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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on Sunday morning 14 September 1924

REVELATION 3 v 3

"Remember therefore how thou hast received  
and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore  
thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee  
as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour  
I will come upon thee"

We saw last Wednesday evening a little concerning this church that was dead, nevertheless that it had a name that it lived. A very solemn condition to be in, to appear to be what we are not; to profess life while yet we are dead; to be sunk into formality; to be held in the embrace of a sort of dead profession. And then we noticed the word to the angel, to be watchful. He had been asleep, had been lulled into carnal ease, and formality and had not fulfilled his office, had not done his duty as a pastor, had not walked before God, been self-seeking. Probably he had been beguiled into a sort of respectable religion with the world in his heart, and in some measure, in his life, and if this word of Christ entered into his conscience, what he must have suffered. When the light shone into his conscience, when he saw what he had been doing, how he had been living, how he had not cared for the flock committed to his care, had been indifferent to the insidious working of Satan transforming himself into an angel of light, what sorrow he must have felt. And this would stir him up greatly to obey His Lord and Master, to watch and to strengthen the things, the decayed things which were ready to die; they remained. And God testified to him that his works were not found perfect; there was not a full measure, but he was just a poor, short-coming, and hitherto more or less indifferent minister. And then through him the word was sent to the church. The church had become as the pastor. Like priest like people. And this would lead him to warn, to point out the condition of a dead church and the peril of that church, the perilous condition of that church, and to show that though no elected blood-bought sinner can ever be lost, yet a church state may be lost. That is absolutely clear in the cases of

these seven churches. Not one, so far as one can ascertain, remains, or has even the vestige of true christianity. This should be, God grant it may be, a solemn word to us. Are you really exercised? Do you feel, as in God's sight, as part of the church, that there is in you a proper, gracious, feeling after God; a turning away from vanity, from the world: Is the world crucified to you by the cross? Are you crucified to it? May the question not be resented, but bring a right examination of self.

And now Christ further addresses this minister and says to him "Remember therefore". Your case is not what it was. Your condition is not as good as it used to be. You had a good start, you have fallen from it. Now remember, remember the past. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent." Here are several things of great importance; may we be enabled to regard them.

First of all, remember, call back into your memory the past days in affliction. And in another case, Job did this - O, he said, that I were as in the months that are past. And when conviction fell into this minister's heart, would it not be the same with him. O that I were as in those days when I felt God sent me out, put my foot on the rock of the Scripture, and gave me testimonies in my own soul, and gave me the word, and a willing heart, with zeal and some knowledge to publish it. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard". Take this receiving - how thou hast received - in two ways. First, as it appears to be the intention of the Spirit in the text. How thou didst receive the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of God. Remember this. How did it come? How does any minister receive - I mean sent minister. Does he not receive salvation into a broken heart, Jesus Christ into his soul. Does he not receive by faith the bread and the water of life. Is not the doctrine of the Scripture made spirit and life to him? "The words that I speak unto you" says Christ "they are spirit and they are life". The man's conviction of sin, his reception of Christ by revelation, the word of pardon spoken on his conscience, the justification of his soul, and acceptance of his person in the righteousness of Christ, the indwelling, and teaching of the Eternal Spirit, the speaking home to his heart from time to time of the Word of God, the encouragements he got to go

forward, notwithstanding that he trembled again and again at the Word of God. Now these blessings had, as it were, been forgotten, they had passed from his memory, the influence of them had ceased to be with him, and instead of all that there was carnality, a kind of deadness, a carelessness of his own soul, and a disregard of the best interests of his flock. Now Christ calls his mind back again, says, Go back to those days when you washed your steps in butter, when I spoke to you, when I gave you a willing mind to preach notwithstanding the opposition of your nature; when I said, as it were, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" and you, out of your heart, said, "Here am I, send me"; when I told you to feed My sheep and My lambs; when I spoke to your heart, and said, Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry; and the poor man's conscience would be wounded. O, how deep would be the wound, how full of shame would he be, how grieved. What confessions would go out of his heart, Lord I have neglected all these things and turned away from Thee, and turned to vanity. Peter would suffer, would not he? He had professed more love to Christ than all his brother disciples. These may deny Thee, I will not. These may flee from Thee, I will go to prison with Thee, I will die with Thee. And then Peter sinned more than all of them. When Christ renewed him in that kind and beautiful manner which is related in the gospel of John, He said to Peter - "Lovest thou Me more than these?" more than these, thy fellow disciples - not the fishes and loaves, but the men, his brethren. "Lovest thou Me more than these?" Thou once saidst thou didst; wilt thou say that now? The Lord shake us out of self-confidence. You wont be the biggest if the Lord deals with you. No minister will be the biggest when he gets conviction of his neglects, his lack of watchfulness; when he looks upon the effect of his ministry as being more killing than quickening, more deadening than moving; when he sees the flock scattered in affection, and carnal, and worldly minded. He is to remember this and hold fast the things that come to his memory. He is to hold them fast as being given to him by the Lord, and his commission to preach, which he is ready to cast away through the sorrow of his heart, he is to hold fast, and to repent. Repentance here means another mind, and this other mind now he is to have and he finds it coming to him. He goes back to days that are past - O that I were as in those days. O that my simplicity of heart had remained with me, that I had feared God, and that the world

