

SB 823

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LaPaz

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Sermon Preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
by Mr J.K. Popham on Sunday Morning  
17th October 1930

Text 1 Timothy. 6 verse 12

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

I have no wish to draw attention to myself but I have thought perhaps, I ought to just say this, that today I enter on the forty ninth year of my labours here. Forty eight years have been completed, and looking back, one can only say, that the backlook in respect of ones self is very painful, and very very encouraging. Painful with respect to my imperfection and failures in all respects. Though mercifully kept from outward sin so as to bring reproach. Any reproach by God's mercy in that particular attaches to ones life, but O the inward reproach. Looking on the changes that have taken place, one can only say, and there have been many. I have Practically, buried the congregation I came to, and now we are probably going to be diminished as a congregation, by death we shall certainly be diminished, and if the providence of God does not add others, the inevitable result is that we shall be fewer and fewer.

I may not see a great change in that particular, but I do see this, I believe that if we as a people, are enabled to cleave to the old things, ancient things, and walk before God, we must not expect great additions for the apostasy, the great apostasy foretold, has very much set in. It has not yet come to its fulness, but it is like a stream. May the Lord keep us, keep me. You have borne with me patiently and been exceedingly kind to me, and I have seen God's goodness to many in the congregation, bringing them into the Church. So that I feel it is correct to say, we have more Church members today than we had when I came. But how do we stand spiritually before God? That is the great question, the text tells us to fight. I have had to do this all my life, since it pleased God to meet with me, and I expect to have to fight as long as i live.

"Fight the good fight," the word that Paul wrote to Timothy which is translated good, means pleasant, beautiful. Fighting amongst men is the opposite. Sordid motives, ambitions and various things as a rule, contribute to all fighting amongst men, whether it is between individuals, families, communities or nations. Not necessarily, but as a rule, there is something sordid and dreadful in the motives that lead to a fight.

Here is fight, first of all it pertains to God's character, faith maintains His character, and has to do it beautifully, because it relates to the gospel. Faith has to hold it, but there are many enemies. Whenever an open door has been set for the gospel, there have been many adversaries, and there will be. It is beautiful, it is profitable, because it relates to the soul. "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5 verse 5). It is beautiful because it relates to eternity to the eternal holiness and the happiness of all the saints of God. So this commandment is a fight in which gracious people engage. A fight on which God looks, in which He gives encouragement, a fight that has a definite end, the overcoming of all enemies. A victory that shall redound to the honour of God, and the everlasting happiness of all, who are more than conquerors through Him that loved them, and gave Himself for them. So Christian, when you read fight, and read it as a commandment to yourself, do not think it is something dishonourable, something you should flee from. It does not relate to a peace among men. Follow peace with all men, which is indeed a proper thing to do, but it relates to your soul, it relates to God and Eternity.

"Fight the good fight," the beautiful fight, the pleasant fight, hard, difficult, painful, perilous to the soul, as to feelings, from time to time, as if it must be given up, but no, says the scripture, go on, believing that Jesus is the Christ, and then you will overcome the world, the flesh and the devil, and enter ultimately into eternal holiness and happiness. The fight of faith, I would notice, in the first place what faith is, the origin of it in the soul. Faith has been variously described, but I believe it may be truly said, that faith is a knowledge, a persuasion, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for." (Hebrews 11 verse 1). You must know a thing that you hope for, the thing must be before you, or you cannot hope in it. It is a knowledge of God, whenever God in any way or measure makes Himself known to a sinner, that sinner believes in Him. "For he that cometh to God must believe that He is," (Hebrews 11 verse 6). And in this particular as in many others, God is self revealed. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" (Job 11 verse 7). He reveals Himself, He makes Himself known in some particulars, respecting His Being, His character, and His claims on men. So faith is a very wonderful grace, a knowledge of God, and of His word. Whatever He says, that faith meets with, faith knows, it is no speculation. There is nothing definite in speculation, it is not known, with nothing firm in opinion. What you hold today in opinion, tomorrow you may let go, by having a different opinion, but it is knowledge that a man has by God manifesting Himself to him makes him say, I believe in God, the creator of heaven and earth,

