

The Father Well Pleased in Christ

Preached At Galeed Chapel, Brighton, December 25th, 1919

by J. K. POPHAM

"And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him; and lo, a voice from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:16,17)

Although this refers to the entry of Christ upon His ministry at His baptism, yet I would speak of it with respect also to His birth I mean that Christ is here set before us as the Son of God. The Scripture declares how He became Man, declares how gloriously He was introduced into this world; that while men knew Him not and did not herald and welcome Him, a mighty multitude of the heavenly host was seen to welcome Him, to herald and proclaim His coming, and to sing a song that would provoke men and did as to its substance, provoke men to enmity because there was a King born whom they could not receive. It was God's will that Christ, His Son, should be thus honoured, and all men are to honour the Son even as they honour the Father.

Now for a short time may the Lord help us to honour that infant, that Child born in that miraculous manner recorded. The Son given to take up into union with Himself that human nature. We have in the Person of Christ a great mystery. We have in the Person of Christ the love of God that shall never end. We have also the infinite hatred of God to sin and we have also the infinite justice of God in punishing sin, condemning sin in His flesh so that should it please the eternal Spirit to help one to speak rightly of these mysteries, it may be profitable to us and it may help us rightly to observe this day. The birth of Christ stands alone among all births. There never was, never will be another like this, the birth of Jesus Christ. Each poor sinner born into this world is born to fill a place, to do a work, to accomplish a certain number of days. An object of divine love and redemption, called by grace in time, then to go to glory; or left to sin and fill up the measure of his or her iniquity; and that makes birth a very solemn thing and life a very solemn thing. But the birth of Christ stands alone, as I said.

In the object of it, in the great and wondrous end of it, He came not as a private person, but as a manifestation of the goodwill of God to man as the highest possible expression of the glory of God which some men are to behold: "We," said John, "beheld His glory." And when the day came for Christ to enter upon His ministry then the Father bore testimony to Him and the Spirit came upon Him, and there on that day, on Jordan's bank, in Jordan's river, was the eternal Jehovah in His Trinity of Persons, Jesus Christ the only begotten, the eternally begotten Son of the Father, saying with a voice that was audible to Christ, "This is My beloved Son," and the Holy Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. It is whether we or not, a most glorious sight, a sight for angels, a sight for redeemed sinners; that there on that day the Trinity should be, to redeem poor sinners out of every kindred and tongue and tribe and people and nation, so that

they should all come to sing unto Him that loved them and washed them from their sins in His own blood; and may we be of that number.

There are two perfections in the Almighty to which I would just draw your attention. The first is love which I have named: "God is love," and beyond and behind and after that will come nothing to the church of God. It fixes the state of all its blessed objects. It has fixed their home. It has provided all meetness necessary for that home; it is the convoy to all pilgrims from the city of destruction to the heavenly Jerusalem; it is their comfort as they feel it; it is their happiness as it is shed abroad in their hearts. It brings them to God; it brings God to them; there is nothing beyond it; there is nothing after it; there is nothing to be compared to it the love of God. And this love of God is expressed in the greatest possible manner by and in the Person of Jesus Christ, who is the express image of His Father's Person and the greatness of His glory. What favoured people we are if we are loved with an everlasting love! We are sure to get through, though we sin and fall and stumble and come short of the glory of God. We are sure to get through, for He says "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." (Jer. 31:3)

And the second perfection in God is what is necessary to His Being, infinite hatred of sin, and wherever that is and wherever it takes full effect, there is nothing after it; no change. The smoke of the torment of the lost ascends up for ever and ever; and this is a tremendous thing to consider and the consideration of it is a great mercy, where people are brought to it. If it should please the Lord to bring us to it; yea, He has brought some of us as we believe to consider the wrath, to consider Him who has something against us, against whom we have sinned, and to consider it while we are in the way that we may go to Him and confess and be reconciled. That is an infinite mercy and may you who do not know at present this mercy be brought to know it, for I say to you again there is nothing beyond it, there is nothing after it; there is no gradual improvement of fallen lost men until they emerge from the pit into light and goodness. The wrath of God abideth for ever. Everlasting darkness will hold and torment the lost. And this hatred of sin forming itself, so to speak, into the curse of the law, is necessary to God. If He were not good He might pass by sin; if He were not just what He is He might condone sin; but seeing He is good, out of His infinite goodness comes this hatred of sin and the necessity of punishing it; and I put this before you, dear friends, as a very solemn thing, which may you be enabled to consider.