had never got hold of me as it did. These will be among the reflections of a minister, of a pastor to whom the Lord comes, finds him in a wrong case, a bad condition, sleeping, and as dead - not quite, but, as dead; quickens him, and calls to his mind the past. Every true minister will have something of this I think sooner or later, the sooner the better if I may so speak, for if the Lord lets him go on until grey hairs cover him, until he is seen to be an old man, and then comes to him and brings all the things that he has done, and the neglects of which he has been guilty, how the pulpit has not been that sacred, awful place to him it should have always been, how bitter, how heavy all this will be.

And now the minister, having God's dealings with him and directions to him, must go to the church, he must speak to the church, he must tell the church where she is, how she has fallen, how that she has a name that she lives but is dead; that her profession is just a formality, that her prayers are just dead prayers, that there is no exercise, no moving after God, no panting. Heavy preaching that would be, would it not? Can you not look into it, as it were, at least some of you, and say, that would be heavy for the people. For the minister - who would suit them, who had walked with them, who had gone with them into the world - for that minister to turn round and come into the pulpit and say to them, We are all wrong, we have had our faces to the world, we have not been crucified to it, neither is it crucified to us, and I have got in my heart that which makes me say this to you; you are all wrong. Speaking generally, this would be a very heavy message to that church. Go, now quickened, now helped, now drawn, Go and tell this church to remember its past. Go and tell them to remember how they received the gospel, how this individual, and that individual member of the church were called. God called this one, then He called that one, and then another and by His holy providence brought them into church fellowship. Go and tell them to remember how I dealt with them, and remember your early convictions, how near God was to you, how solemn He was to you, how dead was the world to you, how unattractive its things were to you. Remember how you justified God in the solemn condemnation that came into your conscience. A minister must call this to the memory of the people. Remember. Remember you once had solemn convictions, that you once had dealings with God by the dealings of God with you, and your

consciences spoke, and God spoke, and you responded, you justified Him. Remember how Christ came to you, the beauty that you saw in Him, the attraction of His Person, the attraction of His atonement, of His righteousness, of His goodness, of His intercession, the glory of His gospel. Paul, to the Thessalonians, speaks of this. He said, You know what manner of entering in we had unto you; you know what our preaching was, how that by means of it you turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come. And if this angel of the church in Sardis were to speak to these people he must have had a message of this kind. If God said to him, Now go to this people you have lulled to sleep; you have injured them grievously by your carnality - now go and speak to them and tell them to remember, call back to their memory what Christ was to them in their early days; how, like the first disciples, they received the doctrine of the Apostles gladly, and were baptised, and how that they continued steadfastly in the doctrine of the Apostles and in breaking of bread as they went from house to house thus engaged. Bring all this to their memory. Is it needful that I should bring these things to the memory of some of you? Did you ever receive Christ? How is it with you now? Can you remember the conjugal love you vowed to Him? Can you remember how dead the world was, how empty everything was as compared with Him? Can you remember how you rejoiced in Him, and how when you were brought into the church of the living God you were thankful for that mercy, you felt the least of all the members, not worthy to be among them, and how, notwithstanding all that, you gradually decayed. Secret prayer, for which there is no substitute in an external religion, you gradually decayed with respect to that. Then your conscience grew hard, and your heart became indifferent to the glorious Person and the work of the Lord Jesus. I say, is it needful that I should say such things to any of you? Let conscience answer, and if it says, Yes, then notice what Christ said: "Remember how thou hast received" - how the truth came, forget it not.

