

The Authority and Efficacy of the Word

by J. K. POPHAM

"I rejoice at Thy Word, as one that findeth great spoil." (Psalm 119:162)

THERE is a good deal of rejoicing at times by certain people in the world; as when they succeed, when they attain to certain objects for which they have set out. But the Scripture saith, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lost his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26) If you had everything that the human heart can wish, and had no life and fear of God in your soul, what benefit would you have? Things that are here are perishing. The young man is warned not to rejoice in his youth, the strong man is not to rejoice in his strength, the rich man is not to glory in his riches. There is only one person who may really rejoice; namely, the man who knows and understands the Lord, that He exerciseth lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, for therein He delights. (Jer. 9:23,24) Now may the Lord make you whose hearts are in the world consider this; consider what you are rejoicing in, what you are depending on, from what you are deriving your good and comfort; consider the temporary nature of all that you have, of your own life, which is even a vapour; consider the pride of your hearts, that you are practically independent of God, though you may not say so; practically independent, because you do not seek Him daily. Consider that He is not sanctified in your heart, that you do not honour Him. God give you a heart to consider your latter end, that what you have, what you hang on, is nothing but vanity, emptiness; yea, it may be worse than emptiness, it may be thick clay cleaving to you, and bearing you down into eternal ruin.

But there is a substance to which the election of grace attain, which may be and is rejoiced in: it is in the text, "I rejoice at Thy Word, as one that findeth great spoil." In speaking to you this evening on this scripture, I would, as enabled, first notice the term "Thy Word." Secondly, the rejoicing in it. And then look at the comparison: "As one that findeth great spoil" hunting, searching, finding that which is great spoil to him. Says the psalmist, "Just as he rejoices in what he has found, so do I rejoice in Thy Word."

First, then, we have before us the Word of God. What was written at that time of the Scriptures the psalmist found, and rejoiced in. What is now the whole of the Scriptures, the church of Christ rejoices in. I will make two or three observations as to, (i) what the Word is; then, (ii) the use of the Word.

(i) The Word of God is verbally, plenary inspired. It has in it, as originally given by the Holy Spirit, no flaw of human error, uncertainty, inaccuracy. It is not fallible; it is an infallible Book. "Every word of God is pure" from the beginning; (Prov. 30:5) and the psalmist says in a verse or two before the text, "Thy word is true from the beginning, and every one of Thy righteous judgments endureth for ever." Go to the beginning, go to that blessed, pure garden, Eden, and see a pure couple, Adam and Eve, under the law. Said God, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." That word, the first recorded that the Almighty

spoke on earth into the ear and heart of Adam, that word is true. "Thy word is true from the beginning." His soul died in the day he ate, his body died later, and his whole person, with all his seed, became obnoxious to the second death. A solemn thing! The sin of Adam ruined us all; he ruined his future race. The seed of evil once brought in has remained in us, and it is true we have died, died to God; we have died to holiness, to righteousness, to uprightness, died very largely to human kindness, died to principles of truth. Much of the Scripture is written with this before the inspired writers, that men are guilty of lying, of speaking contrary to God and truth, and of deceit and hypocrisy. And when grace comes to them, not altering their old nature, but subduing it, the Scripture says, "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds....Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies." (Col. 3:12) "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14) put away all evil; evil speaking, hypocrisy, guile, and malice. How true is the Word of God as it respects men! Man fallen, man unfallen the Scripture describes. Go to Adam fallen, and what a gracious word came from the mouth of God to him! Condemnation was not left alone to ring in the ears of that fallen man; but the gospel was preached, the heavenly gospel sounded in his ear. Yes, the Lord said that he was a guilty man, but He promised the Seed of the woman. The serpent had bruised Adam; the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent. (Gen. 3:15) The devil had overcome man; Man, Incarnate Deity, should overcome the devil. The devil had led man into captivity; Christ should lead that captor captive. Christ should ascend into heaven, having died and received gifts for men, to administer those gifts, to give them to sinners. This Word is true, it is the infallible Word. Search out all records, search all history, search the whole world, and you will not find one single scripture that has had anything to do with this or that thing, that has fallen to the ground. Said Joshua to Israel at the close of his eventful life, "Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you: all are come to pass unto you; and not one thing hath failed thereof." (Joshua 23:14) Some of us can say, "We know." We know that the word of God is true, is infallible; we have hung upon it, have depended upon it, have been inspired to hope by it, have been led to pray by it, have been reproved, rebuked, comforted, strengthened, and guided by it. And as far as we have gone, has any single word failed? The Word of God is infallible, because it is inspired: "Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Pet. 1:21)

