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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 16 February 1927

ROMANS 8 v 20

"For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly
but by reason of Him who hath subjected the
same in hope"

Holy Scripture is wonderful, beautiful in its consistency; it is one glorious whole. It pleased God to take generations to compose it, to compose it under different, vastly different circumstances, but when He had composed it, it was one wonderful Word. We are apt, probably, to take it very much piecemeal, as we read a chapter here and a chapter there, and whichever part it pleases God to use to speak to us, that part belongs to us in a peculiar manner. That part expresses to us the mind of God with respect to us in some particulars. It may be in respect to some trouble, some affliction, some smile, some prosperity, some need of a rod and some need of comfort, but whatever it may be that God says, out of whatever part of the Bible it pleases Him to speak to us, that is His Word to us and that gives us an understanding and makes us wiser than some of our teachers, wiser than the ancients. And, on that ground, I would say that no child of God need be discouraged. No child of God needs to feel that he does not know anything. When looking at the Scripture and seeing it to be so great and so wonderful, so wide in its reach, so deep in its teachings, so high and glorious in all its doctrines, there is no need for anyone to say - I do not know the Bible - if God has spoken one single word out of the Bible to that person. Hold fast what you have got. Hold fast every word God has spoken to you. Give not up, at the dictation of the devil, anything the Lord has said to you. Notwithstanding, it is a mercy if we feel, while enabled to hold fast what He has given to us, a desire to know more of His word and to see the blessed and white fields, and the green pastures, and the still waters, and the streams from the river of water of life, flowing in the Holy Scriptures. I do not know much - I say that out of a feeling, a sincere feeling, of the truth of it - I do not know much of the Bible. I thought, many years ago, and I believed - and sometimes

still believe - that God did open my eyes to see, as in a moment, the doctrine of the eternal truth when I was in the darkness of error and loved my own free-will and all that. God brought my heart down in labour and I shall never forget, I trust, nor give up that that He, in a moment, as it were, wrought in my heart and understanding, and I trust He will never let me give up what He taught me, never let me belittle any doctrine that then, and since then, from time to time, He opened to my heart and understanding. But it is true, I do not know much. O what a mercy to know your ignorance. Do not be afraid of your ignorance. You need not be afraid of it so long as you are on your knees, saying, "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." So long as you can pray, "That which I see not teach Thou me". We shall need divine teaching as long as we are breathing in this world. O, what will be opened to our eyes when, as we hope, we reach heaven. What God will show to us then, the glories of Emmanuel, the delight of the temple not made with hands, in which we shall worship, and the pure light in which we shall walk in that city, in the street of that wondrous city. God Himself the light, Himself the temple, Himself the glory, opening to the eyes of all there more and more of what He is. I have often thought of, and mentioned, that passage to you in the Revelations, when the Lord Jesus, the Lamb, is in the midst of that company, that number that no man can number, leading them to living fountains of waters, and they shall thirst no more, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. And I have thought that those living fountains of waters must be the amazing, uninterrupted and glorious manifestations and emanations of the love and grace and beauty and blessedness of the Lord God in Jesus Christ. May our eyes see Him, may our hearts know that wondrous fountain of life, and may we walk with Him. It will be a great thing to get out of this life, but while in it, it is a great thing to get something from God, some communication, some blessing. I ought not, perhaps, to have taken so much time with these general remarks only I am led to them by the consideration of this chapter in connection with the text. The text is a much contraverted one, but it seems to me to belong to the beautiful chapter as a whole and not to be detached from it, as to its spiritual significance, at all or in any way. The chapter as a whole is very wonderful; how beautifully it opens. We speak of the chapter because, though it is a modern invention - the dividing of the Bible into chapters and verses - it is a very convenient thing; very,

very, convenient for us, and this chapter, the 8th, following closely on the 7th, wherein you have the conflict of the Apostle and his victory. Here we have the beginning of the state, the happy state, of the Lord's people. Without condemnation, that they have often felt; that that the law brought them into; that that they could not escape. O, the condition of man under the law is inescapable, as to himself, but now the wisdom and goodness and sovereign grace and eternal love of God shine here. There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. Not under the law - they are delivered from that - in Christ Jesus. In Him by eternal election, given to Him by the Father, predestinated to the adoption of children unto God by Jesus Christ. Put there, fixed there; they are united. They are invested with the high privilege of sons; a state which precedes justification in the purpose of God. It does not precede justification in experience. Justification ordinarily comes before a sense of sonship, but in eternal love, this sonship precedes justification. Then the Apostle, by the Spirit, who would cut off all that licentiousness of our wicked nature, that would turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, gives us striking evidences of what it is to be in Christ Jesus, to be born again; to walk after the Spirit, to mind the things of the Spirit; to be spiritually minded, not to walk in the flesh, for all who do not walk in the Spirit are under the law and in condemnation. It is well for us to observe it. It may be a great encouragement to us, to you who know what Paul says to the Galatians - "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh and these are contrary the one to the other so that ye cannot do the things that ye would". I am glad of that verese; it cuts both ways. Sin in me cannot have its way, and alas, grace for a time cannot always have its way, but there is the conflict. O, when you feel unable to do what is right, and even feel yourself almost as unwilling, see if you can find yourself in that verse "the Spirit lusteth against the flesh". A resistance, a real resistance, a strong cry against the violence that sin offers to you. Now, says Paul, a man who is in Christ Jesus does not walk after the flesh. He may be dragged by the flesh, he may be brought into captivity by the flesh. He may be very much injured and hurt and pained by the flesh. He may get defilement by the flesh, alas, who does not. But notice it, he does not walk after it; he comes into the 1st Psalm - Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, who standeth