And secondly, we may say of this word "Remember how thou hast received and heard", remember the joy that came with it. Remember that, as Peter teaches us, it was with you. "In whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" That was joy, was it not? O, the greatness of this joy in a

glorious salvation, in a glorious Christ. Where is that now? What is the world? It was then as nothing - what is it now? Are you dead to it? Has it renewed its attractions to you? Is it, in some particulars respecting your position, a very attractive thing? Do you wish for a position, are you seeking wealth, at the expense of your conscience and communion with God? Remember that you did rejoice. Now if it be so with any of you, and you receive the word of Christ in conviction, where you did rejoice you will be very sorry today. You will grieve, you will mourn, and rightly so. But this is not a word of despair, it is not a cutting off. O, where the word of Christ comes with authority it is far from that. Hold fast. Hold fast what God gave to you. Sin has weakened you and weakened your hold of it, but it has not done away with the beauty, and the efficacy, and the glory of Christ. It has not at all weakened or emptied its efficiency and sufficiency. Hold it fast. Faith will go back to it and you will say, Lord I am not worthy of it, but He says, hold it fast, let it not go. Remember you have received it as a weak, poor, guilty, dying, perishing creature and how, when you received it, it brought you up from the dust, it lifted you off the dunghill, it set you amongst God's people, princes. It made you a prince. Remember all this and hold it fast. The fall of a person does not invalidate, destroy his interest. It has destroyed his enjoyment, has eaten up his strength, has carried him to a grievous distance from the Lord, but it has not, I say, destroyed his interest. So the Lord says, Remember, hold fast, keep it. Can you find this in your heart? Can you find in your heart a looking out to, and a desire to receive again, and hold fast, and rejoice in, the Lord Jesus? If you can it will be a very great mercy. We are poor Christians, at the best we are poor Christians, but some of us are far from being poor. We are ragged, and shameful; what a mercy if we can say, we are ashamed. We blush and lift up our face with shame, and are ashamed to lift it up because of our transgressions for we are before Thee in our trespasses and we cannot stand before Thee because of this. Hold fast.

How can a person hold fast that which he has let go in some way? How can he hold fast to the Person of Christ to whom, and to whose blessedness, and preciousness, he has, through the benumbing of sin, become more or less indifferent? In this way; when he has this

repentance working in him, when godly sorrow and shame and clearing of himself, and revenge against himself; in this he proves himself to be clear. In all this repentance he proves himself to be clear. And then the whispers, and the assistance, and the leading of the Eternal Spirit, will bring him in his affections, and his pantings, and his hunger, to the Lord, and by that he will find himself cleaving close to, though he cannot at this moment rejoice in, the Lord Jesus. Promises, directions, and truths opened, doctrines explained and spoken home to the heart; these will come back by the Remembrancer working, and then faith will go to them and see anew in them the beauty, and the blessedness, and the mercy of God.

Hold fast and repent. Repentance here is not that gloomy, terrible dread of hell that every child of God, more or less, at the beginning, mostly at the beginning, feels, but it is a sorrow, and grief for having grieved the Lord, for having done despite to His Spirit, for having vexed and grieved the Holy Spirit so that He is turned to be an enemy of this person in His workings, and in His reproofs. It is a repentance that makes you say before the Lord, I am sorry I have behaved, and misbehaved myself so grievously; sorry that I have turned my back on Thee, who didst come and turn Thy face and Thy favour to me; sorry that I became at any moment, and have been, indifferent to Thee in my affections; that I have not aimed at being nearer to Thee, and more and more like Thee. This is not a hard grief, tender; it makes you weep in your spirit and go softly, and thank God that He has been pleased so far to spare you, and that He has not cut you off in your sin. Repent. It is a mercy when a person repents, where repentance is needed; and it is a mercy when a church needs repentance, to have repentance there. If any of you feel that such a word as this really belongs to you, may you have faith to lay hold of it, receive it, and walk according to it. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard". It is like that word to the Ephesian church. Remember therefore how thou hast fallen, whence thou hast fallen, from thy first love, from thy zeal. Remember how that thou couldst not bear those which are evil in those good days of thy church life. So here, remember what thou hast fallen from. Dearly beloved friends, it will be a great mercy if we stand in need of such a word as this, to have it spoken to us. I bring it before you because I know I myself need it, and I doubt not some of you do, and