Now the love of God is in this wonderful Person in all its perfection. You think perhaps, you who are concerned about your salvation, that the greatest act of love that God could do would be to save you; but I tell you there is a greater act than that, and that is in the gift of His beloved Son: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

Now in speaking a little this morning of this great matter, of this Person to whom attention is drawn by the Father saying, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," I would notice in the first place how we are to understand this word: "My beloved Son." It is said of Him in the Psalms by the Father, that this day He had caused Christ to come, this day He had begotten Him. We are not to consider Christ as purely a Man, only a Man, but as God also, the eternal God. O my friends, we can never grasp what this means! He who can comprehend God is God. Men saved and taught of God have apprehensions of God, but they can never comprehend Him.

This blessed, this eternal Being, is before us in the Man Christ Jesus. High beyond all imagination is this tremendous truth God was manifest in the flesh; manifested in the day of His incarnation; manifested always afterwards to the eye of faith, though a poor and a despised Man. Now heaven hangs on this and may we consider it for a moment. I say heaven hangs on this. Go to Eden's garden defiled and see the Lord expelling our first parents naked and ashamed; see Him putting them forth from that once so beautiful garden, but now defiled and spoiled; closing the gate and safe-guarding it, lest they should return and presume to lay hold of that fruit of the tree of life which is in the midst of the garden; and see this pair thus expelled, now homeless orphans, no heavenly Father, speaking of them as fallen, no heavenly Father, no heavenly home, and they had lost their earthly home. And now all their descendants, we among them, are in the same condition, just in the same condition depraved, sinful, loving sin, cast out of Eden, homeless vagabonds, without God, without hope in the world. That is the best that can be said of any man naturally, and that is the worst in this world. And this state, my friends, is changeless, so far as the ability of the man is concerned. So far as our ability is concerned we have no ability to change this our fallen state. When a man is convinced of this it is a solemn thing for him. Cut off, driven out away from all good. No God, no Father to care for him in heaven, a poor depraved creature. I say, my friends, this is a very solemn thing to consider. There is nothing too base for us as we are thus fallen, and there is no place for us as we are thus fallen after this life but hell.

Now what a mercy it is that God had determined that some should be redeemed from this state, and O if He has determined that we should be, if through grace we are amongst that determined number that the Lord God will have to be with Himself for ever and ever, we shall need eternity to bless Him for the mercy! But how shall this be? Having one only Son He sent Him: "In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son." (Gal. 4:4) And Isaiah prophesies of this Person and both the natures which He has thus: "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given." (Isa. 9:6) This is Jesus Christ. This is Jesus Christ coming from the love of God, the bosom of God, the throne of glory, laying His royal estate aside; this is Jesus Christ. He, rather than that His children should perish, came to give Himself that He might die in their place. The Son given, the Child born, miraculously born just as the Scripture declares Him to have been born; and this is how the Son of God is here before us. Two natures, one Person. The divine nature in all its fullness, in all its glory, though veiled. Human nature in all its purity without sin and yet as born into this world to be a Man of sorrows.

Now you see this blessed One, our Lord Jesus Christ, this is how He became the Son of God in manifestation, eternally the Son in the bosom of the Father. No man could see Him: "God dwelleth in the light that no man can approach unto." (1 Tim. 6:16) The Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, dwelt there eternally, but now the Son shall come forth and He shall be the Son of God and the Son of Man in manifestation; and what was this for? Why did He lay aside His royal estate, come down to earth to be made a Man? We are told in the Epistle to the Corinthians: "He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." (1 Cor. 5:21) So He came to be a poor Man, to be burdened with imputed sin. We would leave all outside matters of man's enmity and bitterness and the devil's persecution of Him, and just confine ourselves for the time being to this one consideration.

