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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 29 May 1921

SONG OF SOLOMON 2 v 3

"As the apple tree among the trees of the wood,
so is my beloved among the sons. I sat
down under his shadow with great
delight, and his fruit was sweet to
my taste"

This Book, this Song of Songs, abounds with figures used mutually by the Bridegroom and the Bride. Each praises the other; because of mutual love there are mutual praises. The astonishment to a believing heart is that ever Christ should praise him. Christ is infinitely worthy of all the praises and honour and glory that poor sinful creatures can offer Him, but that He should be able, at any time, to praise and extol His people, this is a wonder, but so it is, and may we have faith to believe it. May we feel it in our own hearts, and be able to receive the amazing grace, the matchless love, the infinite condescension of the dear Lord Jesus, for it is indeed matchless.

The text opens with a comparison, a comparison between the sons of men and Christ, and the figure in the comparison is striking. "As the apple tree" or citron or orange tree "among the trees of the wood". A scrubby forest perhaps is intended, and there is one tree among them and only one that bears fruit, the apple tree, and so it is distinguished from all the trees about it, is better than them all, for it bears fruit, it affords a shade, a covering, a defence, to all by whom it is seen and who are enabled to come to it. "So is my beloved" says the Church - Jesus Christ - "among the sons". Look at this comparison. Here is a world of men born of God, fruitful in sin, bitterness, ignorance, enmity, unfaithfulness, unholiness; there is no exception. Gather all Brighton together, all the world and look at men, as men, as sinful men, and you will not find one that bears fruit to God, that has any beauty in it. "The whole head is sick", to use another figure "and the whole heart faint". From the sole of the

foot to the crown of the head there is no soundness but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores" that have not been bound up neither mollified with ointment. That is a description primarily of Israel, but also of the whole world. That is the description of each person here by nature; each one is just that and no better. What a solemn thing it is to be a sinner. What a dreadful thing it is to be a sinner. And, added to the solemnity and dreadfulness of this, is the consideration, the truth, that for the most part men do not believe it, do not feel it of themselves. "Are we blind also?" Are we dead? Are we corrupt? "We never were in bondage to any man" What a sad sight. May the Lord give it to us concerning ourselves - as we are poor, fallen creatures - may He forbid that we should live in ignorance of our state. Do not wrap yourselves up with the cloak of profession and self-righteousness. God's eye sees through it, and one day His hand will rip it off and you will be exposed in all the wickedness of your nature. Among all these sons of men, wicked and barren, there stands One to the Church different from them, different entirely, higher, greater, better, glorious. As the apple tree is distinguished from the trees of the wood, so is Jesus Christ distinguished from all the sons of men, and He is distinguished particularly; not in a general way but in a particular way, and also universally distinguished and if the Lord will help me I shall endeavour to show in what respects He is different from the sons of men; how He is distinct from them.

First, with respect to His glorious Being for He is perfect God, equal with the Father and with the Holy Ghost, a Person in the Godhead, in the Trinity, not borrowing leave to be. As is the Father, so is the Son, and so is the Holy Ghost. The Father hath life in Himself and so hath the Son life in Himself. This true almighty God stands among the sons of men, different from them. We are creatures; He is God. We are of a day; He is Eternity itself. We know nothing; He is the only wise God. We are feeble; He is almighty. We are polluted; He is holy. We are unjust; He is the just God. We are dying; "He only hath immortality, dwelling in the light that no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see." So, my friends, do you believe in the eternity of Christ, of the Son of God? It is not a matter of indifference whether this be believed or not. It is solemn, it is terrible, to deny it, terrible. 'Tis great to