And I would affectionately say to you, my young friends, who may not at this moment feel as we who know, by the grace of God, something of self and a little of Christ, mind how you treat this Book. God put it into your hearts to be careful about this Book. Flee from that which is written of the Jews, "They have rejected My Word, and what wisdom is in them?" He who rejects the Scriptures is a fool as well as an infidel; he lacks all wisdom. One might for a moment ask, what exalted England? What made her the head? What made her the lender? The Word of God received and revered. What brought about the blessed Reformation? The reception of the Word of God, and its translation and dissemination among the people. Notwithstanding all the wicked opposition of the bishops and the priests, God sent a powerful ministry, and the nation was blessed. Even as the Jews prospered through the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah, so England was prospered through receiving the Word of God; and the liberty we have enjoyed, and the mercies we have daily had at the hands of God have come to us by means of this Book. The Universities received it: it is very different today. But now, dear young people, do, if you can, listen to me for a moment. Reverence this Book; treat it not as an ordinary book, but as the Word of God. Regard it as a standard to which you must be brought; as a measuring line by which you

must be measured; as a balance into which you and all your works will one day be put and weighed. Remember God's holy Word. God forbid you should despise it or treat it wickedly. It is infallible, because it came from Him, and can you be guiltless if you despise it? Can you be innocent if you turn your back on the Bible? The Lord give you mercy in this particular.

Secondly, the Word of God is full of authority. It does not ask any one's acceptance. It comes and says, "I am from God, I am the very expression of God's mind." And he who says to it, "I entertain you not, I have an intuition, I have learning; I know that some of the writers of this Book were ignorant, illiterate men, and they wrote under their national and personal prejudices; I do not receive you," I say such men will find one day that that Word which they despised will judge them. This Book says, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." But who shall judge what are idle words? Set up your own standard, and you do not utter many idle words, perhaps; but come to the Bible, and if God teaches you, you will understand what an idle word means. There is no fear of God, no reverence of His Majesty, no trembling at His Word, no calling on Him for mercy, no asking of Him to save you; and for all your idle words, all your misdeeds, all your ungodly speeches, which you have ungodly uttered, for all these He will bring you into judgment. The Word of God has authority. You may listen to me, and you do patiently and kindly, but some of you may say sometimes, "Well, after all it is only what he thinks, what he believes." And if there is no application of what I say to you, that is about what you will be thinking in your hearts. But here is a Book that will judge you; you will stand or fall by this. Remember, this Book tells us what a righteous man is, how a man becomes righteous, how a man becomes a Christian; how he is to live as such, and what is the end of him. It tells us what a sinner is, how he became a sinner, what sin is, what a foolish thought is, what a covetous wish is, what an unlawful look is; it tells us all these things. And it is not your judgment of yourself that will constitute you right or wrong, righteous or wicked; it is just what this Book says. Then it has authority. The Lord give it authority in our consciences, then it will stop us. Read it, read it, read it, and God cause you to mark it, and inwardly digest it by faith.

Thirdly, this Word is an enduring Word. Other books die, they pass away. The leaves of this will perish, but the truths uttered by it will live for ever. "For ever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven." (Ps. 119:89) There it is. Here is written the song of Moses, and here is the song of the Lamb; it is sung here, and in eternity they sing it. Here we have the record of the Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness; in heaven all, plunged into that Fountain, sing unto Him that washed them from their sins in His own blood, and made them kings and priests unto God and His Father, "to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

Now take these three points, or qualities, of the Word of God, its infallibility, its authority, its endurance; and God gave you hearts to reverence the Scriptures. Remember who wrote them.