It affects us, if indeed we are interested in it, and will affect us through eternity. O sinner, are you concerned about this? There is nothing worth living for but Jesus Christ. Comparatively all else is vanity, emptiness, death. One of the greatest mercies is to be concerned about this "Am I His or am I not? Did this wondrous Person love me, come to die for me, to bear my sins in His own body on the tree? Did justice overtake Him for me, smite Him, wound and bruise and slay Him for me? And did He voluntarily come and offer Himself as a spotless sacrifice to God His Father, to honour justice, to magnify the law, to bear my sins away? Did He come for this?" It is a great question. O what a mercy to be assured of this! Yea, the first mercy is to be concerned about it. And did the darling Son of God interpose Himself on my behalf? Was that matchless scene of sovereign grace and love, that I might enter heaven? I say it is a great blessing to be concerned about this matter. Press the case if you feel it. Press your request on God. Fly to the throne of grace by prayer, make all your requests known unto God. Pour out all your wishes. Tell Him all your doubts and all your fears on this great errand, and look to this blessed One, who in time will say to you, "I am thy salvation." This was the end He had in view. This was the great purpose. It is beyond our comprehension that the sins we have committed should have been by the very hand of God taken from us and put to the account of Christ, should have been laid on Him by an act of infinite justice in imputing all to Him. It is beyond us my friends, but the glory of it may be seen; the effect of it is felt in every conscience when the blood of Christ is applied. This is how that song, that beautiful song takes effect in men: "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill toward men." (Luke 2:14) O wonder of wonders that ever a sinner dead in sin by nature, a child of wrath even as others, can be born again to be concerned about his sins and God's glory, and then have given to him a powerful sense of an interest in this blessed work of substitution, of death, of sacrifice by Jesus Christ! That is why He became a Man, that He might have sin imputed to Him and bear it away. There is nothing else worth looking after, thinking about, or praying for; for if this be given us all else will come.

"This is My Beloved Son." Now look what is said next: "In whom I am well pleased." Look at the awful contrast between the pleasure of the Father in Christ and the enmity of man against Christ. "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom. 8:7) Just look at your own enmity; I look at mine sometimes. I remember feeling it; I remember exhibiting, uttering it, wrathfully uttering it. O the wretched creature, hating whom God loves, despising the Man of God's right hand, in whom He has infinite pleasure! This is our state by nature. Not one in this chapel now but what is involved in that terrible statement: "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." My friends, you are alive or dead; either you have love or hatred prevailing, one or the other; under the law or under the gospel, and if dead under the law your state is exceedingly terrible. If alive under the gospel, although you may be not favoured in your times of bondage and guilt, your state is most blessed, and you shall know it is God's time.

Look at the Father's pleasure. "In whom I am well pleased." Why is God so pleased with this Man, this Jesus Christ? First, because He is His Son: "This is My Beloved Son," whom I sent, who has come forth from My bosom, who has come forth being one with Me, possessing the whole divinity. O wondrous Person! This is My Son, My beloved Son in human nature, a pure Man. I think it is very difficult, and impossible except we have faith, to consider rightly the Lord Jesus Christ. Naturally we only know sin; in some form it is in us prevailing. We have not faith naturally, and "whatsoever is not of faith is sin;" but here is One set before us who knew no sin,

"In whose mouth was no guile." Now although we may be by this position honest people, yet by nature we are not honest; there is hypocrisy in everybody, there is guile, there is deceit in everybody. You say, "Surely not." I say, or rather the Scripture says, "Yes, it is so." Listen: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9) That is your heart, my heart thus described. But here is a pure Man, and what a mercy that it is so! How could He have been a Surety for us if He had not been a pure Man? How could He have undertaken to redeem us if He had not been a pure Man, as well as Almighty God? Just consider it, beloved friends, for a moment. What a beauty then and a glory you may see in the sacred humanity of the Lord Jesus! And yet though pure, He subjected Himself to death, else He could not have died; for where there is no sin there can be no death. Death always and only follows sin, it never comes where there is purity, and established purity as in Jesus Christ. But though He was this pure blessed Man He subjected Himself to death, and His Father sent Him to die: "Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life that I might take it again; no man taketh it from Me. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father." (John 10:18) So the Father was pleased because of His dear Son, His only, His eternally begotten Son, and also pure Son of Man.

And in the next place the Father is pleased with Him because He was His willing Servant. We are not willing servants. We are unwilling by nature. We are determined to have our own way by nature. We are wicked people; but here is One who was the willing Servant of His Father: "Behold My Servant." And being a Servant He was dependent. He was cast upon His Father from His birth. He was made to hope from His infancy. He was made to look to His Father. A true belief in the sacred human nature of Christ, an entrance into all that human nature means without sin, will show us this and make us see a beauty in that word: "But Thou art He that took Me out of the womb; Thou didst make Me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts; I was cast upon Thee from the womb." (Ps. 22:9,10) And in His troubles His faith went out to His Father and He said: "I know that I shall not be condemned; He is near that justifieth Me." O His Father promised to help Him and He did help Him! What an amazing thing a willing Servant, and as the Psalmist said, "As the eyes of a servant look to the hand of his master, so our eyes wait upon the Lord until He shall have mercy upon us," we see the eyes of Christ were always upon His Father, as He said to His Father: "I do always those things that please him." (John 8:29) Think of it, this blessed Jesus, this willing Servant coming to obey and He perfectly obeyed, perfectly; and it pleased the Father that He was not only a willing Servant but also a willing and an acceptable sacrifice. He is pleased with Him: "Therefore doth My Father love Me because I lay down my life. I have power to take it up," He said, "power to take it again. I lay it down freely, voluntarily, of My own love and My own will; but I lay it down also in subjection to My Father's will." "If it be possible," He said to His Father of the cup and of His death, "let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done. I came to do Thy will and I do it in laying down My life." Now this means heaven. Let me say again, this means heaven to all interested in it. It pleased the Father thus to testify of His Son.