I believe God made man in His own image, after His own likeness. Now if this is a true and proper description of faith, it may be an important and proper question for me to put to you. Do you possess this faith? Of course you possess a respectable religion, of course you possess a certain respect for the scriptures, and believe them more or less distinctly and definitely to have been given by inspiration of God. That comes short of true belief, right in itself, good, but it comes short. Do you believe in God? Have you ever had a definite impression of Jehovah made on your hearts? We are born Christians according to the general idea of religion, because we were born in Christendom. But Christendom is merely a geographical term. Christianity is a different thing altogether, a personal thing, arising from a distinct impression of God, a belief in Jesus, and a belief in the Holy Ghost. No man will ever get safely through this life, and die in the Lord without faith. No man will ever please God without faith, no man will ever hold fast to God without faith. No man will ever rightly believe that his times are in the hands of God without faith, no man will ever truly accept God's providence without faith. But if we have faith, then there is a definite knowledge, a definite feeling, a definite acceptance of things which are revealed in the scriptures, and which are brought to the soul by the Holy Spirit.

Now it is evident that wherever this faith is, there is opposition to it. It is true for me to say this, and right to say it, that every believer is troubled with unbelief. This was the first sin that entered into the world, committed by Adam and Eve. Had there been a firm faith in God, a firm faith in His commandment given in Eden to Adam, but, whatever had previously kept him, unbelief came in through Satan, who tempted Eve, and said "Yea, hath God said," ..... "Ye shall not surely die".... "then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3 verses 1 & 4). This subtle suggestion, stirred up an ambition which, agreed with unbelief, and there was no strength to resist. If you have faith, you will have unbelief to trouble you, if you have faith the god of this world will fight against you, if you have faith you will have the world against you. If you have faith, unbelief will say sometimes, it is only a figment, this religion you talk about. If you have faith there will be a spirit in you saying there is nothing in it, give it all up. If you have faith there will be very serious questions injected into your mind with respect to God's justice, to His mercy, to His wisdom, and to His kindness. If He be a good God, why is all this evil in the world? if He be a merciful God, why does He show it to one and not another? and such terrible questions will pierce the soul. If there be faith, then if you are in trouble, unbelief will say where is thy God? If things are adverse, then unbelief will say, where is thy God?

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You pray to Him and get no answers, you ask Him to bless you, and He seems to be against you, and so, more or less, there is this constant opposition to faith. Now faith has an end, and that is to reach God and heaven, and between this end, and the realisation of it, come enemies. In a fight, there is an end, in ambition a desire for victory, and this is true of real faith. Faith's eyes look to, loves, fears God and seeks to have Him. Unbelief pushes back the sinner, creates confusion in his mind, turns his eyes away from the great object, the blessed end of his faith. And what shall the sinner do? give way? cease resisting? yield to the enemy? give way altogether and quit the field? patch up a peace that God is not the author of? That is impossible, backslidings are many, woe to some of us. Woe to me, I have been a backslider in heart, I have turned away from a good God many a time, have disbelieved or forgotten His word, as Paul says, "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord." (Hebrews 12 verse 5). Alas I have done it, O what a good God some of us have, that He should not have left us to it. Nor left us to our own disposition, rebellions, cowardice and backslidings, but has called us back to Himself. Sometimes by chastisement in providence, sometimes in solemn rebukes administered to the conscience, and sometimes by the gracious drawings of the Spirit.

Yield not, then, to unbelief;  
Courage, soul, "there yet is room!" (Gadsby's 956 verse 5)

He is a good God, there is a good Home waiting for thee, an eternal rest waiting, and all that is well worth fighting for and waiting for. And waiting is necessary again and again in conflict. This fight of faith has several very distinct things in it, I have already named them briefly, but let me for a moment or two speak of them again. Faith has before it the character of God, I have been wishing lately, several times in secret for you and myself, that we might have a more powerful impression of the majesty of God. Religion speaking generally, seems too light and easy, and too comfortable in our day. A sense of the awful majesty of God kills that flippancy and ease, and brings the child of God to a real worship. And the more of that there is the more opposition will be offered by the enemy. Recently, one day when alone, this petition rose in my heart, and then, not for myself, but for all my friends, I asked that I might know more of the majesty of God, of the loveliness of Christ, of the intimacy of the Holy Ghost. And if God should give to us these three things, we certainly shall have more opposition offered to us. Unbelief will never give way lightly, and Rutherford says, something to this effect, that you will never hold Christ in peace while the devil lives.

