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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 15 December 1929

1 Thessalonians 5 v 17

Pray without ceasing

God is love and He sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. He spared not His only begotten Son, bruised Him, wounded Him, chastised Him, laid stripes on Him; it pleased Him to bruise His Son and the Son, in His sorrow, gave Himself unto prayer. They hated Him, all His enemies, without a cause, but He said "I give myself unto prayer". And He died; willingly, lovingly, vicariously, He died, and by dying the guilty death of His people, they live a life of righteousness in Him. They are called, each one, with an effectual calling, being born again, not of corruptible but of incorruptible seed by the word of God. They are justified by the blood of Christ; they are taught by the Spirit of Christ; they are gathered into Christ, for God gathers all things in one in Christ. They are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit, and they are brought into Church fellowship by the Spirit and grace of God. And, in the providence of God uniting with the Spirit's work in them, the saints are brought into visible churches and these churches are to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. They are God's families; they are His tabernacles; they are His rest. And all this love, all this redeeming, precious love, and the blood of God whereby He purchased His Church, and the Spirit's grace in them, lays them under a solemn and sweet obligation. They are sinners in themselves; every child of God brings into the visible church with which he is united, a body of sin and death, an evil nature, an evil heart of unbelief, disposed powerfully and ceaselessly to depart from God. These families have Christ for their Head, God for their Father, the Spirit for their teacher, and it pleases God, knowing what these families are by nature, how disposed to evil, to turn away from what is right, to send precepts - "holy commandments" by the Apostles, as they are called - to them. Brethren we are not outside these precepts, these holy commandments. Every visible church of Christ, gospel church, is laid under an abiding

Word of God. Take heed, we are told, take heed unto the Scriptures which come, not by the will of men, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. And if we are lively, if the Lord is favourable to us, many a word will hit us very hard, that is to say, will bring to our view our shortcomings, our sins, our departures from the living God. Ah, if any dear child of God present finds at any time a precept like a hammer on his head, a sword in his spirit, a light on some of his sins, he will do well to take heed thereto. Not the word of man but the word of the living God works effectually in every believing heart from time to time. God may make a mirror to you of some particular things in you and set you before that mirror and fix your eyes upon it, and then you will see something to be ashamed of and you will wonder, you will wonder how such a person can be an ornament which Christ will bind on Himself. You will wonder how He has borne so patiently with you, and wonder, not that you have trouble, but that you have so little trouble. The church of the Thessalonians, as we may gather from the two Epistles written to it, was in a good condition. It appears to have been, at the time of the Apostles, in a very flourishing state. But the Holy Spirit warns them of dangers, and addresses to them admonitions, for there were forgers and troublers about them at that time. Some, it would seem from Paul's word, forged letters in his name, for he bids the people of Thessalonica to take no notice, not to be moved by letters as from himself, nor were they to listen to prophets who came and told them that the day of the Lord was nigh. People would make these Thessalonian Christians think that the second coming of Christ was at hand, and against that erroneous view the Apostle was led to make a protest, and to tell the people that many things were to happen before that great event took place. And people today are looking for His coming - without any warrant from the Scripture - they are looking for His coming to reign in person at Jerusalem and they go so far, some of them, as to say that the tabernacle and all the tabernacle service will be restored. Now Paul says to such people, the day of the Lord is not yet; many things have to be done, slow workings of providence, slow, but mighty movements of God in nations; many, many things are to happen. One thing is hastening now, and that is the great apostacy that has come, and religious teachers today are just like lawyers, doctors, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees; all against Christ. And this Church, in this good condition, is

exhorted; there is a beautiful trinity, so to speak. In the 16 verse they were told to "Rejoice evermore"; in the 17 verse "Pray without ceasing"; in the 18 verse to give thanks in everything. And then, says the Spirit, by Paul, "This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you". This is the will of God concerning the Church at Galeed; that the members should rejoice evermore. Not easy with sin, with tribulation, with darkness of mind, with a great deal of ignorance, much prejudice; not easy when your signs are hidden from you; not easy when the enemy has come with axes and hammers and destroyed the carved work. But it stands here; there is ground for it, reason for it, though neither the ground nor the reason may be apparent to, or present with, us for the moment. What ground is there for a sinner to rejoice, a sensible sinner? Why, that the dear Saviour opened a fountain for sin and for uncleanness; a fountain of infinite merit that should take away all causes of separation between the soul and God. Think of it, dear friends, the atonement, the precious blood of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the grace of the Spirit, the omnipotence of the Saviour; these constitute a wonderful cause of rejoicing. May the Lord make this cause out to us, that we may follow the holy commandment, "Rejoice evermore". Rejoice against your sinfulness; O it is difficult. I do not speak of it as if it were easy, for I know it is most difficult. Rejoice against your sinfulness, against the many outbreaks of wickedness in your thoughts, against your ignorance of God, against your carnality, against your death, against the prevailings of sin in particular forms. These, these have transient triumphs; the cause of rejoicing is eternal. These blacken the face, these burn the gates, these make us like dead things at times, but they are passing. The cause of rejoicing abides. Rejoice when trouble has come to you. Not easy, when trouble cries out look at this, look at that, see destruction on every hand threatening you. God is above them all. His wisdom guides, His power controls, His grace will bring good out of them all. Therefore, rejoice evermore. I can only set the truth of it before you, but it is a great thing, a wonderful thing, to get a hint even of that everlasting cause of rejoicing, namely the Lord Jesus in His work, the Lord Jesus in His grace, the Lord Jesus in His intercession. O mourning saints, rejoice.

