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PASTOR'S 40th. ANNIVERSARY

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Monday
afternoon 26.5.75

Hymns 806, 778, 1119

Reading Psalm 116

Text Psalm 119.116

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

"Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and
let me not be ashamed of my hope."

I am before you in fear lest I should fall and bring reproach upon the Holy Name of God and the ministry, and I am before you in much trembling because of the Majesty and glory of God and because we are poor sinners in ourselves, not worthy of the least of His notice for we have sinned and come short of His glory. As the Lord may help me I would direct you to the Psalm. I am not attempting, in a sense, to preach a sermon, but to record the goodness and mercy of a covenant God Who has sustained me hitherto. This particular verse that I have read is the verse from which I attempted to speak at my settlement in April 1935. This was the word I addressed the people from when my late pastor, Mr. J.K. Popham of Galeed, Brighton, was here in the pulpit by my side while I preached in the afternoon, and he preached in the evening, and it was a time to be remembered. The Chapel was packed with people but there was something more important than a full Chapel; I believe it could be felt at that time that the Lord was here.

What I have read then is a prayer that is as suitable today as when I preached from it 40 years ago; but it would behove me to make this acknowledgement to the honour of God that He has heard and answered prayer in upholding me all these many years, for if He had not supplied my need and helped me along in my felt weakness and fears I could never have continued. One feature of the everlasting and glorious Gospel is that although thousands of sermons are preached yet still the Gospel remains as full and free as ever. It is like a fountain ever flowing, ever free, with water rich and

clear. While the Lord has indeed fulfilled what I have read up to the present time, yet still I feel the need of this prayer more than ever, "Uphold me according unto thy word" - which is a point to notice, it must be a gracious upholding that is uniform with the teaching of the Holy Spirit in the souls of the Lord's redeemed people. By the "Word" we may understand one or two things; first of all it can relate to the Lord Jesus Himself. We have this point in John 1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God;" a very blessed testimony to the glorious Trinity and the deity of each Person and yet though one they are three distinct Persons. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Word. He is referred to as the Word in the Holy Scriptures because He is a means of communication. By Him the Father speaks and He Himself speaks to His people, and the Holy Spirit, a Person in the Trinity, reveals Christ in the hearts of the Lord's people as the Word that was with God and is God. It is a great thing rightly to believe in the eternal deity and divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is an important point and I feel disposed to say that wherever the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed by the Holy Spirit Who glorifies Him, He will be revealed as God and a Person in the eternal, blessed Trinity. This I felt myself in my earlier days in Brighton in a particular sense when I believe the Lord blessed my soul and delivered me from my bondage. I believed that Jesus was the Son of God from all eternity but in the fulness of time He assumed human flesh and accomplished the will of His divine Father in the salvation and redemption of His people, by His great and blessed atonement, by which means He did bear their sins away in His own body on the tree. Moreover He is the support of His people in the trials, afflictions and sufferings through which they may be called to pass; as in the case of the Apostle Paul when the Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness". I would emphasise this point then that to have a right view of the eternal glorious Person of the Son of God is vital to our soul's comfort, peace and salvation. We have no hope apart from Him and what He has accomplished.

"Uphold me according unto thy Word". We may refer this also to the written Word, to the Holy Scriptures which we have before us, they are the Word of God, and as you know in these sad times in which we live there are many attempting to overthrow the divine inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures; but they never will do it in the heart and conviction of a poor sinner where Christ is made precious and His Word has been blessed to their souls. I do not believe they will ever do it. I have often thought of that sweet word that the Lord says of the Holy Spirit that "He shall glorify me, for He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you." How can we feel then in regard to this particular point, in being upheld in the doctrine of the blessed Trinity and in the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures? We need to be upheld in passing through trials and afflictions that are more or less the lot of the redeemed family of God. "In the world ye shall have tribulation" and so we shall, although in these days we are favoured with our liberties for which we have cause to be profoundly thankful. I have been reading quite a lot lately of the martyrs of by-gone days and their noble testimony which they sealed with their blood and sometimes under great torture of body and yet they remained faithful to their convictions. What should we do if gathering here as we are now we were in danger of being thrown into jail and maybe put to death; I wonder how many would be here in this congregation. What mercies we have in these days in which we live.

