

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday evening 23 December 1923

ROMANS 15 v 29

"And I am sure that, when I come unto you,
I shall come in the fullness of the
blessing of the gospel of Christ"

The highest honour that God can confer upon a man is to make him a minister of the gospel. Whatever other honours may be given to men, this transcends all, to have the everlasting gospel given; to be made an angel or messenger to fly with that gospel, and preach it to every creature which is under heaven; the appointed lot and mission, and honour of all true ministers. And people listen, listen as it may seem to them for the most part to what is called a sermon, and if it, in any measure, gratifies them they are pleased, but the grand thing is for people to go to hear the gospel with cases, with sins, and fears, and troubles; with desires to know God, and to be brought nigh to Him by the blood of Christ. God knows how many of you have cases, and with what exercises you come. If you come, any of you, just as a custom, and to hear what is called a sermon, well I am certain you will be disappointed. But if you have cases, hunger, thirst. longings to know, and receive God in His Son into your hearts - something that He alone can do for you; something that He only can speak to you - then there will be hope that you may not always go away disappointed. I have nothing new. I have something old, something of the ancient things, and I hope at my time of life to be kept from attempting to bring new things to touch itching ears, if itching ears are present at any time with us. Old things, which began to be spoken by God in Eden defiled, to Adam, sinning, fallen - "The seed of the woman". That is the first declaration, intimation, and opening of the gospel of the grace of God, and from that day onward, till the canon of Scripture was completed - and God took many generations to write the Bible by different hands - from that time, I say onward, to the completion of the canon of Scripture, revelations were continually made, and added, one to another; not different, one from another, but one and another, and all of them together, making one

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wondrous whole. We have what are called the four Gospels, but then they are not different. The relation of them differs in some particulars; one is more full, and another less, but they are all one wondrous gospel. So throughout the blessed Word of God, the great gospel of God, the glorious gospel of the blessed God, the glorious gospel of Christ, the gospel of the kingdom. These are terms which the Spirit uses to set forth one doctrine, the doctrine of God in Christ. And this is the gospel which the Apostle Paul was ready to preach at Rome whenever it should please God to direct his steps there, and such was his confidence in God who employed him so remarkably, that he said he was sure that when he went to them, when he arrived there, he would be there, full of the blessing of the gospel of Christ; that is to say, the blessing of the gospel in its fullness would be preached by him. It is a great gospel. The Apostle Paul in this epistle says there is a remnant according to the election of grace, and, explaining what he means by that, he said, If it is not of grace then it will be of works. If it be of works, then it is no more of grace. Grace is to shine, grace alone is to shine in election, in redemption, in regeneration, in sanctification, in union with God, in knowledge of God, in communion with God, in an entrance into heaven. Grace, grace; grace in the building, grace shall bring forth the headstone, and there shall be shouting "Grace, grace unto it". It is a wonderful gospel. No victory over sin in any case but by the gospel. "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for" - this is the great reason - "ye are not under the law, but under grace." The law provokes sin, grace subdues it. The law tells people they are sinners, and, telling them that, and that they are condemned, they are provoked, and the commandment comes, and sin revives, and all manner of concupiscence works in the person by the law. But the gospel comes and lays its hold on a sin, and on all sin, and subdues it. Therefore it is a gospel of victories. The one victory obtained by Christ was on the cross when He said - "It is finished" - and he destroyed death, and hell; death and him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and from that time, yea, and before that time, whenever faith was in exercise in any child of God, grace subdued his sins. Whenever you get a victory over anything in your nature that is contrary to God, any lust, pride, vanity, worldliness, unbelief, hardness, and ingratitude, it is all of grace. Not one bit of work shall enter into this, work, that is to say, done by the creature. It is a wondrous gospel that reveals a new

heaven, and a new earth, for the former, the old heaven, and the old earth, are passed away, and in this new heaven, and new earth, there is no more sea, sea there, as in the Scripture in other places, representing trouble; wicked people like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, casting up mire and dirt. And in this new city there is no sea, no corruptions boiling, no storms raging, no waves of sin beating. Peace, perfect peace.