But this is not my text; my text is "Pray without ceasing",

which means, let this be the bent and attitude of your spirit, Godward. A beggar, seeking alms; a sinner, seeking mercy; a saint, desiring to be upheld. "Pray without ceasing". Prayer comes from two particular things in the heart. Need, felt need; need of the blood of Christ; need of the Spirit of Christ; need of the grace of Christ; need of the love of God. O need of some kind always will attend us while we live; need will ever be with us, and this will be a reason for prayer. It will impel, it will drive, it will say you will never get through without God. Ask Him to be with you. That is the first thing, and the second is the gift, the great, inestimable, wonderful, glorious gift of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of grace and of supplications. Of Him and His operations, we read in the Romans. We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit helpeth our infirmities. He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. It is expressed in Zechariah: I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplications. Now when He is present He lifts the sinner up, He carries the sinner's burdens, He gives wings to faith, He directs faith, and she flies with those given wings to the throne of grace. Burdens that pressed the sinner to the earth now are, as it were, light. Difficulties that stood in the way and obstructed his movements Godward, now are taken out of the way; he prays. And who could number the numbers of sinners of whom God has said: "Behold he prayeth". O, when you creep into some corner, when you get into your room, when you kneel, depressed, when you do not know what to do, when you are hungry for God, when you are troubled because you fear He will have nothing to do with you, then it would be said by God, that sinner prays; "Behold he prayeth". And if God regards a man praying, and thus speaks of Him, what devil, what sin, what hell, will ever keep that sinner away from God. Answers may not come immediately. One was sent to fly swiftly to Daniel, but for three weeks he was hindered. What the devil is permitted to do we cannot fully say, but this is a fact, that no devil, no sin, no doubt, no trouble, no fear, will deprive the praying sinner of the answer that God sends. He is a great person who prays really; not in his own eyes, but in the eyes of God. Yea, and when a sinner prays in the Holy Ghost, for that is the word in Jude, he follows a wonderful example. Jesus prayed; "I give Myself unto prayer" is the word of Christ in that wonderful Psalm. For His love, they hated Him, but He gave Himself to prayer. Cold

mountains and the midnight air witnessed the fervour of His prayer. O what a great thing it is to put the foot of faith down into that footstep of holy example which He left behind. Real prayer is entering into the holiest of all, coming to the throne of grace, coming to the throne of grace boldly. Having therefore brethren boldness to enter into the holiest; let us come boldly unto the throne of grace. The boldness is derived from the atonement and wrought in the heart by the Spirit. Jacob was thus bold. I can take no denial, he said, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me". He was in earnest, as people today are, when the Holy Spirit is working in them. It is not a formality, this praying; it is in exercise; it is a saying to God that you need things; you feel your need of them. That is prayer, accompanied or not accompanied by words, but with groanings that cannot be uttered the sinner prays. Are there sinners here who as yet are not assured of their interest in the Lord Jesus, yet who are hungry to know that, panting for it, praying for a manifestation of the Lord Jesus to their souls? Now Hart says what this text insists on - The remedy's before thee - Pray. God has ordained it; it is His will, His purpose that His people who have had the blessings given to them in eternity in the Lord Jesus, shall come and ask for them. As I have said before, there is one blessing no child of God ever prayed for, given to him, namely the new birth. Nobody ever sought for that until it was given. That given need is written - the need of a sinner is written - on his heart by the Holy Spirit, and then that same Spirit in another operation directs the sinner to the throne of grace, and their faith gets a view that no words can ever properly express, of the goodness and the greatness and the mercy and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who have had it never will forget it. It is wonderful for a man, shut up, unable to come forth, to get on a sudden what amazed him, a view of the blood of Jesus Christ; the atonement of the Saviour. He might not be able to talk about anything else; no knowledge of the Scripture, no knowledge of the doctrines of grace and how beautifully they are related each to the other, but he gets that view of the blood of Christ that makes him say, I can take no denial. Now press on, go on praying like this - "Make all your wants and wishes known". Entreat the Lord to come to you; entreat Him to receive you, for He receiveth sinners and eateth with them. He does not count up the pence that you owe. If they are 500 it does not matter, yea more than that; all He

