the Church. It will fight against the Bible, against inspiration, against the authority of the Bible. It will say that these things are alright if a person chooses to believe them in this way or that way, but there is no binding authority. It will fight against the gospel, against it being preached. It is too severe, too searching, too solemn, does not leave room for this nor for that; it cuts off everything. It will fight against repentance, and tell you it is a mean spirit; against humbling yourself because it is also too mean and ignoble. Lift up your head, harden your heart, eat and drink for tomorrow will be as this day, yea, and much more abundant. O the awfulness of this enemy. Who can properly express it?

The second enemy is the law. I have named this as the second enemy because it is our sin that gives the law its strength in us and against us. The strength of all of your opposition to God is in sin, and the strength of the law in your conscience, if ever it comes there in this life, you will find to be derived from your sin. It has strength in itself, it has authority from God, but, its strength to provoke you, to condemn you, to frown on you, to tell you what your duty is and prove to you that you have not done it, and that you cannot do it; all this, is derived from your sin. It fights against you. It wont let you have any peace. It will never let you have rest; it will pursue you and will stir up many thoughts and feelings in your hearts against it. It works wrath in God - "the law worketh wrath." It works wrath in you - it provokes God to be your enemy, by and in a broken law. Yes, the law is an enemy of a

sinner. A relentless foe, a relentless creditor; one, whose demands will never be abated, who will never give up his pursuit until he gets satisfaction.

The third enemy is the devil, who always endeavours to blacken the character of God. To malign Him in all His beautiful attributes. To speak against you as well as against God, is his business. To lull you to sleep if possible, and if that be not possible through grace in you, then to frighten, to pursue, to haunt, to torment, and seek to devour. O, what a restless devil we have to do with - to fight against.

Another enemy is the world which "lieth in wickedness," and if you are its friend, you are God's enemy. If you are God's, the world is your enemy. He that "will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God." The friendship of the world is enmity with God. A solemn thing this - a very serious thing this - and with this enemy the people of God, have to do. The devil pursues a child of God painfully. If he seeks to repent, the enemy says, 'That is no repentance.' If he lets fall a tear, 'that is only the tear of a hypocrite.' If he seeks to pray, the enemy says, 'It is no use you praying, God heareth not sinners.' If he feels he would love Christ, the devil says, 'You do not know Him.' If he seeks heaven, the devil says, 'There is no heaven to seek,' or if he cannot make you believe that, then he will say you are not a person chosen; you are not in the way to heaven: you have no evidence of godliness. You sin - you have sinned against light, against knowledge. You have known the right way many-a-time, in your judgement; you have felt when you heard the preaching, that it has been the right way that has been preached, and yet you have turned away from it in your heart, and now you are given up. Now God has left you altogether, - He is your enemy. 'I am your enemy and it won't be long before the end comes, and then what?' So he tries to distract, to distress, to torment and to devour. And the world says, 'Well this silly practice, this unreasonable strictness, this cutting away from all your pleasures, this giving up of all your amusements; it is all nonsense, it is not necessary. Religion is not that kind of thing. You can have the world and religion too,' and so it tries to deceive you. It may be, that you are obliged to come into contact with some worldly people, and your soul is vexed with their filthy conversation, - these are

enemies. If we know it, may we thank God. What is it to fight against them? Well, first, it is not to be determined in your own strength, to overcome them. It is not to think within yourself, 'Now I know my enemies, and I will soon make an end of some of them, if not all.' That is not fighting against them. It is not standing up in your own strength to resist sin and the devil and the world. No; and if you get rid of the world, of Satan, there would remain two enemies you could never, never get past - sin and the law. God's law will never be put off. Sin will never be trampled under foot by you. Is the case hopeless? No. If you are too feeble to stand up; if you are too weak to resist; if you are too weak to repent; too weak to send a heart-felt cry to heaven, as to your sense of things; if you are too weak for these things, there is one exercise that you are not too weak for - that God will help you in - and that is the exercise of prayer.

"Prayer's a weapon for the feeble;
Weakest souls can wield it best."