not in the way of sinners; who does not sit in the seat of the scornful. Notice it, O tried sinner, notice it. You think you are wrong, and are apt to cut yourself off. See this - do you walk after the flesh? When the flesh entices you to some sin, do you consent? No, you can say honestly before the Lord sometimes - I do not consent to it. Then the day may come when God will give you wisdom to say with the Apostle Paul - "It is no more I that do it" The hidden man of the heart speaks - I do not do it; I do not consent to it. I wish I were rid of this enemy, this devil of sin in my nature. Then, having set forth these things, he gives a distinction between flesh and spirit in one short verse. "So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh" Now this is for our encouragement; may the Spirit instruct us in it. "Not in the flesh". What a mercy it is not to be in the flesh. We are in the body, but the flesh here is to be understood to be the carnal mind, which is enmity against God. Flesh and Spirit are thus opposed to each other - the new man, the hidden man of the heart, created in righteousness and true holiness, after the image of Him that created him, and the flesh, the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. Now, dear children of God, put yourselves by the side of these testimonies. Look at the standard, stand by it, come to the balance, put yourself in it, and when you put yourself in it you, will say - Bless God, I come out right; I am in the right scale. And, when you put yourself to the standard say - By the mercy of God I am straight with it. Then the Apostle declares the relationship of the people of God. He says you are children, and not only children, but you know it. Now this may not be the case with all of us because the way they knew it was this, that the Spirit bore witness, His own infallible witness, with their spirits that they were the children of God. What a mercy. Have I a Father in heaven? Have you a Father in heaven? Then if your father and your mother here forsake you, your heavenly Father will take you up. A Father in heaven to care for you. Then he goes further and says - Ye are not only children of God, but you are heirs of God. Adoption in the east was a legal thing in every case and the adopted child took rank with the natural children, and he was an heir. We, poor Gentile things, vile creatures, predestinated to the adoption of children and born again and blessed, as some of you have been, with the Spirit of adoption. I hope I shall never forget the day and the circumstances when that favour came to me. "Likewise the

Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit". Not simply a reflection of a truth upon your soul, but a direct witness, a testimony sweet and clear. Many truths may come as holy, sweet reflections, from God, and comforters, but this is more than that. It is a direct testimony of the Holy Ghost in the soul crying there "Abba Father", and the sinner says "Abba Father" and the Father owns the kindred. This person is an heir of God. O to be an heir of a parent who owns many thousands may seem, and is, naturally, a great thing, but to be the heir of God - O what an amazing thing - and a joint heir with Christ Jesus. Says Paul to the Hebrews, God appointed Him Heir of all things. And, says the Word here - You are joint heirs with Christ. Everything, the love of God, sovereign grace, the election of Christ and all the benefits of that grace given to Christ before the world began, to save His people, omnipotence in human nature, wisdom divine, compassion infinite, High-priesthood and prevailing intercession, and all the blessings of everlasting salvation, these, these are the mercies and the state of heirs and joint heirs with Christ. Heirs to all the covenant blessings - the covenant which is ordered in all things and sure - and of the promises which are given in the covenant to the Lord Jesus, and the Spirit who was given to Him in the covenant and is never to depart from Him. Heirs of those promises and heirs of that Holy Spirit of God. Who needs fear being poor if he is a child of God? Yet I am afraid of poverty; you are afraid. If you possess a little you do not want to lose it. O, but how many heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ have gone to heaven from the workhouse, through the fire, stripped of all, yet rich to all the intents of bliss. Why, says Paul to the Corinthians - "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death, all things are yours and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's". May these mercies come falling into our souls like the sweet, soft rain of God, as it is said - "My doctrine shall drop as the rain and My speech shall distil as the dew".