"Uphold me according unto thy word". If it is a right upholding, you see, it will be uniform with the Holy Scriptures and the revealed Word of God. Although errors abound, where there is a real teaching in the heart by the Holy Spirit it will be uniform with revealed Scripture. 'Uphold me in it, Lord, according to Thy Word.' It may be some of you have many fears as to how it will be with you when you come to the end of your journey, and you may often in substance be breathing this, "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not". "Uphold me according unto thy word". This upholding is

by living communications by the Holy Spirit in the experience of the Lord's people whereby we are strengthened, established and built up in our most holy faith.

"Uphold me according unto thy word". As far as I am concerned I would desire to honour a faithful God Who has upheld me here now for 40 years. I began to come here actually in 1929 when I went forth to preach. The good deacon here, Mr. Stevens, wrote to me, hearing of it, and said 'We have three Lord's days that I have tried and tried to fill but have not been able and who knows what this may mean?' I came on those three Lord's days and a few here may remember it, probably you do; I came for those three Lord's days and now we can say that we know what it did mean. Eventually it resulted in a settlement, and here I am. So it is in the Holy Word of God that we are exhorted to remember all the way that the Lord our God has led us these 40 years in the wilderness, and He has graciously promised that He will not leave or forsake us. "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" is what the Lord said to Joshua when he was to command the people and bring them into the promised land, to which the Apostle Paul refers in 13th. Hebrews. What a faithful God He has been, He has not failed or forsaken us according to His Word and promise. Many that I came to in the first place have departed; practically a congregation has passed away, and many of them are in the realms above in Emmanuel's land. Yet the Lord has condescended to maintain our cause, has raised up others, supplied our need and brought us hitherto, and it may not be out of place to say that I have received great kindness and consideration as a Pastor from my deacons and people through these years. I have been upheld according to the prayer here, "Uphold me according unto thy word".

To be upheld then is to be upheld in the profession that we have made, many of us. We have put on the Lord Jesus Christ openly and we have been upheld hitherto. Many changes we have seen and yet have been upheld till now, "according unto thy word". This can also be according to the preached word for the Apostle writing to those Thessalonians referred to the fact that "Our Gospel came not unto

you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance". Oh, this is a religion beloved friends that will take us to heaven. Anybody can be religious as far as that may be considered but to have a religion that will take us to heaven is the great thing. O let me not be deceived and do grant that I may not come short at last when the time of need shall come. "Uphold me according unto thy word that I may live" - that is that my soul may live. The author is not referring to our natural life, though of course that can have some application, but it is the life of the soul, "that I may live". What are we to understand by this? I would understand that it is a living by the Holy Spirit's gracious operations in the heart, in a knowledge of Christ. This is the vital point. A hymnwriter says,

"To know my Jesus crucified,

By far excels all things beside"

It excels everything else and that is because it has eternal life in it. These are the Lord's words in the Gospel by John, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent." How this unites the Trinity because the knowledge is by the Holy Spirit as I have mentioned in the Lord's words, "He shall glorify me, for He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." Some of us may feel to live at a poor dying rate. A poor living it may be with some of us, and yet it is the life of God in the soul. That is the life, and that is the seat of eternal life in a knowledge of God. I would desire to emphasise this. It is a knowledge of Christ that is the vital point. Some may not feel to have had any particular revelation as others may speak, but some of you have. I believe that divine teaching in the heart of one convinced of sin will have this issue,

"To know my Jesus crucified,

By far excels all things beside"

We would say it carefully, but the truth of it is very, very precious. The Apostle Peter writing to the scattered tribes says, "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious", and He is not precious in the right sense to anybody else whatever kind of religion they may

profess. The Lord Jesus Christ is made precious in the souls that are being prepared for heaven and though here we see through a glass darkly, sometimes very darkly indeed, yet even so if we are the Lord's dear children the day will come when we shall see Him face to face. O how can we anticipate heaven, that place of glory, peace and holiness? Have you ever felt Him to be precious, have you? Has there been now and again a little worship in the night watches, has the Lord come to some of you and made Himself precious in your soul? If He has, you will go to heaven and will see Him face to face. As you know I have come to the evening of my life and I dwell much in my quiet moments upon the end. One night I seemed to hear a voice saying "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten". It was a quiet voice and yet an audible voice, as I felt, and I began to feel humbled before the Lord, and then it came again a little more pronounced "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten", and my spirit was humbled within me because I was in a particular church trouble at that time. Then it came a third time, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten", and I could see then that the trial I was in was a chastening for a particular purpose. Has He ever been precious to you? One night I felt these words come very distinctly to me, "All is settled - all is settled" - and what could I say? "And my soul approves it well."

