

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
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ROMANS 9 v 33

"As it is written, Behold I lay in Zion
a stumblingstone and rock of offence; and
whosoever believeth on Him shall not be
ashamed"

The Mosaic dispensation was ended; types and shadows were now done away. No longer was the laver needed; no longer should there be the golden candlestick; no further use for the table of shew-bread, nor yet for the altar of incense; these were all realised in the Person and work of Christ. What need could there be for that candlestick in the temple, when He had come, who is the Light of the world? What need could there be of the altar of burnt offering, when He, who offered Himself without spot to God, had died, had risen again and had ascended into heaven, there with His incense? But the Jews would not have it; they stumbled at that stumblingblock, that stumblingstone. "He came unto His own and His own received Him not". So far were they from receiving Him that they said: Away with Him; crucify Him, crucify Him". God laid the foundation; they stumbled at it. And when this stone falls on any of them in unbelief, it will grind them to powder. Christ is a stumblingstone today; men will not have Him. He said to them who were His hearers when in the flesh on earth - "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life". It is true today. Ask the papist if he is satisfied with the infinite merit of Christ's death? If honest, he would say, no, because he dares, in horrible wickedness and unbelief, to offer what he calls a bloody sacrifice, whenever he says mass. Jesus Christ, body, blood, bones, divinity, and everything belonging to Him, the priest offers whenever he says the mass. You ask the modernist if he will have Him. Have Christ? Why He was but a man, born as other men are born. He had His limitations, He was ignorant of things. He spoke as a Jew and spoke after Jewish prejudice. Will this man have Christ? He stumbles at that blessed Person whom God has laid in Zion for a foundation. Will the pleasure seeker have Him? Does he want Christ? Will he look

to Him? Give him the pleasures he wants; he wants nothing more, seeks nothing better. And this Person Jesus, dear to God as His Son, dear to God in His incarnation, pleasing to God in all that He did, specially when He died; the worldling wants nothing of Him.

Now let us come home. Do you see anything in Him? Is He desirable to you? I ask myself - Is there anything in Him I need and want and seek? Let conscience answer, as in the sight of God. What is there in Him to cause men to stumble? Divinity. Humanity, in all its excellence; death, in its infinite value; resurrection, a stumblingblock to reason; His ascension into heaven, entering there with His own blood, ever living as a High Priest, the great High Priest of our profession, to make intercession for all that come unto God by Him. Here is the attraction to faith; here is that which enchains the affections of a sinner, when he sees and receives this blessed Jesus. O, may we kneel before God constantly, and thank Him for the distinguishing grace bestowed upon us if, instead of stumbling at Christ, we believe in Him and worship Him, and depend on Him for salvation. My hearers, we shall soon be in eternity, either in heaven or in hell. As we esteem Christ or disesteem Him; as we stumble at Him or depend on Him and love Him, so our state will be in eternity. As the tree falls so it will lie. God laid this stone. This text is a quotation you know from Isaiah and the Psalms. A stumblingstone, yet the stone which became the Headstone of the corner. A foundation laid in Zion, a precious cornerstone, and he that believeth shall not make haste. And the Apostle quotes this by inspiration and sets it before these Roman Christians, and tells them later in the epistle that what things soever were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope, and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed. Then believing on Christ is a wonderful thing; that clearly is an inference. Many stumble; some believe. Believing is a great mercy and a wonder. Every believer on Jesus Christ is a person wondered at; to be wondered at. He is singular; he is not one of the whole universe; he is singular. Jacob was singular; "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated". A trembling word to a believer. "Esau have I hated". A doctrine divine, not to be lightly spoken of, but to be believably, tremblingly, embraced as God's own eternal decree. It is not a matter to harden the heart, but, as rightly

received, it is a very humbling truth.