lest we should become as a dead church I would warn you. In doing this, I believe I am, in some small measure, occupying, as the word is: "Occupy till I come". I am occupying - feeling very feeble - the position which I hold and stand in here. I would watch for myself, and my own case, and I would watch for you, and watch your case. And look at this, turn not away from it; gloomy though it may seem, and heavy, turn not away from it. "Remember how thou hast received" what God did. How you heard, that you heard the voice of the shepherd. How you heard His promise, His gospel, His forgiveness, His justification. How you heard Him tell you not to fear. Remember all these things and hold them fast. What a mercy, that although the Lord said this church was dead, though it had a name to live, it was not a word to be taken absolutely, not an absolute word. If it had been a totally dead church, there would have been no word about repentance spoken to it.

"If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee". Now this sets before us two things, the peril of a church state when a church sinks into an evil condition. You remember that this solemn word is spoken to five of the seven churches. So much corrupted were they as to have brought into peril their church state. Is it needful that I should again make a distinction between the eternal safety of the people of God, and the peril of losing a church state? A visible church is liable to decay, to death, and the removal of its candlestick, that is the withdrawal of all gospel light, and life, and the presence of Christ. One wondrous mercy in a living church is the presence of Christ. John saw the Son of Man with those feet which were as if they burned in the furnace, feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace, and, said he: "I saw the Son of Man walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks". Golden, to show their value, not in the eyes of the world, but in God's estimation. Does the Lord value us? Do we, in any measure, answer to this word, "of great value", a golden candlestick? In the midst of the candlesticks was Christ with those feet which were as bright, burnished brass, discovering those things that were right, when showing also His condescension to come and hold communion with the church. Communion with a church would be the communication of His blessing, the working by the ministry, the nourishing up, in the



words of faith and good doctrine, the saints; their reception of the truth as the truth is in Jesus, the reviving of their hope, the strengthening of their faith, the confirming of their souls, and of the testimony of Christ in them; this would be necessary to the communion of the Lord Jesus with a church. Consider it and then ask yourselves the question, Is He among us? Is the Lord among us or no? He does rule gloriously before His ancients, He does speak to sinners, He does visit sinners. Do you hear Him speak? Does He convey any blessing to you? Is the ministry altogether dry? as dead? Is the Word, the Bible, like a dead letter? What an awful thing to you if it is so. But blessed be God if it is not so. When Christ walks among people something is seen, even Himself. Something is done. Something is said; mind this. A formal profession if it comes to prevail will leave you without any panting after God. It will leave you content with your profession. The absence of the Lord wont be grievous to you. The lack of power wont trouble you. A name to live will be enough. If the Lord is with you you will watch, you will be careful about yourself, about your brethren, about His glory. You will be careful not to offend. You will ask Him to keep you, to set a watch before your mouth, to keep the door of your lips, to hold up your goings in His ways, and his paths, to bless you with a tender conscience, with living faith, with discoveries of Himself, with gospel liberty, with the glorious liberty of the children of God. This is what you will have in your souls more or less distinctly if God is with you. Brotherly love will not be lacking. Concerning brotherly love, says Paul, ye need not that I speak to you, for ye are yourselves taught to love one another. Ye are taught of Him to do it. Philip was a good man, and what is the evidence of it in that case? It was this that he went to Antioch being sent to go and visit the brethren there, and when he came and had seen the grace of God he was glad, for he was a good man. And if you can see the grace of God in a person and not be glad then there is no evidence at that moment that you are a good man. And this is how brotherly love is drawn out and maintained from time to time.

"If therefore thou shalt not watch" If, notwithstanding this warning there be no efficacious work of the Spirit in you, you will not watch, and "If therefore thou shalt not watch" - if there be no repentance, no holding fast, no gracious remembrance of what God has

done, of how you received, and how you heard, then - "I will come on thee as a thief". The most solemn and serious loss that any church can sustain is the loss of Christ's working, and walking in the midst of it, and being silent in the pulpit. Think of it, I put this before you because I am persuaded by the Word of God, and also by some painful observations for some years now in the country, I am persuaded that churches, pastoral churches, may lose their church state. You will see Christ taking the old saints away, and young ones are not brought in. You will see that, a decay in that way, when Christ comes and calls home one who has been exercised closely, and mourned, and at last He says, Come home, and no fresh one. Old sheep taken away and young lambs not brought in; very solemn.