believe it. Jesus is the Son of God, the only begotten Son of God, and if there had been no redemption He would have been the Son of God. If there had been no manifestation of God to men, He would have been the Son of God. All His divine titles are irrespective and independent of any relationship He sustains to man, to His Church and people. See this then, the first point in the matter, that He is God. "I AM THAT I AM". "Before Abraham was I am". When the eye of faith is directed to this glorious One it sees in Him eternity. I dwell in the high and lofty place; I inhabit eternity. I was with My Father before the highest part of the dust of the earth was made, when there were no fountains abounding with water. When nothing existed, nothing was created, I was there with My Father in His bosom. So may God settle us on this point; none can compare with Christ here, and yet it is needful to see this. He stands, in the Word of God, and among all creatures, as almighty God, the creator of creatures, for by Him all were made. All things that are, were made by Him. And secondly, He is very Man. Perfect God, perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and also a body; a reasonable soul and body subsisting. And this human nature never existed, never subsisted, alone apart from Deity, and so the God-Man stands among men as the apple tree stands among the trees of the wood, distinguished from them all, and the distinguishing marks of the God-Man are these. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. Yes, our Immanuel knew no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. Our blessed Lord and Saviour did no sin; always holy, always undefiled. When the eye of faith looks on Christ it looks on a sinless One. And this is the first thing to be noticed and believed about Him, that He did no sin, that He could not sin. God cannot sin, and human nature assumed by Him is so intimately united as that it is impossible for that nature to sin. It is a fearful blasphemy to imagine that the Lord Jesus Christ was capable of committing sin. The impecability, as it is called, of the Lord Jesus will ever be an Article of Faith to people who are well instructed, born again, led of the Spirit. One may be led into error of different sorts, but if it is so for a time, one will be brought back to this point - He did no sin; He was incapable of committing sin. So in that the Lord Jesus is prominent. He is above all the sons of men, for not only can we commit sin, but we do it; we are full of it. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?"

He is distinguished from men by His mission. The sons of men are lost men, and the work of the Lord Jesus is to save all His Father gave to Him. This was that which distinguished Him. I am come, not to break the law, not to do away with it, not to obliterate it, but to fulfil it. I am not come to ruin, but I am come to save, men who are given to Me to save, and He came to save them. They were given to Him to purchase and He bought them with His own blood. They were alienated; He came to reconcile them. In rags; He came to be their righteousness. Polluted; He came to purify them. Near hell; He came to fit them for heaven and take them there eventually. What a Man is this. He came to destroy the works of the devil and deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage; to reveal the Father's love and grace; to bring redemption to those who look for it in Jerusalem; to manifest unto them the Father's love and goodness and to bring them into union with Himself as the branch is united to the vine, and this distinguishes Him. What He is in His Person and in His work we may say also He is in His character, or characters and offices; more than any other, above all others. Jesus Christ is the shadow of a great Rock in a weary land. It is said of Him He is the shadow of a great Rock in a weary land. In a dry vale with nothing to screen poor people from the burning sun, He comes to them and is to them as a great shadow to hide them from the burning rays of the sun. From persecution of Satan, and of men and from all the fire of sin, He comes to save them and from the fiery law and its curse He comes to be a shadow, a great shadow. And He comes to be also a hiding place, a hiding place from the storm as well as a shadow from the heat when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. The glory of Christ in these particulars is beyond all adequate expression. No language can ever properly and fully depict what He is, can ever set forth before the eyes, the wondering eyes of faith, what their Lord and their Saviour is; so wonderful is He, so glorious is He. Sent of the Father; freely with all His heart and will coming Himself. He comes to be the Redeemer and O what a distinction and difference there is between the Redeemer and the redeemed. Poor slaves, lying in chains, and their great Redeemer, great in His Person, great in His work, stands among them to draw them and bring them from their captivity into liberty. From their bondage He delivers them and gives them a standing with Himself. As the apple tree is distinguished from the trees of the wood, so is Jesus Christ

distinguished from all creation. He is the Creator, and therefore distinguished. He is distinguished from sinners because He is their Saviour. He is distinguished remarkably and eternally distinguished. He is distinguished in His love. What love have sinners? There is a natural love - and what a mercy that is for the nation and for the whole world that there is a natural love in parents for children so that it is natural for a parent to care for the children - but there is no love for God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." We here who, as we trust, love Him, did not love Him. "We love Him because He first loved us". His love breathes love into the soul; His love brings love; His love makes love in the soul where it comes. Man has no love by nature, no love for God. The language of every sinner's heart is - Depart from me for I desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. Then comes this glorious One, full of love and, although His dealings with His people seem strange and appear not to have love in them, yet they all live to prove that it was love that sent trouble. "God is love" Christ is God; therefore Christ is love.