How do men, who are naturally unbelievers, become believers? How did you - any of you who are believers - become believers? You were not born believers. You were all born in sin and shapen in iniquity. I was. We did not want God as we grew up, did we? It did not become a natural thing for us to pray, to believe, to love, to fear God. All we wanted was the world. Some of you were brought up in the church of God, that is to say, attending a place of worship, and hearing the word of truth; that was from the beginning with you, but with others it was very different. But however we were brought up, none of us had faith. How then did faith come into our hearts? Well, the Apostle tells us in the next chapter; he says, "Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad-tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God". No sinner, made a believer, will be able, perhaps adequately, if at all, to describe how this grace of faith was born in his heart. It came; it grew, he knew not how; only he knew that he became what he had not been; that he believed in God in whom he had not believed; that he had views of God he had never had before; that he had feelings about God he had never had before. And if anyone said to him, at that stage, you are a believer, he might have said, I wish I were, but I am not. Yet he does believe; he believes in God. The man in this congregation who, at this moment, can say in his heart, I believe in God, is a miracle, a miracle of grace, a miracle of the operation of the Holy Ghost. Faith - the spirit of credence. Faith - a spirit that believes everything concerning God that is revealed in the Bible, this infallible Bible. Whatever is said of God, faith believes. Is He angry with the ungodly? Faith believes that and trembles. Has He prepared hell for the wicked? Faith believes that and trembles. Has He sent His Son to save the lost? Faith looks and hopes. Has Christ died? Faith hangs about that death. Is He in heaven? Faith goes to Him as an Advocate there, a great High Priest.

Is He full of all grace? Faith believes that and seeks supplies from that infinite fulness. Whosoever believeth on Him. Faith works in trouble, works when providence is against you. When God may seem intent to destroy you by reprovng you and meeting you and crossing your projects and destroying your good things, your faith will hang to Him, hanker after Him, and never give up. And if the devil brings, as he will surely, if permitted, an evil report of God, faith wont receive it. Paul says in the Corinthians, charity "believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things". To believing Timothy, the Apostle says, "My son, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ". It is a great grace, this grace of faith, a mysterious life in the soul that "lives and labours under load, though damped it never dies". Now, with this poor little attempt to describe it, how many of us can say we hope we have it, this spirit of credence that leads a soul to adore God; this spirit that receives every statement that God has made in the Scripture respecting sin; sin, that filthy thing, that blasphemous thing, that infidel spirit, that mocking Ishmael. I do not speak simply out of the Bible - it is enough to speak so if you describe sin - but I speak out of a very painful experience of sin. Let us be thankful, those of us who have grace, that we are not living in sin, but never let us cease to mourn that sin lives in us. The man who says that sin does not live in him is deceived. There are two things in sin that every child of God mourns from time to time, and is afraid of. First, the deceitfulness of sin. The Apostle Paul says: "Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God". How reasonable unbelief seems sometimes, the deceitfulness of it. And the other part of sin is its violence. It will drive you, drive you to desperation sometimes, but faith living in you will turn you, as the Psalmist speaks of himself - "I thought on my ways"; I thought on my wicked ways, my worldly ways, my unbelieving ways, my carnal ways; I thought on them, I mourned over them, I confessed them. What then? Did he stop there? No. "I thought on my ways and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies", that is to the gospel, which is what every child of God does. What does faith do? It goes to Christ; it enters somewhat into the Apostle's language: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ". Ah, the Person of Christ, the glory of Christ will engross the attention of faith from time to time, and detach the sinner who possesses that grace from the world and most

of all, from himself. Luther said to the Prior, head of his college , "O, my sin, my sin". Wisely, said his teacher, "Wouldest thou have only an idea of sin and so have only an idea of the Saviour?" If you only think of sin, you will never do more than think of Christ. But, if you feel sin, then, under the teaching of the Spirit, you will again and again feel Christ, and you will understand that Scripture in measure - "Unto you therefore which believe, He is precious". They believe in His Person; the Jews stumbled at His Person. Whence hath this Man his letters? He has never been to school; His father and His mother and His brethren we know. He is the carpenter's son; our promised Messiah is to be a king; therefore we wont receive this Man. Faith goes to the manger and, with the wise men of the east, worships Him; His blessed Person. Go, worship at Emmanuel's feet; see in His Person what glories meet. That is a great thing, to believe in the Person of Christ. An old divine says this: "Be careful of the Person; if you are wrong in the Person you are wrong everywhere". The Apostle Paul prayed that the Colossians might increase in the knowledge of God. Where was God to them? In Christ. What was Christ to them? The image of the invisible God. All that Jehovah is, is in Christ. All His perfections are in Christ; all His claims on men were met by Christ; all the curse due to the sins of His people came on Him. So the Person of Christ is a wonderful Person. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and His Name" (but there are two here you say; the two are one, one Person) "and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" and of His government there shall be no end. Now dear friends, how about your faith? Who is the centre of it, and, to use the term, who is the circumference of it? From whom radiate all the beams of light, life and hope to your souls? Surely, if you are believers, your answer will be the Person of Christ. God was pleased in Him, with Him. God was pleased that in Him should all fulness dwell, all the fulness of grace and glory. The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