(ii) Now I shall speak a little of some of the uses to which the Holy Ghost, the Author of this Book, puts it. It is for use, and He uses it. First, He uses it in regeneration: "Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." (James 1:18) A living word is dropped into a dead soul. How the Lord goes here and there and speaks some truth that the Scripture contains, tells sinners of heaven and hell, of sin and punishment, of grace and salvation, and teaches them to consider their latter end! You may not

be able to say this particular scripture or that, came to you in the beginning of your conviction and concern; but if eternity has been laid on you, if the things of eternity, if the judgment day and the great Judge of all, quick and dead, have been in any way made known in your hearts and consciences; then what a sacred, wondrous use the Lord has made of the Scriptures in your case! He speaks by His Word. He spoke to holy men of old whom He made the penmen of the Word, and He speaks still to sinners by the same blessed Word. It is an instrument. He uses it. May He use it to you in your hearts. You will never escape God's Word. In some way it will speak to you, some day it will speak to you, some things it will say to you. "Is not My Word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jer. 23:29) And if you look at these two expressions, you may gather even rationally to what a very important and solemn use the Lord puts His Word. He takes it as one takes a hammer, to break a rock. He takes the Word, and uses it on a rocky heart to break it to pieces. He makes it as a fire, and puts it to a sinner's life; to the sheaf that he has built up, the wood, the hay, and the stubble that he has gathered; He applies it to them, and they are burned. O, solemn, awful, blessed thing this! One may say, "I do not want that religion." If you do not have it, if the Holy Ghost give it you not, you will be in hell. One day you will know that that which you despise was the very blessing of God that maketh rich His people, and with which He addeth no sorrow. Happy is he who can say, "This and that scripture God used as a hammer and as a fire."

The Word is used as a guide. "I will guide thee with Mine eye." (Ps. 32:8) If you are by the hammer broken, by the fire burned, and look at, and grieve over, the ruin that has come to your soul and conscience and spirit, you feel in darkness, in confusion; how you can be saved you cannot tell. But one day some beautiful scripture may fall into your mind, and guide your eye to Jesus Christ. Just as the star guided the wise men to the place when the Infant Saviour lay, so some blessed scripture may fall upon your mind, exercised and confused, and as in prison, and direct you to the Lord Jesus. And what a sight for a sensible sinner! He needs righteousness, and there he sees it; he needs pardon, and there he sees the Fountain opened for sin; he needs grace to save him; there is the fullness of it, displayed in that divinely discovered Person. He needs the goodness of the Lord, and there in the Lord Jesus is all that goodness. The Scripture is used as a guide.

It is used by the Holy Spirit to stir up people, to stir up their "pure minds by way of remembrance;" to stir them up greatly in faith, faith in the bleeding Lamb, faith that wars in weakness and dares in doubt; faith that causes you to say, "I am all that which my conscience accuses you to say, "I am all that which my conscience accuses me of being, I have done all that my conscience says I have done, I am more wicked than I can express; but there is a Saviour, there is a Redeemer, and my soul is after Him, my soul I cast on Him. I look to His Fountain, to His righteousness, to His grace, to His great offices, to His Name; I look to Him." Faith will not give in; and whenever faith has a strengthening, a buttressing word, that word will impart vigour and courage to it, and you will say, "Be gone unbelief." You will say, perhaps, with Esther, "I have not been called in to the King these thirty days, and I know that by law it is death to the person who enters the presence of His Majesty unbidden; but the case is a desperate one, and I will go in, and if I perish, I perish." The Lord will strengthen your faith sometimes to do that.

The Word of God is used in sending out invitations. Sweet, suitable, free invitations are issued by the Lord. "Come unto Me." O what a word! "Come unto Me. I who have heaven at My

command, and earth under My authority, I who am exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, speak to you, Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matt. 11:28) I will not cast you out. Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. (John 6:37) He may bring his reasons and urge them, but I will not listen to them; he may set the briars and thorns of his sins and objections against My mercy, but I will go through them and burn them up, that I may save him." How great is God's Word in invitations! How free they are! "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." (Isa. 55:1) Blessed be God, He has spoken some such words to some of us. These invitations are used to express the very heart and love and purpose of God to certain sinners, the election of grace. You may see the characters who shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven; you may go with the apostle Paul and say, "Such were some of you, and such am I." (1 Cor. 6:9-11) There you may stop, and you may remain there a long time, fearing you have no interest in what you see. But the word of the Lord is very great, it is the word of a King, and "where the word of a king is, there is power." (Ecc. 8:4) If He speaks a word of forgiveness, if He makes you to know that He has pardoned your sins, then you will follow the apostle, "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11)