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If you have Christ you will have opposition. From the beginning, from the first breath of insinuation against God's truth breathed into Eve's heart by the serpent to this day, the devil's chief aim has been the destruction of Jesus Christ. Arminianism also has that chief aim, and so has all other heresies. Herod sought to destroy the young child's life, and if ever you get that young child in your heart, you will find the devil's aim will be to destroy Him in you. So here are the enemies, and if we have faith we have to meet them. They will not quit the field, we have to face them in all their strength.

Now the chief thing in this fight is this, the belief of a sinner that Jesus is the Son of God. "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5 verse 5). This means an intimate knowledge of Him, not merely the letter of truth concerning Him. It is good to believe, good to believe that the Eternal Son of God "took on Him the seed of Abraham." (Hebrews 2 verse 16). That He was born of the virgin Mary, that He suffered under Pontius Pilate, that He was crucified, dead and buried, and that He rose again on the third day. May you all hold that fast, but if that truth enters your heart by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, then the chief aim, the chief end and struggle of your faith will be, to hold fast that Jesus is the Son of God. That poor man who never went to school, He the Eternal God in the Second Person of the Trinity. That poor man whom wicked men took and crucified, the Eternal God.

When reason gets to work, and satan begins to breath his hatred against the Son of God, then you will find you have got to fight to hold this fast. That is one of the chief things, the chiefest of all, to hold fast the Son of God. "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" "But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." How did Peter get to know it? By revelation, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 16 verses 13 - 17). Now this Jesus is the Son of God, Why is He the Son of Man? Why was He made sin? Why did He not vindicate Himself, when He was spoken against? Why did He permit men to say, He had a devil, and that His miracles were done by the agency of devils? Without contradiction, He did not contradict His enemies, Why? Not that He could not have done so, but that being made sin, He must suffer the penalty of sin, due to sin. And that having imputed to Him the sins of His people, He must bear the punishment due to them. Now to believe this, to hold this fast, when men, nations, pharisees, scribes, doctors and all men say it is not true.

To hold it fast and cleave to it as your own righteousness, to cleave to it as that which vindicates the character of God, glorifies His justice, magnifies His name and makes honourable the forgiveness of sin, will not be easy. If you are Christians, if you are believers, you will find opposition to holding fast all that wondrous doctrine of the atonement.

Fight the good fight of faith in the next place, with respect to yourself. Has God spoken to you? then the enemy will say He never did. Has He made a promise to you? then the enemy will say, it was nothing of the sort, it is not fulfilled, and it is not likely to be fulfilled. Opposition is apparent and impossibilities are coming. How then can you hold that fast? Have you had access to the throne of grace? Have you had the ear of God? Has He bowed down His ear to hear you? and made you realise that He did hear you? Has He made over some sweet promise, so that your faith got hold of it? perhaps you even said to some godly friend, God is going to do something for me. He has promised me, then comes a delay, then comes contrary appearances, then perhaps even natural impossibilities appear. Fight the good Fight of faith. Now faith holds the faithfulness of God, faith puts Him in remembrance. He tells her to, "Put Me in remembrance: let us plead together:" (Isaiah 43 verse 26). And faith says to Him, remember Thy holy promise, faith struggles here to hold fast what God has given, what God said. "Fight the good fight of faith."

There is a field of battle where fighting is, where do you most fight? I believe I speak for every child of God here, that the fighting is carried on in prayer and supplication. Reasoning does not answer, if you begin to reason you will find that satan can reason. And you may find he is a better logician than you are, but if we are enabled to seek God's face, if you have given you, a spirit of grace and supplication, there will be the fight in God's presence. "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." (Mark 9 verse 24). It is a great thing to say, "I believe, help Thy my unbelief", I believe Thou art wise, help me to accept this providence, as coming from Thy hand. I believe Thou art good, and doest good, help me to hold that fast in the face of all that now troubles me. I believe Thou art omnipotent, help me to hold that fast, and believe that Thou canst do what no creature can do for me. And when satan, as it were, gets hold of some word that God has given to you, and seeks to pull it away from you, and faith gets a hold of it, and takes it to God, Lord help my unbelief. Help me now to keep fast Thy word, to hold fast the word of Thy patience. It is a great thing to have this battle-field. When men can pray, when they pray in the Holy Ghost, they pray the prayer that God must answer. In the Romans, the Holy Ghost says by Paul,