When you rightly believe, you believe in His Person, first of all, for, what His Person is, so will His work be; so will His death be. You follow that. O happy man who is blessed with faith to lay hold of the Person of Jesus Christ, to close in with Him by saving faith. That person will find God to be his friend for ever, yet men

stumble at Him. His Person in heaven; He is in heaven, not on earth now. His bodily presence, as He is the Man Christ Jesus, cannot be in two places at the same time, and so, when He said to His disciples - "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, The Comforter will not come unto you;" but if I go away I will send you another Comforter, a Person different from Myself, though in regard to His eternity and my eternity, we are One. I will send Him unto you. The Person of Christ is in heaven, there to advocate. If you have faith, you will put a very bad case into His hand. "If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." O, take your bad cases to Him, dear, believing people. Take your unbelieving hearts, take your lustful eyes, take your burdened minds, take your difficulties to Him, and put the whole case into His hands. You will fail; He cannot. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged" You need One to speak for you. "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. Yea, we need a Priest in heaven. If Christ were on earth, He should not be a priest, says Paul, for there are still priests who offer according to the law, but He is in heaven, and His priesthood was of another tribe, not that of Levi. And now He is in heaven, ever living to make intercession for all that come unto God by Him. People do not go without purpose, without cases, without needs. They do not approach God without a plea. If you have a case for God, He has got an eye to look on it, a heart to sympathise with you, a hand of power to help you. But, O, if an angel were sent to preach on the Person of Christ, the whole life that God might give him upon earth would be well occupied in an attempt, would only be an attempt, to preach the Person of Christ, but an angel could not preach Him as a sinner can. Sinless innocence is the angel's, so he could never preach sympathetically with sinners, but a sinful man, sent to preach, can speak sympathetically with a sinner, being a sinner himself, needing this Person. God was pleased with Him. "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him". Now let us pause here and ask ourselves seriously, solemnly, searchingly, as in God's sight - Do we believe in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ? Some may say, that is a strange question to ask believers, some of whom have been in the way many years. But have you no questions? Are no difficulties thrown in your way? You will need again and again to walk in the Apostle's exhortation: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" or no; whether you believe in

Christ. You wont be ashamed of this; you wont be ashamed of this. No, a man will never be ashamed of God's gift and work in him, the gift and work of faith; never be ashamed of his prayers built on the Person and intercession of the Lord Jesus. Never ashamed will he be of his hope in Christ. "Hope maketh not ashamed". Never ashamed of the hours he has spent on his knees praying, or on his bed praying, or at his work praying. Prayer is a grand foundation, prayer is a wonderful ground on which to stand. If we have no faith in exercise but, believing in our sinfulness, what misery is ours, but if, with all that we know and feel of sin, we believe in the Person of Christ, we shall say, there is one in heaven to whom we go. And we may want faith - if we have read the account - as Richard Dore felt when, one morning at 6 o'clock, in London, when he was walking to his work, he said "There is a Man in heaven who loves me and whom I love." O, would not it make some of you happy if you could walk to your homes after this service saying in your heart, there is a Man in heaven whom we love and who loves us. Ashamed of Jesus? Ashamed of this blessed Person? Ashamed of Him whose light comes and radiates the understanding and will and affections and conscience. No; faith says, if I glory, if ever I do boast, the glory and the boast shall be Jesus Christ whom God sent, that we might believe on Him and have everlasting life. The gospel is full of mysteries and yet its statement in holy Scripture is beautifully simple and nothing more simple to faith than this glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. He says, I came to save the lost. "I came. not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." These stumbling, unbelieving Jews, went to work in a wrong way. They had a wrong object before them, namely themselves and their own righteousness, so they went about to establish it. A rickety thing they felt it to be, but they went about to make it good, to establish it. A poor Gentile wretch says, I am undone; I am not in Covenants: I have not the promises the Jews had. I am just a Gentile dog; I am a sinner; I am undone; I am ruined utterly, but I do believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Seed promised to Adam in Eden, and promised to Abraham later, and promised by all the prophets, and prophesied of by Isaiah in that marvellous statement - "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given". I believe in Him and I venture to pray to Him. I venture to beg the forgiveness of all my sin from Him. Now that believer shall never be ashamed. The devil will say, you are wrong; you started aside that