Prayer is no excuse, no extenuation of things. No; prayer is confession of sin. Prayer goes with repentance - goes hand in hand with faith. Prayer is an open mouth by which the sinner pours out his heart before the Lord. Prayer is justification of God. "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works," a praying man says before the Lord. Prayer is entreaty - "The poor useth entreaties," and a praying sinner entreats for mercy. Prayer has an eye to God, has a look to Him - 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the Lord, from whom cometh my help.' "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning." Prayer eyes the Saviour, pleads His blood, mentions His righteousness, looks to His power, hopes in His mercy. Prayer is a sending of messages from a ship-wrecked mariner to the great and blessed God, who sitteth upon the flood; who sitteth King for ever, and who is able to draw out of many waters. David found it so. He said, "I ----- cried unto my God ----- and my cry came before Him" - and, "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters." Prayer is begging; begging for a broken heart, for a contrite spirit, for true repentance; begging for mercy every hour; begging for justification and sanctification: for there will always be, going along with your confession of hardness and ruin, petitions for just the opposite

of those things. For melting, for justification, for grace, for sanctification. Prayer is a humble approach to Almighty God. "I will draw near," said Esther, "I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days," - 'but the case is urgent, if I go and am not accepted, the sceptre is not held out to me, I am dead,' - "so will I go in ----- and if I perish, I perish." So says a praying heart - 'I will go, I will venture, I will call upon the name of the Lord.' True prayer is an infinite blessing. If you know sin, how you will pray. Talkative said one sign of grace was a great outcry against sin - Bunyan corrects him. But if you have real prayer, there will be many a sigh, when no creature will hear, go out of your heart to God about your sin. Yes, the people of God while in this life, have to do with this polluting, hardening thing, sin, but what is it that particularly and specially fights? It is faith!

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called." Now this blessed faith, is the faith of God's operation. Not our own working, not some sort of persuasion vamped up in our minds, but that peculiar, blessed gift and work of the Holy Ghost, that does give credit to God. Faith, when your nature says, 'God is not just,' says, 'He is,' and faith will never receive that evil report of God that your heart brings up. Faith will have it that God is right whatever He does. Yes, 'If,' says a sinner, 'If He condemns my soul, He is right, He is just.' Everything that God is; every word that God says; everything that God does: faith approves. Faith may be very weak and stagger about at times, and not enable you to come to such a conclusion, but fight, it will - it will not receive an evil report of God. Caleb stilled the people when they were moved to their very depths by the evil report that ten of the spies brought up of the land. Caleb and Joshua stood up for God, and faith stands up for God against all that those enemies of His will bring against Him. Yes, you will fight for God's character if you have this God-given faith. You will believe He is right. Whatever nature may say - God is right. I thank Him that I have justified Him. What a mercy it is to justify God in the worst, the very worst. Who is he that overcometh the world and everything else, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? Faith will give you a hold here; faith will take you aside into secret places.

Faith will speak in your heart when you are busy. When you are perhaps at your table with your families, faith will move Godward. When the enemy comes in like a flood, faith will send out a cry to the Spirit, to come in and lift up a standard against him. Faith will tell you, you are weakness itself, and therefore wont let you depend on self, but will bring you to contend that God can help if He will but do it. Faith will struggle after rest - "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest," - even unto Jesus Christ, the Blessed One, who entered into rest after His work of salvation was accomplished on the cross. So, your faith will say, 'May I enter into the rest.' You may feel far from it; nothing but sin with you to trouble you; nothing but the law to condemn you; nothing but lust rising up to confuse you; nothing but Satan coming against you with his assaults, or his deceits; but faith will go against this mighty multitude and cry to God for rest; for rest in the conscience, rest in the mind, rest in the Lord. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." Conscience may say in some of you, 'Well, it is all useless, I pray and get no answer, I wish I could repent but I am as hard as a stone, and if I feel any pity in my mind, it is for myself. I am wrong altogether. I see God saves His people, but I am not one of them; I see that He comforteth saints as one whom his mother comforts, but I am not a saint: I see that the saints are called to holiness, but I am not holy, therefore I am not called.' The objections are many. Faith will deal with them. If you have faith, it will deal with them. How?..... Not by working; not by saying - 'O, but I do repent.' No; rather it will deal with them in this way..... By taking all these enemies and questions to the throne of God's heavenly grace and asking the Lord to make that straight which is crooked, and to remember that which is wanting. You poor perplexed creature, unable to fight, as you judge; wishing to fight but cannot; often having your eye fixed on one object. That object is your own ruined self; your own ruined nature, and can you do anything but sink as you look there? You look at your life - O, what a mis-spent life! You look how you have behaved yourself with respect to God - O, what ill manners, what stiff-necked ways! You look at the thoughts you have thought of God - O, what wicked thoughts! "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." Now my dear tried friends, let me tell you this - you need the Holy Ghost. Not to tell you that you will get better, but to turn your eye another way. To Jesus and His blood,

and that will cause you to eye the Saviour and enable you, it may be, to say with one in our hymn book:-

"And Satan says the medicine's vain
Because we yet are sick.

