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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves on Monday afternoon 6.6.60 at  
"Ebenezer" Clapham

Hymns: 289, 778, 373

Reading: Psalms 115 and 116

Text: Psalm 119.116

"Uphold me according unto Thy Word that I may live; and let me  
not be ashamed of my hope".

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We are exhorted in the Word of God to remember all the way in which He has led us in this wilderness for the purpose of humbling us before Him and to remind us that we have not kept His commandments as we should have done. Indeed every reflection on the past under a consciousness of the Lord's mercy to us, rightly felt, must ever be humbling, especially when we feel a hope that, the Lord has been mindful of us and has remembered us in our low estate. If we are not deceived He plucked some of us as brands from the burning and brought us, in His covenant mercy, to know just a little of the everlasting Gospel of His grace. I should say that where such a reflection is rightly felt it is not only profitable experimentally, but productive of worship and adoration, rightly so, to the God of our mercies.

I have ventured to read this verse today because it was the verse from which I attempted to speak 25 years ago on this Whit Monday afternoon. In my little measure I feel it behoves me to record the Lord's loving-kindness in this, that notwithstanding all my many provocations that might well have moved Him to dispense with me altogether, He has upheld me until now according to His Word, and has kept my soul more or less alive in it and hitherto I have had no reason whatever to be ashamed of my hope. But I have this to say, that I have as great a need of His upholding now as I felt when I was first settled among my people here. This was my prayer then and the Lord has not been unmindful of this, and it is my prayer still, particularly in the position I hold, and have been thus far upheld in, which is cause for very great thankfulness to

that God Who has not dealt with me as I deserve. Therefore upon this ground I do desire to make mention of His loving-kindness and mercy and patience and forbearance that He has shown toward me through many vicissitudes in my soul's feelings which only the Lord's servants engaged as I am can, in the same sense, understand. It is our mercy that although often we feel to be dried and withered, the fountain remains just the same and the streams sometimes flow mercifully, so that, as I mentioned yesterday, the Gospel is still fresh and sweet now and again like a living spring. I know I have been speaking about it nearly every day for 25 years and very principally here, yet when the Lord is pleased to shine again a little and open up before the view of faith the beauties of our glorious Emmanuel the heart softens and His name again is as ointment poured forth.

O what a mercy to be born to know the Lord and to have a prospect for eternity, a hope that is not a delusive one like a spider's web, but a good hope through grace that will never make ashamed; and if it is a good hope through grace it will not make ashamed because God is the Author of it and nothing of which God is the author will ever make ashamed, though often indeed we may feel ashamed of ourselves. Yet I trust in our little measure we can say with the Apostle Paul, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto Salvation", and has been this in my soul if not deceived.

I may be forgiven today if I look back a little as this is not quite an ordinary occasion but one that calls for some reflection. In the year 1897 my late Pastor went to Rotherfield to preach and when he arrived he was informed that Mr. Dickens, a minister some of us esteemed very highly, had just been settled among them by the church as their pastor and that if he felt led to speak to the occasion it would be appreciated by the people. This took him right away from his intended subject and moved him to speak in the afternoon to the Pastor about his office and ministry, and in the evening to the congregation and it was felt to be a good day. Mr. Dickens always referred to Mr. Popham as the Bishop that ordained him as Pastor over them at Rotherfield. In a much closer relationship I can say that twenty-five years ago Mr. Popham, my late Pastor,

was the Bishop who ordained me as Pastor here, on Whit Monday in 1935. I do not know how many were here then that are here now, not very many. But it was a day to be remembered. In the evening his subject was "And He sent them forth two by two into every place where He Himself would come". He then spoke of the need of the Lord's presence in the ministry. On looking back I hope it can be felt in some measure it has been fulfilled. Well, it was a good beginning. I can so vividly remember him sitting here by my side in the afternoon and have cause to remember his wise counsel in many ways.

That was twenty-five years ago, and now we are here in 1960, and through that period of time the Lord has shown kindness to us. For myself, I would acknowledge that I have been as a Pastor much favoured with the practical consideration and affection of my people, much more than I deserve. Moreover, I have often valued their prayers for me, and many times on a Saturday evening our little prayer-meetings have been a sweet anointing for the Sabbath day, not always the same, but on some occasions, and as some of our godly members that are taken home, used to pour out their hearts before the Lord, it seemed to lift me up and give me quite a start for the Sabbath day. My people have considered me in every possible way recently too, in such a measure as I could never have anticipated. We have not come through twenty-five years without sorrows, difficulties, trials, afflictions, bereavements and some hard things. That could not be, could it? But in those things the Lord has kept us united as a people. I have had to see godly deacons taken home, but the Lord has been good to me in providing me with other godly deacons that consider me in every possible way. I feel I should mention this favour and also the kindness of others that has been so uniform through this period of time. We have lost about forty members and friends in the congregation, that have been taken home, I believe it can be said of them each. About sixty have been added to us during this time, in which I have been favoured to see some signs following my labours here. It has been here and there a very humbling consideration that one and another has come forth to speak