day when you rebelled against some providence and your unbelieving heart fretted against Him. How can you think you are a Christian? Then, not denying that accusation, you may go and say - Lord, make me a Christian. Will He turn that prayer away? No. You go and say, O Lord, bless my soul. He may send some discouragement. He discouraged the Syrophenecian woman. He may send some discouragement to you in the shape of not answering prayer, or leaving you to your hardness, or to your confusion. Faith, standing in the power of the Spirit, will rise to the occasion and say, Lord, the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from Thy table; let me pick up these crumbs, and you will get the recognition that good woman got. Faith is not put out, though it is tried; though it is again and again assailed by unbelief and the devil, and though its greatest difficulty may come before you, as being your own greatest difficulty, namely your dreadful sins. I have never found any difficulty in this world in my life so great, so stumbling, as my own sins, yet with all that you may say, I will venture. As you venture you will never be ashamed. O no. O leper, remember this, that, though you must cry, "Unclean, Unclean" to your fellows whom you may not approach, yet you may go to the priest; yea, you must go to the priest. That was the law, and the type, blessed type, is encouraging. And see what the anti-type did when ten lepers came to Him; when another came to Him, a leper. "I will, be thou clean". Just think of it; a leper must go to the Priest. Go then, with your leprosy; you will not be ashamed. No, when your hand is clean, when all the signs of your leprosy are gone, and your whole self, clean, can you be ashamed, ashamed of Him who made you clean? Whosoever believeth on Him.

Now I have occupied your time about the Person; I would like, just briefly, for a moment to mention His atoning work. The glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ, you will find to be here as a centre for your faith. "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ". And I am disposed to say that all real, believing approaches to God, have more or less a distinct reference to the atonement of Christ, because without that what unclean sinner can hope to be cleansed? What guilty sinner can hope to be forgiven and justified? But when that blood appears, ah, it is a wonderful attraction. Some of you may never forget the first sight you had of the atonement of Christ, I think I shall never forget the first sight

I had of it, though it is a long time since. I think, if I recollect rightly at this moment, it is quite 70 years ago when, as a young man I got a first sight of the blood of Christ, and O, the hope of it, the hope in it, the going to God about it, the pleading of it. You will never forget it. You have lost the sight of it, perhaps, many times, and often perhaps have thought it could not have been real because of your sinfulness remaining, but you will never wholly forget it. That is the ground on which a sinner stands; that is the reason he asks the Lord to forgive him; that is the plea he is enabled to make before God; the precious blood of Christ.

The blood of Christ, a precious blood,
Cleanseth from all sin, doubt it not,
And reconciles the soul to God,
From every folly, every fault

You have plenty, have not you, to be forgiven? but every folly, every fault. And can you be ashamed of that precious atonement that took away your sin, and that gave you a pure conscience? A conscience purified so that if one may so put it, you could look God in the face and He looked on you and owned you, and you blessed Him. Perhaps you felt then, now it would be as easy for me to die as it is to lay my head on my pillow tonight. O, bless God for a pure conscience. You will never boast of it, apart from the blood of Christ. Paul, a Pharisee, said he served God with a pure conscience, but that had to go because he stained his conscience by blood, persecuting the saints. But when Christ came, his sins were forgiven; then he understood a pure conscience differently. So there is no shame in regard to the atonement.

Now may the Lord help us to go home and meditate on this blessed Person, Jesus Christ, and on His atonement. I wont say I will take it up this evening; I got a good cure of that many years ago, saying I would take up a subject in the evening because I was comfortable in it in the morning, and I could not do it, but, if the Lord will, I shall take it up again this evening, this blessed gospel.

AMEN.