This morning I said that I would first of all speak of the gospel, and then, in the next place, speak of its fullness, and to this second part I now desire to draw your attention for a short time. The gospel has this quality in it, a fullness, a redundance, an abundance, a completeness, a repletion, that which shall satisfy the widest desires, the highest aspirations, the intensest hunger, the most consuming thirst. The gospel has this quality of fullness in it that shall never leave off the business it starts till all is finished, as God said to Jacob - "And behold I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of". And that is what the gospel is. It begins, it lays the foundation, it carries on the building, it finishes it. The headstone has this great shout "Grace, grace unto it".

Let us look at this fullness in two or three particulars. I am not fond of generalities; I am fond of particular things and want them for myself, and I want you also to have them. You may be lost in generalities. I know that if one handles particulars without the unction of the Spirit, the preaching may be tedious to you, but if the unction of the Spirit is present, then some particulars will be acceptable, attractive, and it will also be useful. The first particular then that I shall name is this, the love of God. This is part of the gospel; indeed one might say perhaps, truthfully, that the whole of the gospel is in love, the love of God in Christ Jesus. It is a full love, it is called everlasting love. It began in eternity. If one might say, it began, it rose, in the heart of the Trinity, and flowed down in a divine decree to certain persons. It will never leave them. You may have experienced it for fifty years, and if, when you come to the greatest trouble that can come to a person, namely death - for there is no trouble that will equal that

with respect to us as we are men; dissolution, to close your eyes on time, to leave everything that is precious to you, every earthly comfort; O to nature this is very repugnant, it is a great trouble, the greatest trouble that our nature can have; it is the last enemy to a saint - if, when you come to the last trouble and love failed you, it would not be a full gospel, a full love, would it? If, when the last help was needed it was not forthcoming; if, when the last touch, the last smile, the last word, and the last sense of support were wanting, and not forthcoming from God by the Spirit, I say it would not be a full love. O, but the love of Christ is full. "Having loved His Own which were in the world, He loved them to the end." He loves out of trouble, He loves into trouble. His love is jealous and sends trouble. It burns sometimes like a fire, but it is not to burn for ever. "Shall Thy jealousy burn for ever?" No. He says - "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem." He says "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee: and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned: neither shall the flame kindle upon thee". If you look into that remarkable chapter in Ezekiel, where love's first outflowing runs to a loathsome infant, dead, uncared for, and follow love's way with that person, quickened, washed, clothed, beautified, and enriched, and see how she spent all that God gave to her on idols, poured out His love as libations before idols, and see how she was reproved, and rebuked, and dealt with for all her wickedness; then come to the end. And what was the end? Was it, I am tired of you, I will have nothing more to do with you? You are wayward, and stubborn, and foolish, and I will have nothing more to do with you. No, it was not that; it was this - Thou shalt be ashamed "and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done...." That was full love, was not it? And that is the love that a sinner needs, and that is the love that he is to receive, a full love that will not give him up; that will chasten him betimes, and deal with him sternly, and firmly, that will be determined that the child shall learn a lesson, that the servant shall do His service, that the soldier shall fight His battles, that the pilgrim shall be content from time to time with pilgrim fare, and a pilgrim's prospect. And love shall carry on the work, love shall flow out in acts of sweetness, acts of comfort, acts of sustaining

grace. Love shall flow out in these ways, and last for ever and ever. It is a full love, my friends. It is a great thing to die young and go to heaven. It is a wonderful thing to see one called by grace and then quickly taken home, like the dying thief, and others, some of whom we have known, but if people do live, if they are in the wilderness for forty years, if they can go back in their memories and are led back sometimes for more than that time, they can see - O what can they see? - sins - "Sins immense as is the sea". But is that all? No. I live a good deal in the past nowadays, and I see so much that I can scarcely hold my face up for shame, and yet sometimes I see so much that lifts my soul up. O what a God I have had. What a Christ has been with me. What a Spirit has helped me. Those of you who are old, and grey-headed in the ways of God, can join with me in this, and say here, we have proved that we have got a faithful lover who has never left us, never left us. "I will not leave thee altogether unpunished". "But I will correct thee in measure". Love has measured that. Love has decided that. Love has weighed out the pain. Love has ordered the steps. Love has used the rod, steeped it in the atonement of Christ and made it soft. And will this love fail at last? No my friends. So it was a full gospel that Paul preached, and that every minister of the Lord Jesus Christ preaches by the Holy Spirit assisting him according to the measure of grace given to him.