Now before I close let me put a question or two to you that I put to myself. First, are we pleased with this Person? What think ye of Christ? What think ye of this Man, this God-Man whose beautiful name is Emmanuel, whose names are "Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace?" What think ye of Christ? Now the Word of God says this: "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." It is a beautiful word, and it stands well on the side

of a thinker of Christ, one who thinks well of Christ. Yes, just look at it, "As a man thinketh in his heart." Perhaps afraid to speak his thought to anybody, but he thinks well of Christ. "O," he says, "He is everything. If I only knew Him, if I only possessed Him; if He would but bless me; if I knew that He gave Himself for me, died for me, was buried for me, rose again for me, I think I could bear all trouble, go through everything in this life of pain!" "I think of Him," one may say, "even in the night season, I think of Him through the day, and though sometimes I do not think I pray at all, yet again and again I am sending up my desires. O that Jesus Christ would bless me indeed!" Well, as a man thinketh in his heart so is he. Now if you think well of Christ as I have just hinted, you are a Christian. God forbid that I should ever say a word that would slightly heal a wound, but I do believe I am warranted to say that if your heart thinks kindly and well and largely of Christ, if large thoughts of Him move you, move you to the throne of grace, move you to esteem Him and an interest in Him, if you view it above all else; move you to think now He is more glorious and excellent in my eyes and in my thoughts and affections than the mountains of prey; am I wrong, am I against the Scriptures when I say you are a Christian? "He that is not against us is for us." The Apostle Paul haled to prison men and women and all whom he found of this way. Now would you hail to prison, that is trouble anyone, pursue and persecute anyone you knew to be a Christian? Do you hate God's people? Do you not sometimes pray this? "Remember me O Lord with the favour that Thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation, That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance?" (Ps. 106:4,5) What a mercy it is to be a Christian in your heart! A believer in Jesus Christ always thinks well of Him.

What do you think of His death? Does it appear to you to be what it really is, the only way to the Father; the only way to the pardon of sin and the justification of a sinner? Does it sometimes shine in your eyes above the brightness of the sun? O can you say in your humble measure that the very Person with whom the Father is pleased, you, sinner though you are, you also are pleased? Does the Father's pleasure, does your pleasure meet? Do these two pleasures meet in the same Person? O bless God if it is so! I believe there are some of us here now who can say, the pleasure of the Father and our own pleasure are on and fixed in the same Man, Jesus Christ. We may doubt a thousand times over our interest, but there sometimes is a truth and we realize it, we are pleased with Jesus Christ, pleased with His death, pleased that He died to make an end of sin, well pleased, would not have it other than it is. O we are without hope but for this; without access to the Father, but for this! But with this there is hope, with this there is access, with this the light of heaven can come to us, with this the persuasion of the Spirit can come, with this the sealing of the Spirit and the earnest of the Spirit can be given to us.

Are we pleased that He is in heaven? The Father's love sent Christ from heaven, and the Father was pleased to receive Him into heaven, and are we glad that He is there? He ever liveth to make intercession for His people. The Father is pleased to hear Him. There is a golden censer there and in it is much incense, and mingling with that are the prayers of the saints coming up with infinite acceptance before God the Father. "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Mark in his Gospel adds, "Hear ye Him." Hear Jesus Christ. Hear His assertion of His own Deity: "Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58) Hear His gracious invitation: "Come unto Me." "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17) Hear what Christ the Lord says: "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." (John 5:24) All these

things are in Christ's blessed word, "Hear ye Him." O what a mercy it is to hear Him! His enemies sought to catch Him. Do you seek to catch Him in His words, find fault with Him? Nature says, "O yes." What says faith? O that I might hear His voice! "O that He would kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for I believe His love is better than wine!" (Songs 1:2) May the Lord make this out to us and help us in the spirit of faith to look to this blessed Person, the Object of the Father's love and pleasure, that we may be found in Him at last. Amen.