"I will come on thee as a thief". Not walking amongst them; they had not observed His absence, for they are dead. Now He is coming, not to walk among them, not to teach them, not to reprove them, not to bless them, but just as a thief comes. O when Christ comes to a people in that way, He just comes to take away what is good. His candlestick, He wont have it any longer abused, the light shall be removed. If there is no light of life in a church, then Christ has come as a thief and taken it away. He takes away the light when He removes a living ministry. If you, as a people, lose your hunger for truth, for grace, for God, for Christ, this is certain as a consequence, a result, that, though you will have a preacher in the pulpit, there will be no bread. He comes as a thief, just to steal, as it were take away what is good, and leave all the rest. All life, all conviction, all shining, all reproof, all these things which were with the church, which kept it in the fear of God, all of them taken away, and now at last the light is entirely removed. The form may be kept for a time, but there is nothing but that. "And thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee". And this would point to a dreadful security in that church as if some of them, hearing perhaps distantly something about this, should say, O but we are secure. We hold the doctrines that we ever held; we have not departed from the form of sound words; we keep it, we would not knowingly listen to anything that contradicts those words of soundness, and of God's truth. We do not suspect that that would happen to us that is here spoken of because we hold the truth. Ah what a deceiving that may be. How the devil may have come to some people and made them speak like

that without the slightest suspicion of there being wrong, any wrong, in their midst. Now may the Lord help us to look at this. It is important as far as I can see, very important, for us, that as a church we may be moved, stirred, quickened, and led to make close examination of ourselves as before this great God. Says He by Paul: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith;.....Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Corinthians 13 v 5). One way in which He may come as a thief is by allowing error to creep in so insidiously, so silently, that no-one suspects it. Cardinal doctrines may be questioned first and then denied. There may come in the awful heresy of the denial of the Sonship of Christ into a church. First of all the people may be indifferent to it. That glorious truth may have lost its attraction, and its power, and the people think, Well there is no need to make such an ado about that. So long as you believe in the Deity of Christ you are alright, and so they are lulled asleep in respect of that which is the very foundation of our hope. I believe it will be very difficult to show from Scripture that a person can believe in the Deity of Christ and deny His Sonship. And so other errors may come in, and just as the people receive them, as asleep; as they receive them without any questioning as to whether they are according to Scripture, and as to whether any power, or sanctifying influence come upon their souls by these things. And by this way, and in this way, error may come, death may come, that is Christ has come as a thief, for can these things come to a people and He not allow them, nor send them? He has judgements, as well as mercies, and all the abuse of truth that may be in our hearts He notices, and if we belong to Him He will show His resentment, and we shall suffer, but have grace to repent. But if we be not His people, except in a way of profession, then this will come to pass: "I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee". Security in a profession is one of the worst things you can have. He who feels secure does not pray to be kept. The man who has no sense of weakness and liability to fall, does not ask the Lord to hold up his goings in the paths of God. But when one feels weak, and ready to slip with his feet, hourly perhaps, then his cry is: "Hold Thou me up", make my conscience tender, deal with my soul, shine into my heart, speak to my heart, touch me by Thy gracious power, attract me by Thy beauty, and convey to my soul Thy pardons and Thy love.

Now I have just brought these things in a simple way before you, and if you feel, any of you, that there is an application of them to you, may the Lord help you to follow Huntington's good advice - Let conscience do its office. Be afraid of brow-beating your consciences, be afraid of saying, O but surely this is not coming to us. You do not know. "I will come on thee as a thief". Are you secured? You may be secure, but are you secured? Has Christ secured you? and does He deal with you, speak to you, and help you? Now He who searches the hearts knows how I have spoken these things to you. I want to be clear before Him. I would like, when alone, to have, as in His sight, His approval, His smile in respect of what I say here. You may forget all, or nearly all, I have said. You may not go into your rooms and ask about these things, but I have to do; I do not forget what I have spoken. I have to deal with the Lord about it afterwards. And now I would wish if it please Him to grant that insofar as there may be any reason for these words to be spoken, for the case of this church to be brought to your notice, there may be a real application to you, and to me, that as a people we may stand before God; search ourselves, examine ourselves, weigh our condition up according to the Scripture, this blessed Word, and may the Holy Ghost come and let us know through, and in, Jesus Christ, how we stand. If the standing be good, may He confirm it. If it be not good, may He show it to us, and give us repentance.

AMEN.