It is, in the next place, a full gospel in respect to a sinner's standing before, and with, God, standing in righteousness, and holiness. God is able to make the weak one stand. There is no weakness in justification, though there is great weakness in a justified person. There is no weakness in divine holiness imputed, but there is a great weakness in experimental holiness often. There is no weakness in God. God is able to make him stand. O the grace of God, the rich grace, the abounding grace of God. It is enough for trouble. "My grace" said Jesus Christ to an afflicted Apostle Paul, "is sufficient for thee". Thou art not sufficient for thyself. Thou art not sufficient to carry this burden, to bear this provoking, irritating cross, this thorn in the flesh, but "My grace" - of which I am full, of which I have the fullness - "is sufficient" I will give it out in a measure sufficient for you to be reconciled to this thorn in the flesh, and more than that, to glory in your infirmities. And so it is with every child of God. He gives us enough grace, grace

to say sometimes - "Thy will be done". Grace to say sometimes -

It is the Lord enthroned in light
Whose claims are all divine
Who has an undisputed right
To govern me and mine

Grace to perceive infinite wisdom ordering every step. O, the grace of God is full. Remember what the Apostle Paul says to the Colossians - "It pleased the Father that in Him - Jesus Christ - all fullness should dwell." The fullness of grace we cannot exhaust. This grace, it shines, it works, it speaks, it comforts, it visits, it draws, it attracts, it sustains, it nourishes. Grace is grace, work is work, and the two are opposite each to the other, and can never unite. Grace comes and turns out evil. Grace comes and sustains a weak creature. Grace comes and sets before him an amazingly beautiful prospect. O the sweetness, the sufficiency, the power, the glory, of the grace of God. The fullness of the gospel.

Grace reigns to pardon crimson sins

Grace is not to be put off, my friends. It hates sins, if one may speak so, it hates sin, but it will visit sinners, help sinners, comfort sinners, speak peace to sinners; tell them of God, what He is, what He has, what He has purposed, what place He has prepared for those He loves. So there is a fullness in grace. Lean on it, poor, weak sinner. Look to it, O empty sinner. It is quite full enough for you. Rest upon the promise He has spoken and look for the fulfilment, for God is faithful, He will perform that which He has promised.

There is a fullness of righteousness in the gospel. I drew your attention this morning to the expression - "the righteousness of God". The Apostle Paul has it in the Philippians as well as in the Corinthians. He longed for himself, to be found having on the righteousness of Christ, not of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Now this is full, is not on a sinner today, and taken off tomorrow because he has behaved himself badly. Sin will bring a rod, but it will never make the sinner destitute of this righteousness, never. You will not

find sin easy and cheap, but you will find an abiding justification if you are justified. "Justified from all things", that is, all sins, all deficiencies, justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. Wide as the need of a sinner, pure as the light of God, deep as the guilt of a sinner, is this righteousness. Justice shines and is mild, and on the side of a justified person. If you could be one moment without it you would fall back, in that moment, into condemnation. But, says the Apostle - "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus". There is no condemnation. He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and sinner, this seen by faith will make you so to love this righteousness, and so to love Him who is righteousness, that you will wish never to offend Him. They say "Let us do evil that good may come". Says the Apostle Paul of all such their damnation is just. We who know a little of justification know the holy effect of it upon the spirit. We know that it makes us hate every false way, and every sin. We know that when we are consciously justified, then also we are consciously anxious to live a life of godliness, to walk in all humbleness of mind, and uprightness of heart before, and with, God. Is not that true? You know it is who know what righteousness is. And dear friends, we are to live for that, and therefore we must have an everlasting righteousness, and that is Christ's. He brought in everlasting righteousness. No end to it. Once applied, once given, always on. Not always realised and enjoyed, but always on, so as that God sees in the justified person no fault. The fullness of righteousness is the glory of the gospel.

And O, let me say also this is the fullness of the gospel in one particular, namely the power of God. One moment without this, and what would become of us? The God of all grace and power knows this, and He says - "I will keep it night and day, lest any hurt it". He keeps it by power. His omnipotence is around a saint, and around the church. It is beneath the saint, and beneath the church. It is the omnipotence that works wonders, wonders in the heart, wonders in providence, wonders in experience. Every child of God has some understanding in his heart and experience of the power of God. Paul said he gloried in his infirmity that the power of Christ might rest upon him. When the power of Christ rests on you, then you are godly, you are humble, you are content, you are thankful, you are