To come back to the subject here, "that I may live" - this is a spiritual life within. Actually it is Christ formed in the heart the hope of glory and this will take us to heaven. He is the only foundation and where He is formed in the heart the hope of glory He becomes the Foundation, that Foundation that no man can lay other than Himself. "Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." "Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live". O what a sweet life it is, what blessed living it is, when one, under some sweet view of Christ by faith, lives upon Him, draws life and strength from His fulness, grace for grace. "Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope". This is a hope that maketh not ashamed.

How many people have a false hope and are building their hopes for eternal life upon something of their own. It is a mercy to be brought to Calvary and to really feel as good Toplady says,

"Nothing in my hand I bring"

You will never get to heaven with a penny - "Nothing in my hand I bring". We must be stripped, to depend alone and entirely upon His fulness, His sufficiency, His precious blood, and to feel something of the sprinkling of it upon our conscience. How sweet it is. I remember it so clearly in my own case, many years ago now, before I came to London; when I was in my shop at Brighton and a light seemed to shine into my soul and I said, "Where are my sins" and that line came,

"Now if we search to find our sins
Our sins can ne'er be found"

They were drowned in the atonement. O precious, blessed Lamb of God, the only way to heaven is through Calvary, and we shall not miss it if we are brought to feel what I have just mentioned, to cling there. Nothing of our own! "Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live". What a blessed life it is. It is a life of drawing from His fulness and grace for grace. O how lovely He is in the view of faith, the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely. Oh to get a sight of Him! A good old minister in Sussex was asked by a certain person whether we should know our relatives in heaven as our relatives. "Oh!" he said, "When I set my eyes on Him I shall never want to look at anybody else." Oh to have a sight of Him here below and to feel something of His loveliness and beauty. "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. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." O what a blessed religion it is that takes a poor sinner to heaven, takes away his filthy rags and clothes him with a change of raiment and takes him through his pilgrimage until he bids adieu to everything else, to see the King in His glory. Let us beware of sentimental religion or a mere formality, let us seek to know Christ that we may live and feel

Him to be formed in our heart the hope of glory. "Let me not be ashamed of my hope". We may be rightly ashamed of ourselves, ashamed of our profession, ashamed of our ignorance but not of our hope. For He is the hope of glory, the hope of the Gospel, the hope that maketh not ashamed, and that hope is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

I notice I have quite a number of dear young people here and I would say affectionately and tenderly in these days when errors abound and so many light things in religion, seek for a knowledge of Christ. You may confess your poor ignorant condition but He will not be offended. Seek a knowledge of Christ, "To know my Jesus crucified, By far excels all things beside". We shall never meet again, precisely the same number as are here now; a year will bring changes. Many have gone to heaven that were here in this congregation when I came; many have gone, they are taken Home. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever." "Uphold me according unto Thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope". There is nothing in the hope to be ashamed of, but this may have reference to being ashamed of bearing witness of the hope that is in us. It is a mercy to have a real foundation. The Apostle Peter refers to this as a lively hope that the Lord's people are "begotten again to a lively hope" and that is linked in a living Jesus. When I was in the army in the first world war and thrown into a lot of bad company in Canterbury I found myself being shaken about my religion; but one day that word came so sweetly, "Because I live, ye shall live also" and it was a wonderful help. There is no other way of living, no other person we can live upon. "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also". "Let me not be ashamed of my hope". May we be favoured to feel something of this upholding grace and something of this life within, "that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope". Now as I have said I have not preached a sermon but I have said a few things with a few personal references and if the Lord shall make it helpful and a blessing then His name shall have all the praise. Amen.