But all this will not do;
Our hope's on Jesus cast;
Let all be liars and Him be true,
We shall be well at last."

Hold on there, if ever you get to that spot -

"Urge thy claim through all unfitness;
Sue it out, spurning doubt;"

The Holy Ghost has born witness in the Scripture, and He will bear witness in your conscience one day, and you will know all is well. Faith in the bleeding Lamb will tell you that "The blood of Christ, thy soul can cure." Can bring you to God. Can reconcile you to him; can make you holy; can turn out the guilt: wash away the pollution of sin and justify you entirely. Faith will tell you this, and faith will tell you this too - that all the afflictions you are under, the sorrows you feel, the difficulties which confront you, are under the management of the Lord of life and glory. That the devil who hates you, is under His power and authority; that the waves that beat against you; the rod that pains you: these are sent by a good God. That the wants you feel, and which press you, He can supply; that all fulness is in Him by God's pleasure, so faith looks this way. Faith is a weapon. Faith is a shield. Faith will enable you to hold on, to fight the fight of faith; will enable you to walk uprightly before men, and make you wish to be right in the sight of God. The battle is long and often severe. As long as we live, while we are lively, more or less, we shall have some conflict, yes, some heavy conflict. Two heavens are not promised. A heaven hereafter is preceded by affliction and the wilderness, with occasional visitations of God in the night; with occasional songs that you have sweetly sung to the praise of His glorious grace in coming to you, and helping you with a little health in your soul, and making over to you some gracious word. Says the Apostle to Timothy, "My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Hard questions, hard matters - matters too hard for you - endure them. How?..... By casting them

on the Lord. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." Faith goes to Christ, looks to His blood, looks to His righteousness, looks to His sacrifice and to His priestly office and the intercession.

"Faith in the bleeding Lamb,
O what a gift is this!"

Well, how many of us are engaged in this battle? How many of us know our enemies? How many of us have the weapon of "All Prayer" - the shield of faith?

Let us look in the next place at the gracious word - 'overcometh' - "To him that overcometh." 'O', perhaps a goodly number of us may say mentally, 'here we stick, we are not overcomers.' And yet the judgement may not be true. When by precious faith in the bleeding Lamb, you have received some gracious encouragement, some holy promise, some view of Christ, some sense of His mercy, of His love, of His presence, enabling you to say with sweet hope, 'This is from the Lord, this is a token for good, here my soul melts, here I repent, here I rest, here I hope, here I can look for the Lord, here I can even believe that He is coming to me and that one day, it may be soon, He will speak that word of peace and life and love which I am seeking at His hand. And here I feel the Saviour dear to my soul, here I can submit to His dispensations, here I can say in my humble measure, "the will of the Lord be done." Can pray honestly, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth," in my heart, even as in heaven.' Is this person conquered? No; grace has got the victory. In a measure, grace has conquered. Now his faith can say, 'My soul attend,' - "Tis Jesus speaks the word." Faith is attentive. "Hear attentively, the noise ----- that goeth out of His mouth." "The sheep ----- know His voice." Faith says, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." This is not being banished, and the sinner knows it while he is in this state. Yes, he knows that the Lord is not far from him, and that he is not far from the Lord. "Overcometh."..... Yes, the foot shall tread down the lofty city. "The lofty city, He layeth it low; He layeth it low, even to the ground;" - then, not till then, then, - "the foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy." So, is Christ lifted up, so, does a sinner see victory coming to him, and feels the sweet fruits of Christ's power and love and

blood in his soul overcoming, from time to time. I believe there are many, given victories in this wilderness. I believe that when a sinner is revived in his spirit, when Christ appears again to the view of his faith, then there is a victory given; prayer is revived, hope is revived, love is made warm and fresh and sweet, faith is wonderfully strengthened, and even, the sinner may sing:-

"Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given;
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heaven."