He is distinguished by His power. What are we? Poor, helpless creatures. If any man has any strength it is to commit sin, that is all. We are said to be without strength and then Christ died for us. He is distinguished by His wisdom "God only wise", and Christ is God. He is only wise. These things do distinguish Christ. His offices distinguish Him, His relationships distinguish Him. His great end in coming distinguishes Him from all men, and this is a very wide field in which, if enabled, we might walk with great profit. For a long time, even for our lives, and then through eternity, we shall walk in this field, to look on what Christ is and on what He has done. O He is altogether lovely; the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely. "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood so is my beloved among the sons", and I do hope that it may please God to make Him so to us. That we may not simply see Him as one apart from, at an infinite distance from, ourselves, but as One to whom we may speak and of whom we may say, each one - My beloved, My beloved. Not the beloved of the Church only, but my own beloved, in whom my soul delights, about whom I hang by faith, on whom I, a sinner, cast my hope for eternity; from whom I, a guilty creature, look for pardon

and for justification; a weak sinner, look for strength from Him; a blind sinner, look for light from Him; a poor sinner, look for riches, durable riches from Him. Do you see any beauty in Him? Does He attract you at all? Do you see in Him that which you long to have from Him, not possessing it at all yourself except it be as a gift from Him? We have nothing but sin, nothing of our own, nothing but death. Christ has all, and to His people He is all. All their union with God, all their hope in God, all their righteousness for justification, all their purification, all their fitness to live in this world and all their fitness to die they perceive, by precious faith, to be in this beloved One.

Let us look for a moment at this personal word the Church uses with respect to Christ - "So is my beloved". Now when Christ came into the world, came to His own nation, He was not received. "He came unto His Own, but His Own received Him not." They were disappointed; they expected an earthly king and grandeur. They looked for a deliverer from the hated yoke of the Romans. They thought the Messiah would come and free their nation from all enemies and give it a regal grandeur. He came and He was not what they expected. He was as a root out of a dry ground. They saw no form of a king, no comeliness of authority, or rule and power. They saw nothing of that kind in Him and so they rejected Him; they hated Him. They said this is the Heir, let us kill Him. They took Him with wicked hands and crucified and slew Him. "Away with Him, away with Him" was their cry. "It is not fit that He should live". O what treatment Christ submitted to from the hands of men. Are we better than they? Do you feel any better? If you feel indignant against them for their treatment of your Lord, do you think you are better than they? Paul says "Are we better than they? No in no wise." And though he said that in another case, you may apply it to this case. Are you better than any hater of Jesus Christ? Are you better than any worldling? Are you better than any immoral person? Externally you are different, happily so, but are you better? Have you a better nature, a better heart, a wiser mind, a more toward will? Are you better? Do not make anything of the distinction, beyond what it should be, between a moral and an immoral person. Come down beneath that distinction to the root of the thing. Are we better? No, in no wise are we better. We have the same wicked nature, utterly depraved. Then if any poor sinner can ever address