of what the Lord has done for their souls. But beyond all this, the Lord has continued His gospel among us. I did not know how I could ever come through the period of probation. It used to seem to me as though I should be dried up, for I knew something of what Mr. Dickens felt like when he had preached the first time and they invited him again. He said, "I have said all I can say". "Well", said the deacon, "You tell them the same things again". And so for twenty-five years I have been more or less telling my people the same things again, that is to say I have, as helped, preached the same Gospel; and after all, there is no other, is there? I should soon be dismissed if I attempted to preach any other Gospel, which is not another. But still this same Gospel holds good and has often been a sweet and joyful sound amongst us, through the goodness of a prayer-answering and a promise-performing God.

Now this word, as I have hinted, is still eminently suitable. I have not felt I could get away from it, though I do not remember whether I have actually preached from it since. I still feel to need upholding, according to that same grace and power, that my soul may live, that I may not be ashamed of my hope. I realise that twenty-five years having just fled away, the sands of time are sinking, and how much longer I may be spared I do not know; but I desire to commit the future into the hands of that God who has, we believe, ordered all things well. What a mercy to be upheld! What is it to be upheld? It is to be helped and strengthened by the God of all grace. How many, many times I have come into the pulpit with the simple plea of the Syrophenocian woman who said, "Lord, help me." She came worshipping Him, saying "Lord, help me". I have not got beyond those three words yet. I have no desire to. In my measure I can echo what the Psalmist said in Psalm 27, "Hide not Thy face far from me; put not Thy servant away in anger; thou hast been my help". I can say that. "Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." In another Psalm too the Psalmist says, "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence", or, what I like rather

better in the margin "my soul had quickly dwelt in silence"; but He has been my help. He has been the help of a worm many times, for He has said, "Fear not, worm Jacob, I will help thee". It is a mercy to be upheld and maintained hitherto.

Some people play with religion, but when God begins in the heart and conscience of a sinner, He does not play with him, and He may deal very solemnly with him. How unspeakably solemn it is to trifle with the things of eternity. No words can convey their solemnity or their far-reaching issues; nothing can be of such amazing benefit to us as the grace of God. "Godliness" we read "has the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." It is profitable for time and for eternity, for this life and our future life. What a mercy to be a subject of grace, to be taken in hand, to be dealt with, and to be maintained, as I believe we shall be if the work is of God, "for He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ." The day is not very far distant when many of us will have done with the things of time and sense, and shall launch into another world. Oh what a profound mercy it will be to be found right at last; not to be weighed in the balances and found wanting, but to prove the sweetness of the Psalmist's blessed word, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me."

The Psalmist desired here to be upheld according to the word of God, "according to Thy word". This was a prayer, not to be held up in anything wrong, in error, or in anything inconsistent with the name of God; but to be upheld in the truth. The Lord Jesus Christ is Word, Truth, Life and Way. He is the eternal Word. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God". This is a profound and a blessed truth, essential to the salvation of our souls; for (as in reference to His eternal Deity and divine Sonship) He must be just what He is and nothing less, the infinite God, the eternal God, subsisting in that mysterious and blessed relationship as a Person in the Trinity. And not only is He the eternal Word, but He is also the incarnate Word. "This term "word" is used, we understand, or was used, by the Jews, in relation to the Messiah. It is expressive because words are a

revelation of the mind. I convey to you what is in my mind by my words. In this sense the Lord Jesus Christ is both the eternal and the incarnate Word, in that He declares the mind and will of His Father. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him". Thus the Lord Jesus Christ is the Word. He is the Word as a minister of the Gospel, as is recorded of Him in the prophecy. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." In this sense He is the incarnate Word.

To be upheld according to this word is, as I take it, to be upheld under the teaching and guidance of the Holy Ghost in a knowledge of Christ in relation to His glorious Person and His finished work. I may repeat what I mentioned here yesterday, namely that everything in the Lord Jesus Christ, in His glorious Person and work, is attractive to the eye of a believer. "His name is as ointment poured forth". He is "the desire of all nations", the "chiefest among ten thousand/<sup>and</sup>the altogether lovely". He is the incarnate Word; by Him the Father speaks. But we need also to be upheld in the written Word, the Holy Scriptures, for they are divinely inspired and a wonderful gift of the Lord to us. " whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." May the Lord ever keep us close to His blessed Word. It is like a mine whose depths can never be fathomed. It is a glorious revelation of the great Redeemer in type and prophecy, and in the New Testament as setting forth His precious atoning sacrifice and all-prevailing mediation. Some of you know what I mean; now and again, in the silent watches of the night, a glimpse of Him can fill your heart, and you can believe that you will get to heaven one day. So you will, because you have an earnest of it in your heart, for Christ is precious there. The devil can do much, I know, but he can never make Christ precious in your soul. I have felt Him to be precious, and some of you have felt Him to be precious.