The Word is full of promises, sweet, suitable, exceeding great and precious promises; (2 Pet. 1:4) not one of which is written in vain, not one of which shall ever be spoken on any heart in vain; no. O what promises the Bible contains! and in Christ they are all yea and Amen "unto the glory of God by us." (2 Cor. 1:20) Notice that scripture, let us tarry for a moment upon it: "All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen" certain, infallible, sure, never shall fail; all of them yea and Amen; and what for? "Unto the glory of God by us." How? In their fulfilment. And if you can say, "Now there was a time when I was destitute and afflicted and tormented and weak, and I knew not what to do, what course to take; I was empty and poor and miserable and wretched and blind and naked. And the Lord spoke to me, and He made a promise to me of life eternal; gracious truth was opened and applied to my soul;" now, that was a use to which He put the Scripture. That word was His very word to you; and remember, it is a great thing to remember, "God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent." (Num. 23:19) No; you may make a bad use of it sometimes, or you may dishonour Him by forgetting it, or you may say He did not give it to you, and dishonour the Spirit in that part of His work in you. You may set up your ingratitude, and think, because of that, you have provoked the Lord to take the promise back; but it is not so. All your poor thoughts, your unbelieving thoughts, your questions about it, will not turn Him aside. He "is not a man that He should lie." And when He comes and reproves you for your unbelief, then you will be very sorry that you treated Him so badly, and beg Him to forgive you; and He will surely do it, and fulfil His promises.

The Word of God is a wonderful Word in respect of promises, promises of supplies, of strength, of wisdom, of guidance, of perseverance; promises of protection, the convoy of eternal love being granted; promises of covering you in the day of evil, of divine presence in water, in flood, in flame; promises of a passage safe and sure through Jordan, and of an entrance into heaven; promises of supplies of your daily bread and water being made sure. All these things were written aforetime, and were "written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Rom. 15:4)

Now let us take briefly another view. Take for instance this great truth in experience; namely, that we have a conflict; that we wrestle not with flesh and blood, not against those enemies you can look upon every moment; but "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12) that subtle, that powerful, that ceaseless foe. Is there anything in the Scripture that will be of use in such a conflict? Yes, there are two things afforded us by the Word of God. First, armour. "Put on the whole armour of God;" (Eph. 6:11) the armour of righteousness, the justification of your person; "the armour of light," (Rom. 13:12) the illumination of God in your understanding. "Having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness." (Eph. 6:14) Covered with this, a sinner may meet all the giants of sin, the devil, and trouble. Then, secondly, the Word is also a sword. "Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." (Eph. 6:17) And with this armour and this sword, says the apostle, you will "be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." (Eph. 6:13) How weak we are in ourselves! How incapable of fighting! How lacking in prowess and courage, in knowledge of warfare! But there is a blessed Word that will teach you how to fight. You see a marvellous example of the use of the Scriptures in the Lord Jesus. When He was tempted of the devil, He said, "It is written, it is written, it is written." And may God help us in temptation to say, "It is written." "Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight." (Ps. 144:1) Says the enemy, "But you do not know that you are the Lord's." May your faith say, "But there was a time when I did find such and such a word useful to me." And your faith will look at it, and put God in mind of it. That is the work of faith. Canst thou not perceive, poor soul, that at such a time the work of faith is to hold fast? "Remember" saith the Lord to the church in Sardis, to whom He had said, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast." May the Lord help us to do so. How did we receive? What did we receive? A promise? a good word from God? Says the devil, "You must not hold it." What has he to do with it? It is no business of his. It is God's work to give the word; it is the devil's work to make it doubtful to us, and to make our interest doubtful. But, as the Lord helps you, look into the Word, see how it provides armour and a sword. Says Paul, "Put it on, put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

And, my brethren, the Word of God looks to the future. It does not say only, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." It does promise that; but it looks to the present and to the future, and says, "In Me ye shall have peace." It looks to the end of the conflict and of tribulation. "Because I live, ye shall live also." (John 14:19) "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2,3) These are some of the uses to which the Lord puts His blessed Word.