the Lord or speak of Him and say of Him - My beloved - how has the difference come about? He has made it. The Apostle asks the question - "Who maketh thee to differ from another and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" The difference begins here. "Ye must be born again" The new birth is the start of all vital religion, of all love, all humility, all faith, all hope, and every grace. The beginning is here, the new birth. And when one is born again and convinced of his sins, and His sinfulness, then gets a view of the Lord Jesus, O how his heart's affections run out to that glorious One. His whole soul embraces Him. His mind is taken up with Him, his affections run to and cleave to Him. His understanding approves of Him, his will goes with his mind and the choice is made of Him as in Mary's case. There were plenty of things for Mary to attend to, along with Martha her sister, but Christ was so prominent at that time in her view, and it was so desirable that she should sit at His feet, that she left every other thing for Him, and it is so with every child of God. There comes a moment when his heart is so taken up with Christ that he leaves the world, he leaves the world. It is a shadow, an empty thing to a child of God. He is a poor creature himself, without any hope in himself, and by precious faith he casts himself upon the Lord of Life and Glory for eternal life, for justification, for sanctification. Now that is the great point in experimental religion. The Person of Jesus becomes so real to faith that it is as the Apostle Paul expresses it in the Hebrews - "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" and Christ becomes real and great and nigh as says Paul to the Romans - "The Word is nigh thee even in thy heart and in thy mouth". Christ becomes real, becomes very near. It is a great point this in vital religion, to approve of Christ and find your whole heart going out to Him. Then it is not whether you will make yourself right, but He has made you right. He has done it and the crown shall be His. Yes, He becomes prominent. There is none like Him, there is none to be compared with Him; none. The whole of creation, His own work, and beautiful as His work is, falls into insignificance compared with Him. Each believing soul, blessed with a manifestation of Christ, can say in his measure

Compared with Christ in all beside
No comeliness I see
The one thing needful dearest Lord

Is to be one with Thee

With whom none can compare. He stands above all. To use the word of Christ Himself, He is the treasure, and then and therefore He gets the heart. "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also". "So is my beloved" my beloved "among the sons". Then you see if you can say He is your beloved, you know Him. You know something about Him. As walking among trees you look at them, you come across one that is prominent in some particulars and distinguished from all the rest and you can speak of that, as well as of them, so you see men and yourself; you see men to be wrong and wicked and dead and condemned and you see yourself in the same condition, and then you come, by precious faith, to a revealed Christ, and see Him different from all the rest. Suitable, great, wonderful - none can compare with Him - and your whole will goes out to Him and He is a beloved, your beloved. If one should ask you why you make such an ado about Christ, you will follow the Church in her description of Him, and then, as you have finished, you will finish as she finished - This is my Friend, this is my Beloved. What a great thing it is to love Christ. What a wonderful thing it is to love Christ. It is a miracle of God's grace, a miracle of the work of the Holy Spirit, an effect of the love of God to a sinner. "We love Him because He first loved us".

And to show the kind of person the Lord God loves you have in the prophecy of Ezekiel a description of that person - a dead child. Think of it, a dead, polluted child, and none to do anything for it. Then comes the Beloved above all others. He comes and He says "Thy time was a time of love". This time? Yes, this very time. In this condition? Yes, in this very condition, with no improvement, no life, no comeliness, no cleansing, no covering. At this time and in this condition there is love. "Thy time was a time of love". And I spread My skirt over thee and thy time was a time of love, and I said unto thee, Live, then thou becamest Mine. "Now this is what the Lord does and so He makes Himself the chiefest among ten thousand. He makes Himself almighty God, and very Man to His people. O there is none to be compared with Him. The affections entwine around Him and the understanding is enlightened concerning His beauty, and the will goes out in that blessed motion, that Mary shows to us in her own case. "She hath chosen that good part", that one thing needful, "and