And, having brought these things before us, he says, if we suffer with Him, if these heirs - they are like minors, as in the Galatians we are told - these are to suffer with the Lord Jesus. He had ended His sufferings as to His Person, but His sons are to suffer with Him, and fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ's body. If we suffer with Him we shall be also

glorified together. And then Paul expresses in other words what he said to the Corinthians. There he said - "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." You see your afflictions and feel them. You see your mortifications and see many things that come upon you and make you reel and stagger like a drunken man, until you come to your wit's end. You see these things. O, but there is a hand that sometimes comes to you and touches you. There is a light that sometimes shines on you and a hand guides you away from seen things, and a light shines on unseen things and you look on them and say, O, but the things I have been looking at, they are only for a moment. Though heavy, they are but light comparatively, while I look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. This may come to a child of God just in his spiritual infancy, and he may say, though a young man, well, what a poor empty life this is. What an empty world this is. But what makes him say so? Why, he says, I have got a sight of God; I have got a sight of God in Christ. I have got a living hope and feeling in my soul that He is my God, and what more can I want. "I must have", says the hymnwriter "all things and abound, while God is God to me". Here we have the same truth - "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time" - and Paul was a great sufferer for Christ - "are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us". You cannot put the two together in a way of comparison. Light cannot be compared with darkness; life cannot be compared with death. They are different absolutely. They are not worthy to be mentioned by the side of what is to come, "the glory which shall be revealed in us". "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who had subjected the same in hope". This creature. Some will have that this creature, and the whole creation in another verse in this chapter, mean the whole of the creation, the animal creation and all things, but there is this one thing against it, namely that the creature of the text is subject to vanity in hope, and the proportion of faith shows this. The proportion of faith is the measure of faith

or the rule of faith in the Scriptures. The rule of faith never will allow you, if you walk according to it, to place one Scripture in opposition to another Scripture; there is a oneness in the whole. And we find, in the proportion of faith, this, that the new creature is spoken of in terms throughout the Scriptures very much alike. Created in Christ Jesus in righteousness and true holiness after the image of Him that created him. And in the Corinthians Paul says "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature". Put off the old man, again, says Paul, and put on the new man which is created in righteousness after the image of Him that created him. And this creature, this new creature, is also called the hidden man of the heart, the new man. Here we have the same. If we are new creatures, born again of the Spirit, it is a new creation, entirely different from the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. And the Apostle here tells us a great and an experimental truth when he says that the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly. Come to your own hearts. Vanity in the Scripture is the same thing as sin; emptiness. Whatever is wrong or empty of God is vanity. Wherever a man is entirely empty of God, he is full of sin; that is, he is a poor, vain man. Vain man would be wise though he be born like a wild ass's colt. Now you who have this new creature in you can understand painfully, and mournfully will say, sometimes, I am not willing that it should be so. Some sin rises and you say, I am not willing to be under its power. Some temper rises suddenly, and carries you away in a boiling passion. It may be only within, nobody may see it or hear it, but there it is, and in your right minds you kneel before God and confess your sin, and say, Lord, it is not my mind, it is not my wish that I should be so, that I should do this. Some piece of worldliness comes into your heart and you hanker after what is not good or right, but there is a protest in you against it, is not there? Is not there a protest? Cannot you, do not you, say, Lord I would not have this? Do save me from this.

"Subject to vanity, not willingly". Let us look at this "not willingly", for a minute. You go to the 7th chapter of this Epistle and there was the Apostle Paul, that great saint, one of the greatest, if not the greatest saint that ever lived, and he tells us of his case. He gives us a little of his experience. He says "I am carnal"; "I am sold under sin". "The good that I would" - that is, I would walk

in God's holy, clean fear; I would believe in Him; I would love Him with all my heart and mind; I would never have a contrary thought against Him or His revealed will, or His holy infinite nature - "but the good that I would, I do not, and the evil I would not" - the infidelity, the hardness, the ingratitude, the lust, the pride, the vanity of my nature - "the evil that I would not, that I do". It rises, it assaults me, it takes me by surprise and it does this; it brings me into captivity. Now that captivity should be a good word to us. It is a painful experience, but mind, a captive has no will, no choice in his captivity. He did not voluntarily go into captivity. Do you know, one who is taken into captivity is taken by violence, taken against his will. The thief comes into your house and he takes your jewels, he takes things which are yours and prized by you. You may see him do it but he has bound your hands. He may have put a gag in your mouth that you can neither stretch out a hand to oppose him or utter a word to sound an alarm, but it was this, captivity, not willingness. You do not will that he should take these things, that he should bind your hands, that he should close your mouth. So spiritually, we are carried into captivity. Says Paul, I am a captive, what shall I do? O wretched man, what shall I do? Now the creature speaks, the new creature speaks, and when he had said "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" faith in that new creature began to move and it reached God and he said I thank God, so then I myself, the Apostle Paul, the regenerated man, I myself serve the law of God with my mind; with the flesh, the old man, the law of sin. Are you subject to vanity? Have you got somebody in the house you cannot turn out? The thief who is always robbing, a lion who is always tearing you, a lust that is always hurting you and defiling you? Have you got somebody who comes and binds you hand and foot and wont let you pray? Sometimes, to your own feelings, puts a gag on your mouth? Somebody who wont give way, whom you cannot drive or turn out? "Not willingly". "Not willingly", think of it. O, afflicted saint, think of it. "Not willingly". Who has subjected you to it? This is a point. Who is it who has subjected you to this bondage, this vanity? God Himself. There is a difference between a person sinning wilfully and a poor afflicted child of God having vanity and death and many evils in him and he protesting and saying "I wish I were rid of these things. Why has God subjected His people to vanity against their will? How is it that a child of God