affectionate; you cleave to Him, you follow Him, you trust Him, you commit your care to Him, you cast your burden on Him, you look to Him to supply you. For everything, you see a fullness in Christ. You believe - by that faith there is in the power of God - that Christ has everything you can need. Is it not wonderful when you can, by the grace of the Spirit, take your bad case, your wicked heart, your persistent sins, your boiling corruptions, to the Lord, and ask Him to do for you what He has promised to do for His people. Ask Him to subdue your iniquities, to cast your sins behind His back, to sustain you in the conflict, to hold you up in your afflictions, and to give you to realise that "Underneath are the everlasting arms". The trouble is to get low enough for them. We are a good deal too strong for the most part. We have too much of that spirit in us that Solomon speaks of when he says "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity". So, after a time, God gives the man a wound. "A wounded spirit who can bear". Then he has to go to Christ, and faith takes him to Christ, for His omnipotence. "Hold Thou me up". "Hold up my goings in Thy paths". Hold me up in faith. Let faith sustain me as being sustained by Thyself. Keep me in the fear of God. My brethren, omnipotence is a part of the fullness of the gospel. Here is an abundance. Two enemies we have in particular, and these two are to come under the power of Christ. The first is sin, the second is the devil. Sin is to be subdued. Satan is to be put under the feet of the saint shortly. "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly". The fullness of the gospel of Christ.

Now let me say one word more, namely this, there is a fullness of pleasure, a fullness of pleasure in the gospel. Probably you say, out of a painful experience, you have but little pleasure here. Sin mars everything. It is a blight on the whole world. It is a blight in every saint of God. But does that mean that there are no pleasures to be had here by the people of God? No. One moment's intercourse with Christ is a pleasure that can never be adequately expressed. A sense of His smile, a touch of His mercy, a feeling that He loves you, a sense of pardon, will give joys like those above. Christ said His Father would show Him the path of life, and that there were, at the Father's right hand, pleasures for evermore, and these do run down to sinners. You can be pained, without faith. You can be burdened and not feel your burden in a good sense. You can rise sometimes, and do

rise, above all the distressing things of your life, and bless God for His love, and mercy, and grace manifested to you. There is joy in God, friends, though there is none in self. We are not to joy in anything here, but we may, and so sometimes, joy in God. It is a secret pleasure. It is a sacred pleasure. There is that in it that you cannot express, and the more you have of it, the more you take it, as it were, into secret places to enjoy it, and bless God for it. There is something peculiar in this pleasure. It is spiritual, it rises above all temporal troubles. "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God" says the Apostle Paul, and this is that, that Paul prays for in this chapter. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." What an amazing thing it is. Joy at a sight of Christ. Joy at a sight of His righteousness, at a sight of the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness; and rejoice in hope that one day you will be utterly, entirely, eternally free from the body of sin and death, and all things that afflict. A fullness of pleasure. I can tell you this much, I would not part with the little pleasure of a spiritual kind that I get from time to time for all the wealth and the honour of this world, as far as I can understand such an expression. What an amazing thing it is, is it not, that any sinner should have his eyes, and heart, and the affections drawn after God, and that God should come and tell him that He loves him, and say to him - "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions as a thick cloud, and as a cloud thy sins". That God should say it to a sinner, that He should let that sinner know that He loves him, that He will never leave Him nor forsake Him.

And now I will try to bring up the whole of what I have said, and the whole of what is in the gospel that I cannot say - I cannot say much, because I do not know much; I cannot say much because the subject is infinite in its greatness, its durability, and its glory - but I say I will bring the whole up with this, it is the gospel of Christ's presence, the gospel of Christ's presence. "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world". Now that presence is to be known, is to be enjoyed, and it is found in these ways. First, in secret, when in prayer and supplication. Christ is pleased, now and again, to draw near to you, and draw your heart to Him, and let you know that you are not forgotten of Him. You may have been a time