You do not want another Gospel, do you? No, say you, but I need to be upheld in this. "Uphold me according to Thy Word ", according to the written Word, His precepts, as well as these precious doctrines. The precepts flow out of the doctrines and are often knit together in one verse, as for example, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit".

Uphold me in Thy written word. We feel in these days for our younger people. The awful, unnameable errors that abound under the name of Christianity are terrible to contemplate: the modernism, the criticism of the Holy Scriptures. Truly it is a solemn day in which we live. Oh to be upheld in the written Word, and not only the written Word but the spoken word too. It is our mercy to know a living Christ and a speaking Christ. "My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me." There are many Scriptures that affirm the truth that the Lord Jesus speaks by His Spirit to His people. Here and there in your life you know this to be true. This may not have been an audible voice, but if it were I would not dispute it. He has often spoken by the sweet inshinings and power of a Word brought into the heart in a time of need, always in a time of need. "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned that I might know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary". Do you know anything about that? A word spoken by the Lord to a child of God at times has been a wonderful strength. Some of you may be in circumstances to need this, and indeed may mourn His silence, but even so there is a waiting upon Him. Oh, how the Psalmist felt this! He said "Lord be not silent to me, lest if Thou be silent to me I become like them that go down into the pit." His voice is heard sometimes. "Thou shalt hear a voice behind thee saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it". His voice may sometimes be heard sharply to reprove us, and who has not known this and the dealings of the Lord with them? But oh, what timely reproofs they have been! I could mention some if I had time. What wholesome reproofs they have been, and what needful ones too. His voice is sometimes heard in direction, invitation and confirmation. He speaks by His Spirit and the influence of it can sometimes lift

you up out of the depths and as a still small voice can bring a quietness into a troubled and disturbed mind. "Be still and know that I am God."

"Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live" that is, I take it, not so much that I may live naturally. I do not take the Psalmist to refer to our mortal life so much as to the soul. "Let my soul live and it shall praise Thee". Is there not a need of this with every one of us and especially those of us who minister in the name of God? Ministers need to be faithful ministers and lively ministers, not necessarily excitable ones but lively in their souls in the truth they preach. The Apostle writing to Timothy said that the husbandman should be first partaker of the fruits. The Apostle John spoke of tasting, handling and feeling that which he declared there in his Epistle. What grace we need in the ministry and to be kept alive in it, to live in it, - let my soul live in the ministry. You live in it not simply when preaching but almost every time you go out you have the pulpit before you and it is necessary to be living in it. I believe I can say that I love to live in it, but more particularly in the exercise of it that by the Lord's mercy and by His good Spirit the heart is inditing a good matter. What is the good matter? It is the blessed Gospel and we cannot have any better matter than that. It is a mercy to live in it ministerially speaking, and to have grace to speak that which is right of God. Often I am reminded in my own feelings of years ago when I used to hear this in prayer, when my late Pastor would pray to be helped to speak that which is right of God. This is not easy, is it? We may study, and rightly so, we may be very correct; but still we need something more than that. To speak that which is right of God we need His good Spirit to reveal the gospel to us and make it precious in our souls, so that we may live in it; and that will preserve us from error as much as anything can. "That I may live" in these precious doctrines, that I may live in my soul in the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. So much preaching today is anaemic; but we cannot keep too close to the blessed atonement of Christ. "God forbid that I



should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." There is a great tendency to drift away from the good old-fashioned truths. They are looked upon by some professing folk as old-fashioned, but if we are taught by the Holy Spirit of God we shall want to keep the old paths and stand therein; the good old truths will do to live and die by and everything else will fail us.

"That I may live and not be ashamed of my hope". If it is a good hope through grace we shall not be ashamed of it, but we may do well to examine our hope, as to how we came by it, and what it is built upon. You know they are very familiar words, and I know some dear, godly old people that have not been able to say much more than that; none of us in a way can -

"My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness."

Well, if your hope is built on that, it is a hope that will take you to heaven. It is true we see through a glass darkly here, but there face to face. Oh what a prospect lies ahead when earth is exchanged for heaven and the fleeting things of time for the abiding realities of eternity. Oh to have a hope that will never make ashamed! "Hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost that is given unto us." I must not keep you any longer. May the Lord bless these few reflections and very brief observations upon this point of truth, for His name's sake. Amen.