Now look for a moment at what the psalmist says: "I rejoice at Thy Word." Throughout this Psalm you see his esteem of the Word of God; he esteemed it to be better than all else. He esteemed every precept of God to be pure; he said that it was to him the testimony of God, and he panted for it. "My soul panteth for Thy Word; I long for it." And when he found it, it was just with him as with Jeremiah later: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them they were my nourishment, my meat and my drink and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." You had better have a promise in your heart than a million pounds in the Bank of England. A million of gold would not sustain your heart in trouble, and would not bring you safely through Jordan; but the word of God spoken in your heart will do all that. Yes, it will. I do

not want to speak thoughtlessly, but a man of God can be content with his poverty; and is so, when he finds the word of God in his heart, assuring him that he shall lack no good thing. The Lord said to His disciples, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." And I dare not say that He did not say to me once, with a power not to be forgotten, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." That to faith is sufficient; not to an unbelieving heart, not to a worldly mind; but to faith that is sufficient. If your heavenly Father knows what you need, and says so to you, that means He will look after you, He will take care of you. If He pities a person, His pity is effectual pity. If He works for a person, that work is effectual; there is nothing in the Lord of impotence. So look at that promise. If you have that in your heart, you are rich. When you find Christ with you in a word, the dear Saviour of sinners in a promise, when you find the merit of His death in a promise or a word of the gospel, when you find His righteousness there, and His mediation there, then you will say, "I rejoice at Thy word, as one that findeth great spoil" here is more than ever the huntsman could get; here is more to my soul than all riches." This answers to an earlier Psalm, where the psalmist is saying, "There be many that say, Who will show us any good?" He looked out on the whole world, and as it were heard them crying out for good: "Who will show it to us?" The Pharisee, the Sadducee, the worldly priest, the wicked priest, and the people who were turning away from God, all saying, "Who will show any good?" Said this man of God in his secret prayer, "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us." And when he got that light shining, then said he, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." Let the wicked have their corn and their wine; it is all they have. Poor sinner, if you never have more than corn and wine, which means earthly good, what a poor person you are! Yes, if you could say, "So much belongs to me;" if you could count your possessions by the thousands and ten thousand, what then? It is but poverty. But if you get a smile from God, then you can say, "I rejoice now, I rejoice in the Lord, I rejoice in Christ Jesus; I rejoice in the word that brought Him to me, into my very heart; I rejoice at the condescension He showed in blessing me; I rejoice because He answered prayer, and I rejoice because He came near to me; I rejoice at Thy Word."

"As one that findeth great spoil" as one who as it were stumbled on wealth untold; as one who, not expecting it, finds himself possessed of it. You who fear God will follow this. May the Lord give us, then, to enter into this word, yea, this experience. A man of God esteeming the Word of God, yet persecuted by princes, his heart standing in awe of the holy Scriptures, suddenly finds himself possessed of the Scriptures in power, in life, in light, in glory; finds himself saying, "This is my Word, this is the Word of God to me, and I rejoice in it."

May the Lord bless you, my dear hearers. And do not think that having the Bible in your hands is enough; the Spirit put it in your hearts. God give you the grace to seek His blessed Word to be in your hearts with power. Once again let me say, all we have here will die. If we live for years to enjoy it, as men speak, we shall die and leave it; or it may make to itself wings and fly away. But if we have the Word of God in us, in the power of the Holy Ghost, then faith will explore the boundless wealth that God has given to us, the kingdom of immense delight that awaits us, the precious Saviour who will not leave us nor forsake us, the good God who has said He will guide us with His eye, who has exhorted us to follow Him as dear children. Then, I say, we may rejoice in boundless wealth, in eternal goodness; we may look everything in the face, and say

sometimes, "I bear all my treasures with me, and can therefore fear no fatal shipwreck." May the Lord add His blessing. May the Holy Ghost bless you by giving you His Word.