Now a few words upon what the Lord has promised to give to these overcomers. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God." That is to come. And this word, as I understand it, embraces the whole of heaven and that eternity of bliss which the people of God are to enter and enjoy. The tree of life can be no other than Christ, - the tree that John saw when it was showed to him, as he relates in the latter part of this book. That grows on the bank of the river, the pure river of life, whose fruit is new every month. That is, perpetual fruit, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. And to these overcomers, Christ gives a right to eat of the tree of life, and a right to enter into the city. (Rev. 22, v. 14). In Genesis we read that God drove out the man. Eden's gate was closed against him for ever. We read in the Revelation that, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God and he shall go no more out." Dear friends, what will it be to reach that holy, happy place,

"Where sin no more defiles;
Where God unveils His blissful face,
And looks, and loves, and smiles;

Where Jesus, Son of man and God,
Triumphant from His wars,
Walks in rich garments, dipped in blood,
And shows His glorious scars."

Heaven becomes attractive to faith when it is manifested by the Holy Ghost. Heaven, not simply a place where no trouble is, but that abode of God, that will make it attractive. If you believe by precious, God-given faith, that God's abode is heaven, you will want to be there. In heaven there is no sin; - that will

make it attractive too. That may at some moment of your life, be the best thought of your heart, and rejoicing of your mind, that there is no sin there; nothing that defileth or maketh a lie shall enter into the holy city and into heaven. O to be free from our enemy, to be away from our bitterest foe, to escape all the pollutions of sin, all the influences of it, all its power; - this is sometimes attractive to faith. Jesus is there, manifesting Himself - the Lamb in the midst of the throne of God. He is there, and with Him are the four beasts and the four and twenty elders, and mind, they are the holy elect angels; these are there. And heaven is a place where there will be most glorious union with Christ, and perfect union in the Church - the bride, the Lamb's wife. Perfect righteousness is there, she is clothed in a garment pure; this is the righteousness of the saints. Living fountains are there, and, "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall ---- lead them unto living fountains of waters" and they shall thirst no more, No tears there. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." No persecuting sun to scorch is there. No sea of trouble is there; the new heavens and the new earth have no sea. He says - "There was no more sea." Nothing will trouble. There is no night there. "There shall be no night there," - no darkness, no distance, no desertion. God and His people always near each other. "A people near unto Him," - this honour have all the saints. Palms are there. John saw the saints there with palms in their hands. Victory is there, so palms are there. Watts, looking at them, says in his poetic vein:-

"I ask them whence their victory came,
They with united breath,
Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
Their triumph to His death."

All these fighters, are overcomers. "They overcame ---- by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." And a song is there. They sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. They sing, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." And they harp with their harps, and this is partaking, eating of "the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God." All that heaven affords, all the light of it, all the beauty of it, all the glory of it, all the bliss of it, all the eternity of God, - the

good of it. This is eating "of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." It is great to sit under the shadow of this tree of life while here below. "I sat down under His shadow with great delight." What will it be, to be where we need no shadow, as we need it here, but to be in the presence of that tree of life, to partake of its perpetual fruit. All the blessedness of the death of Christ; all the beauty and the glory of justification; all the sweetness of electing, eternal love; all the happiness of being delivered from the law and the curse and from sin. This is that, that I apprehend is included in this word - "to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." - "Paradise", meaning heaven. That happy place.

Now my dear friends, this is a poor word on a great subject, but may it be the means, in God's hands, of leading us to meditate on these great things. May we have the witness of faith given us to rise and see this holy happy place, and look upon the spirits of just men made perfect. One we have known, recently has entered this happy place - Mr. Dickens. All his conflicts over. All his pains at an end. All his tears dried, all his sorrows taken from him, and he, now with Adam and Eve and the holy apostles and the prophets, is singing the song of the Lamb. I felt very sweet satisfaction in burying him yesterday. Happy songster! May we join with all the rest of happy songsters. 'When shall we your singing and your chorus join?'

Well, heaven is a prepared place, and the people of God are prepared for it. They cannot make themselves ready or fit for it, but they are prepared. Prepared by divine love, by the blood of God with which He purchased the Church; by the righteousness that He gives to His children by the Holy Ghost, who is given them to quicken them and reveal Christ to them and form Him in their hearts, the hope of glory. A prepared people, made fit for heaven. Made "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" - a prepared place and a prepared people will fit well together. One would fear this, that if some of you were to be taken out of this life in your present state, there would be no heaven for you; even it may be that you are weary of hearing me this evening, talk of these things, because there is nothing like them in your hearts, nothing like them in your minds. There must be likeness to have enjoyment, and if you have no heavenly nature, how can you find

heaven to be heaven. God give each one, if it please Him, a heavenly nature, a new birth and living faith to fight a victory, in and by the blood of the Lamb, and then, an entrance into rest.

Amen.

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