has before Him is your eternal salvation and He put away every sin and all transgressions when He said on the cross "It is finished". And now there is a new and living way, an open way. In the Acts of the Apostles we are told that God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. That door of faith means that God, by grace, by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, had made open a new and living way, a door never to be shut. Pray poor sinner, pray without ceasing. You want to be right with God; look perhaps with wonder at a Scripture like this: Spotless and without blame before God in love. How can it be? Faith says, by the blood of Christ, by the righteousness of Christ, by the love of God, by the covenant of grace. Faith will say all those things and as you hear them in your heart, go on praying. "Urge thy plea through all unfitness". Now that is one stage of experience to which this word may be applied - "Pray without ceasing".

Then the people of God, at a further and advanced stage of experience, have various needs. One may be here, or more, who can say, who does say, with shame and grief, that they have left their first love, and the warm, sweet sensations of that happy day of their experience they long to have again. They are reprov'd for the sin. "I have somewhat against thee" says the Lord, "because thou hast left thy first love". They are reprov'd thus for doing it, but now they are brought to this, that they need and desire it again. They want the drawing: "Draw me, we will run after Thee". They want to be enabled again to say: "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons" I delighted and sat down under His shadow and His fruit was sweet to my taste. And their cry is, "O when wilt Thou come unto me". Pardon the sin that I committed when I left my first love. "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation". The reproof of Christ has broken the bones. Heal Thou the bones which Thou hast broken. A remarkable passage, which tells us that sin does not break a man's bones; backsliding does not break a man's bones. It prepares him to have broken bones, but love breaks the bones. Heal Thou the bones which Thou hast broken. God came to him and broke his bones by conviction of his sin. Now he says, Lord, do heal these broken bones. You find the Church in the Song constantly seeking the Lord, sometimes lazily seeking Him, till she was brought off her bed, but

seeking Him. "Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of Thy companions?" You want to hear Him say to you, The winter is past and gone. Come with Me; let us lodge in the villages. You want Him to take the little foxes from you, the foxes that spoil the vine; your vine has tender grapes. Now the Word of God in a case like this is very distinct - Pray; this is the remedy. Pray without ceasing for the restoration of those mercies which have been lost to your spirit. They are in Christ in all fulness, but they are lost, and now the great mercy is to be enabled to seek, according to this gracious direction: "Pray without ceasing".

Sometimes the people of God are apprehensive of affliction, of some particular trouble that they may think they see ahead of them; see threatenings in their circumstances, some difficulties that are probable, as they judge, and O, how they sink. You only can tell who have had the same thing I am naming; how the heart sinks. What shall I do in such and such an event which appears to be probable? What shall I do? O, says God, pray. Turn to the Strong-hold, look to the fulness of God in Jesus Christ, listen to His gracious promise: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Look to the arm that upholds the world; it will hold you up. Look to the Word of God: "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." And then the injunction, so suitable, so acceptable, will come in: "Pray without ceasing". "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me". "Open thy mouth wide". I have brought you out of Egypt; I have done all that; I have not brought you into the wilderness to destroy you. Open your mouth wide, that is, bring large petitions; you never can ask too much. Ask Him to sanctify the trouble you are apprehensive of if it comes; to deeply sanctify holy providence as it may afflict you. "Pray without ceasing". Holy Scripture sets before us this great thing - "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." It tells us that the trees of the Lord are full of sap. And some of you, who are old in the ways of God - not as old as myself but still old in the ways of God - may have felt troubled when you have put yourself by the side of that scripture: The trees of the Lord are full of sap. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they shall

flourish in the courts of our God, to show that the Lord is upright, that there is no unrighteousness in Him. I could not think of even beginning to express the pain and shame I feel when put by the side of such a Scripture, and that word - "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ". And you look at your own little experience, your foolishness, how much greater than your wisdom; your stubbornness, how much greater than the suppleness of your will and mind; your hardness, how long have you had that and how seldom, and for what transient moments, have you had a soft heart and sweet repentance. "Grow in grace" - it is an important word, my brethren; look at it. It is the word of the living God and that same blessed, living God said to His disciples: "I am the Vine, ye are the branches. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the Vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me." Poor wanderers, gadding about as we do after vain things that cannot profit us; poor, silly, foolish doves, without heart, as the Spirit speaks in Hosea; silly doves without heart. Well might He describe the same people in another similitude: "A cake unturned", burnt to cinders almost on one side and soft dough on the other side. "A cake unturned". Do such scriptures touch any of you? Put the case by the side of the word I have quoted: "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ". Then some may object, what you were singing just now - "No help in self I find". Well, can you go along with the hymn - "To Christ for help I fly, the Friend of sinners lost", for that is the gospel, and this word may meet such a case: "Pray without ceasing". Do you pray that the roots of your little faith may strike down deeper into the merits and grace of the Lord Jesus, that, so doing, you may bear fruit upward? It is written of Judah that he shall take root downward and bear fruit upward. Taking root downward there is taking root downward into the grace of God. You will never take root downward into yourself for that is a dreadful thing, a wicked thing, but, taking root into the grace of Christ, you will bear the fruit of grace. So this will meet it, this is the word of the Lord to a sinner in this condition: "Pray without ceasing". Beg and cry, and cry and beg, and present a lean soul, with bones sticking out, present it before the Lord. Go and beg of Him, as sometimes you have been enabled to do; continue to do it. Pray that God would do for you what you cannot do for yourself.