without His presence, and suspicions have arisen in your heart, and you have thought - Shall I never see Him? Shall I never have His presence? - then He comes sweetly, and sovereignly to you, pays you a love visit - transient it may be; real it is, sweet it is, powerful it is, conforming you to His image. That is one way. Seek Him in secret. A public religion, if it be real, is a good thing - that is, a religion that commends itself to all who see you by reason of your uprightness - but that religion which is best, sweetest, most wonderful, most powerful, is in secret. There Christ comes; there He lets you see His smiling face; there He drops in His mercy; there He speaks His gracious words. Nothing can be a substitute for this secret religion in the secret presence of Christ. Nothing can be a substitute for it. It just ravishes the soul. You may lack all words, but that does not matter. When you get Him in your heart, when you embrace Him in the little arms of your faith, when you are assured of His presence, of His love, of your interest in Him, of His interest in you, then you are happy. You are happy, because you are holy in Him. It is found next sometimes in the Scriptures, when reading the Word of God, or perhaps not reading it, but He speaks a word to you, and that is a blessed way by which He comes into your heart, and you say, Why! I found Him in my heart. He was in the Word, the word of promise, the word that He would never leave me nor forsake me. The word by which He told me that He would supply all my needs out of His own fullness. The word whereby I knew that He pitied my weakness, understood my griefs, and forgave my sins; that He would be with me to the very end; that the fire, the fiery trial should not consume me; that the waters of sorrow should not drown me; that He would bless me. A word such as that spoken to Abraham - "Surely in blessing I will bless thee". Then you have said, as the church said, - "The voice of my Beloved, behold He cometh" and faith opens her arms to receive Him. See how He was with Jacob. He met Jacob in the wilderness, He spoke to him, He entered into a Covenant with him, and concluded by saying - "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" Twenty years of experience of that, in different ways, and different trials, and tribulations, Jacob comes back, and what does he say in a new trouble? "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant: for with my staff I passed over this Jordan" He only had that but he had in his heart the blessed word, the

presence of His God. I passed over this Jordan a lonely man, and yet not alone. I have been twenty years in trouble, and difficulties. Thou hast been with me and Thou hast said to me, Return to thy father's house and I will be with thee. Now Lord, Esau is coming, and I am afraid of him, as who would not be in the same case. I am afraid of him. O, but the angel came, a man came and wrestled with him and gave Jacob power over himself. "I will not let thee go" said Jacob to him, "except Thou bless me". Hosea said, "he had power over the angel and prevailed." God was with him, He was with him. Do you know this? Have you found Him with you in trouble, in flood, in flame, in conflict with sin, with temptation? There is a fullness here, "The fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ".

Sometimes He is found in the ministry, and by it, as I trust and believe some of you know here. When coming with a case, with fears, with want, perhaps with death, with coldness, and a temptation, feeling that you could only sit and sin unless the Lord came to you, have not you sometimes found Him, so that you have said, Why, I love the place like another person. That word is true - "Behold I make all things new". He new creates the feelings, comes and fills the empty place. I was going to say, He loves an empty place. There is some room for Him there. There is no room for Him in you who are full, but in us who are empty there is room, and He comes. He comes sometimes in the ministry. How He went with Paul. O, if He could only be pleased in some little measure to be with me when I preach. How, I say, He went with Paul and, as he said to the Thessalonians, they knew, they remembered his manner of entering in unto them. What was it? The power of the Holy Ghost, and they received the word with much affliction, but with joy of the Holy Ghost, and they turned from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven. They found Him in the ministry.

Now lastly, they are to find Him in death. "I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee". Surely that means right to the end, and will He, when the end comes, leave us?

Can He have taught me to trust in His Name
And thus far have brought me to put me to shame?

I do believe sometimes He wont leave me when I come to that day that I am looking forward to now and ought to do, considering my age. I think He will be with me. I believe He will be, now and again. I should like to be able to say He is with me, if I can say nothing else. O to have God with us. So this is the fullness of the gospel as it is here known.

But now I should be very short if I stopped here, in this my last word. I want to rise, as far as speaking is concerned, into Eternity. Think of the chapter which I read. John saw the city of God coming out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. He saw her as a bride adorned for her husband. He saw the city four square in all its beauty, and its glory. He saw heaven, with its own light, and own Sun. He saw Him as the place of worship, and no created temple there. Beginning in time, as to all experience, the living family of heaven shall rise into Eternity, and enter heaven, not to see a new thing, but to see that in its fullness of which they get glimpses here, and to enjoy Him, and the pleasures which are at His right hand for ever. Says Paul - When I come I am certain of this, that the gospel which I have preached elsewhere, of which I am not ashamed, I shall preach to you in its fullness. Nothing short. God in His love, God in His atoning work, God in His sovereign grace in the heart, God in His goodness making Himself known from time to time. "This God is our God for ever and ever, and He will be our Guide even unto death".

AMEN.