it shall not be taken away from her". Christ opposed His questioners with a question. "What think ye of Christ, whose Son is He?" May we be enabled honestly to put it to ourselves - "What think we of Christ?" Here is a forest, a world of men, and there is One Man among them. What think ye of Him distinguished from all the rest? High in His divinity, wonderful in His sacred, spotless humanity. Wonderful in His coming, in His love, in His goodness, in His mercy. Do you see anything in Him? Do you see anything in Him more than in another? "What is thy beloved, O thou fairest among women, what is thy beloved more than another beloved that thou dost so charge us?" It is a question you may put to yourself, that I would put to myself. We profess to know Him; some of us do. Now what is He to us more than another beloved? She said - "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood so is my beloved among the sons." And then - I may add this word here - this is a very exclusive word and a very inclusive word. It is exclusive; it shuts out everything and everyone else from a sinner's faith and hope and love. And if you try, at any time, to mix Christ with something, unite Him with somebody else, you will find you have made a great error and He wont allow it. I am jealous - "My Name is Jealous". Led aright, I say, your faith will be an exclusive faith, excluding all trusts, all hopes, all love and Christ and Christ alone will keep the throne. And it is inclusive, that is to say, it lays hold of a whole Christ. When your faith perceives Him, you see in Him all you need. It will lay hold of a whole Christ. There is nothing indifferent, nothing superfluous in Christ. Nothing indifferent - His divinity, His glorious relationship to His eternal Father, His eternal love, His willingness, His coming, His incarnation, His human nature, His perfect obedience to the law, magnifying it and making it honourable, His Priesthood, offering Himself without spot to God. There is nothing superfluous - you need every thread of His righteousness, every drop of His blood, every word of His mouth, and all the might of His arm. You need a whole Christ and every living soul will unite with me and say that is so. I am sure every one of you wanting Christ by the leading of His Spirit will say you believe that you need a whole Christ, and the Lord's word at the institution of His Supper is a very significant word. He took the bread, whole bread. He took it, He gave it to His disciples and said "Take eat this is My body" - this signifies My death. "Take eat this is My body which is broken for you". And He took the cup and said to them "Drink ye all of

it". "Drink ye all of it". "This cup is the new testament in My blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins." You will never get to heaven without a whole Christ. All that He is in His Person and all that He is in His offices, all that He did in His work, we need to take us to heaven. And so He is above all else. Saul stood head and shoulders above all the people of Israel. When he was brought forth to them they said "God save the king". And Christ is infinitely above all else, head and shoulders, yea, above all creatures, without comparison in respect of His blessed Person, for there is none like Him. "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons". O it would be a blessing if we were more taken up with Him, if He were more to us, more to our hearts and understandings. If we saw more of Him we should see less of self and care less for self, for as Christ goes up self goes down. As Christ rises the world loses. As He increases in our judgment and affection the world decreases, and we see it to be a poor, empty thing, and self worse than all, wanting only this now to be swallowed up in Him. What a great thing it is to be a Christian. Just think of it, when God said to Moses, bless the people of Israel - "The Lord bless thee and keep thee", and so on - He said "Let My Name be named on them". Now when a person is really a Christian that takes place, the Name of Christ is named on him. The life of Christ is in him, the righteousness of Christ belongs to him, the holiness of Christ belongs to him. He is made wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. A Christian then is a great person. Christendom is wide; personal christianity is narrow and belongs to one person. Christendom is a geographical expression; Christianity expresses a personal union with God; union with Christ, union with the Spirit and union with the Father. You may not experience it all at once. We grow by little and a little and a little, but the truth is that. That is what a Christian really is. He has much more than he knows, he is richer than he knows, he is better than he knows, he is poorer than he knows, but he knows a little and he is led on to know more and more by the Holy Ghost who takes of the things of Christ and shows them to all His dear children, and then they discern Him. Some do not discern the Lord's body. They do not discern the Lord's body in His Ordinance; they do not discern the Lord's body in a spiritual way. To discern is to appreciate, it is to judge a thing. When a poor sinner discerns Christ he judges Him to be what the Scriptures declare Him to be. He appreciates Him. His

whole soul says, why this Lord Jesus is the very One my soul wants, my soul desires.

O let a lasting union join
My soul to Christ the living vine

Now my brethren look then at this great point, at the contrast there is here between Jesus Christ and the sons of men; a comparison it is also. Here are trees, a wood, a forest of trees, and there is one tree amongst them distinguished from all the rest. The rest are poor, scrubby things, with no fruit, no fruitfulness. Here is a tree that bears fruit, and that affords a shade and so is Christ. So is Christ, sent of God, dear to God, commended by God, loved by His Father. So is Christ, coming from the Father. So is Christ, a Priest offering Himself without spot to God. May the Holy Ghost make Christ this to us, that we may say with the Apostle John "He must increase but I must decrease". He must grow up, I must grow downward. Not that He can ever increase in Himself, but increase in the judgment and the affections of poor sinners. The Lord grant it may be so with us.

AMEN.