And Christians are spoken to, and of, in the Scripture in two ways, among others. One is their running a race: "So run that ye may obtain". Many run in a race but only one obtains the prize and has the crown. So run, says the Holy Ghost to the saints, that ye may win. Run? Ah there are many hindrances to this running. It means running from the world and running from yourself, and it means that you have got these loose, flowing garments of the East, for remember, that was what was in the Apostle's mind, the loose garments that a person might conveniently let alone while walking leisurely, but if he is to run, these impediments must be taken away, that is, these garments must be bound up, taken away from the feet. So run. Well, another thing is present with us, and that is a lazy spirit. We read of idleness of hands and fulness of bread. Not an easy life, not an easy running, is the life, the running, of a saint of God. There is an object to every man who runs in the race, and that is the prize. There is an object to a child of God, an object before him. He would miss something; he would miss hell. He would gain something; he would win Christ. And, says Paul by the Spirit, run, so run, so run that ye may obtain. O, how short you will feel who are exercised in the fear of God in this particular. There comes this difficulty, there comes that attraction; you must stop to look at it, entertain it. Says the Word of God, "So run". All run for the prize; only one gets it.

And the other word I would name now, the second thing, is this. The Christian is a soldier; he is spoken of as a soldier. A soldier has to fight. The Christian soldier has to meet inveterate enemies - the world, the flesh, and the devil, and the Apostle in the Ephesians tells us what our enemies are in particular. We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world. So God has provided an armour: Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand. And you know the wonderful description of the armour given by the Holy Spirit in that chapter in the Ephesians, and one of the weapons is this - Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance, and for all saints, and this is according to the text: "Pray without ceasing". There is a coward in the spirit, there is a traitor in human nature, there is a wicked thing in the heart, deceitfulness. There is a

readiness in our minds to fall to carnal things, and God says, now all these enemies have to be met, and to meet them there must be an armour which, in itself, is invulnerable, and in the use of it, wonderfully useful, helpful to victory. "Take unto you the whole armour of God". It would need a man of God used to that armour, and taught how to use it properly, to describe it. A coward, one hardly worthy, not indeed worthy the name of a soldier of Jesus Christ, is unable to describe, but one may say this with respect to the weapons I have named: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance". And does not that meet the word of Jude? Jude, inspired, says to the saints of God "Praying in the Holy Ghost." Not chattering, not trying to flatter God, as it were, but crying with the thief and with the publican and with David and with Manasseh, and with every saint of the Most High God, crying to God for help and for teaching and for power. This text then sets before us a wonderful life as I judge, a wonderful life; it sets before us dealings with God, you understand me, dealings with God. Here is a sinner who would fain be a saint; a soldier who would fain have victory; a child of God, he would fain walk with God and say Abba Father, but he is full of failures, hindered by sins, lusts, the pride of life; he is hindered. Now the Holy Ghost comes and enables him to deal with God, transact business on his knees, ask for help and for guidance and for wisdom and for deliverance. There is dealing with the Most High God. Happy the man who is led into it; it is a wonderful life, a secret life; a powerful life in a weak person, a holy life in the midst of a vile sinner, and eventually it is seen to be a prevailing life, for a man of prayer gets answers, he gets answers. Sometimes they are spread over his whole life since the new birth; answers are spread over the whole life. Some periods have more, some less, but the answers are spread over, and now and again a child of God can go back and say, I got an answer there, and there I got an answer and there I had a deliverance. He was led to deal with God. If you do this by the Spirit's grace you will get wealth, you will get wealth. You will have such nuggets of gold in answers, you will get such manifestations of Christ to your souls, you will get such sacred things spoken on your hearts, you will get such wonders wrought for you in providence that you will say, I am rich indeed. You may be very poor, as of this world's good, but you will say, I am rich. May the Lord help us; may He help us to walk in this Scripture,

this holy exhortation or, as Peter would call it, and Paul also, this holy commandment, by the Apostle.

AMEN.