cannot have his own way here? He will have it hereafter, why not here? He walks at large sometimes. He is a free man, Christ's freed man. How is it then that he is subject to evils? God has subjected. And the reason is this, that He has subjected him in hope, for certain ends. "By reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope". There is a reason in God; I can only name it. Now there is a reason in God. "By reason of Him" or, for His sake, or, on His account, as it may be read. On His account the new creature is subjected to vanity. And I think I may say this safely - it seems to me that the Scripture warrants me, and I have a hope that I know just a little, have got an inkling of it in my own soul - the reason is, that sovereign grace may more abound and shine. That, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. That there shall be no reason for boasting in sin or the devil, for God shall overcome both and make His grace shine and be much more illustrious in the heart and view of all in whom it works its mighty triumphs, its glorious works. Why, dear friends, the Apostle Paul in the Philippians tells us there a little more of his experience and his desires and aims. Said he, I want to apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus my Lord. And in the Corinthians he gives us a beautiful example and illustration of this text where he says - "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelation given unto me". He twice says it - "Lest I should be exalted above measure there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me". And there was that Apostle and great child of God subjected to that vanity by reason of Him who would make His grace shine more gloriously by that thorn than without it. Christ said to him - "My grace is sufficient for thee". Says the Apostle, therefore I gladly glory in my infirmity. I am glad to have this thorn, that I might get this grace. I would rather have the thorn with this grace, than miss the thorn and miss the grace. Beside which, the power of Christ rests on me, it rests on me in a way and measure it could not without this thorn. My grace shall be sufficient for you to bear it patiently, to bear the pain. And also, you are subjected to this by the Lord, but you are subjected in hope, hope of getting rid, one day - and not for a season only, but for ever - of the thorn. Hope that one day Satan will leave you, not for a season, as he left the Lord Jesus - and he may often have left us for a season - but for ever, and ever. Hope that the sins, which now plague us, will one day die. That not only shall we be rid of all the

vile passions, but all the being of sin. This is a wonderful thing. Christ's object and end in subjecting us to the things of this life and to the vanities of our own vile nature, is that His grace may be the more wonderful in its sovereignty, in its authority, in its mighty conquest. And again, that His faithfulness may come out. Why, it would have been very little for the Lord to have given the new birth to you, and to me, and then taken us, as He did the dying thief, at once to heaven. But, if I may say so, there would have been no opportunity, in such a case as that, for Him to display His faithfulness in coming to the sustenance of the poor, in sending rain upon the mown grass, in being as the clear shining of the sun after rain, after a storm. But when He lets the evils come, and then, with them, and over them, and after them, He lets His grace shine, and His faithful promise He makes good, in helping, in delivering the needy when he crieth and the poor also, and him that hath no helper, then, O how wonderful He is. And this hope we have got, have we not? A sinner subjected to many evils - he says I hope one day to be separated from everything that is wrong; to be

Far from a world of grief and sin
With God eternally shut in

And also I may say this hope comes a little nearer than that sometimes. I hope to get good out of this affliction. I hope to be able to live honourably, though I am tempted to evil. I hope to be able to hold fast that which the Lord has given to me, which I am tempted to cast away, and which the enemy seeks to snatch from me. I hope that He will help me through. Hope, as it is in one of our hymns

David's Lord and Gideon's Friend
Will help His servant to the end

Now dear friends I have just given hints, that is all, hints that are in my own mind and heart concerning this great theme. I have tried to give you a reason for the view I take of this text, that, according to the measure, or rule, of faith, you see the new creature is spoken of throughout the Scripture, but I nowhere see that God has subjected the animal creation and all things in the visible world, to vanity

with hope. It is nowhere said in the word of the living God. But the new creature is spoken of as the creation. And the whole creation groans and travails in pain, longing to be delivered and waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of their body. And may we come right into this by the Holy Spirit's teaching, so that we may say, we - though troubled, though sinful, though troubled in many many ways by the devil - that we, even we, in such circumstances, have a living hope. Though subjected to these things, in such a way as to be captives, and unable to deliver ourselves, we have a good God in whom our hope is cast and on whom we cast ourselves by faith from time to time.

AMEN.