"For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit Itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (Romans 8 verse 26). He maketh intercession for the saints with groanings which cannot be uttered, "for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." (1 Corinthians 2 verse 10). Now look at that dear believing friends, you get a singular power on your spirit in prayer, you approach the Almighty with holy reverence born of faith, in His Eternal Majesty, you have got troubles, difficulties, enemies, sins, corruptions, and now blessed be God, the Holy Ghost enables you to pray that God would guide you. That His eye sustains you by His power, and He helps you by His blessed Spirit. And the scriptures and petitions that this Holy Spirit inspires and enables you to express in unutterable groanings ascend into the ear of the Lord God of Sabbaoth. Can He deny it? If He refuse to answer you, He would refuse to acknowledge and honour the work of the Holy Ghost in you. May this blessed truth sink into our hearts, that when a sinner prays in the Holy Ghost, as "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost." (Jude verse 20), the honour of God is involved in an answer. Some here have so prayed, and prayer thus indited the Lord will hear. Sometimes faith can do what a general in the army may do, view his enemies, taking particular notice of their position, and knowing his own strength he may say, we shall get the victory.

Faith in you may, viewing God, His wisdom, His love, His power, may prophecy victory in your heart, yea, you may be so certain of some deliverance, that you may say, and perhaps have said in the past, God will work for me, I have had answers in my soul before, I have had them in my hand, which have made me say, God will do such and such things. When you get God's ear by the operation of the Holy Ghost, faith overcomes all opposition, all devils, all contradiction, all appearances of evil against you. It overcomes them all, and you can say, "I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because He hath inclined His ear unto me," (Psalm 116 verse 1). He is coming to give me deliverance, Gideon got that, and he went forth with the sword of the Lord, "blew the trumpets, brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hand, and the trumpets in their right hand," (Judges 6 verse 20). The excellency of every act of faith, triumphing faith is of God, and not of man. And what is so singular in experience is this, that the weaker the soul is in itself, the more it cleaves to God, and the more certain victory becomes. "Fight the good fight." It is pleasant to God, to see a man standing up for the great name of Jehovah It was pleasant to God when that king, who heard the law of God read to him said, we have sinned, the wrath of God is upon us.

He did not know it until the word of God was read to him, then he humbled himself and it was pleasing, for the Lord sent this message to him, "Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest His words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof,.....I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord." (2 Chronicles 34 verse 27). So when faith is in exercise the sinner deeply humbles himself and cleaves to God, cleaves to the atonement of the Lord Jesus. It is a mighty struggle sometimes at this point to believe that all your sins, both before and after regeneration, unnumberable black, and foul beyond words, that all of them can be washed away, and you appear beautiful in the sight of God.

In these last days of my long life I have found it a great struggle to believe that all can be washed away, not ordinary sins, but sins against light and knowledge, teaching and reproof, mercy and guiding, checking and affliction, sins against all these things. Can they be washed away? No says reason, no says the devil, no says unbelief. Is there a principle in you that will give another answer? Yes, faith says yes, I believe in the infinitely meritorious death of the Lord Jesus and here my soul hangs, here my conscience would rest. Then faith looks to the Holy Spirit for an application of that atonement. "Fight the good fight of faith," it is pleasant to God, when a sinner cannot and will not give up what has been communicated to him. When a sinner says, God is involved in this, His character is involved in this,

I trust His righteous character,  
His counsel, promise, and His power,  
His honour and His name's at stake,  
To save me from the burning lake. (Gadsby's 1106 verse 4)

Faith's end, what is that? Heaven, the presence of God, to be in that presence, holiness and bliss. Holiness coming first always, the sinner looks for that, O sweet it is, I can only just name a word concerning our beloved brother, Mr Pollington, when I saw him last, I said to him have you any pleasant enjoyment? Emphatically he said, yes. Almost too weak to speak, he added, yes I am expecting to enter into heaven, whither the forerunner is for us entered, and then gathering up his utmost little energy he said, for me. Well what a wonder, and your faith will have the same thing in view. "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus," (Hebrews 6 verse 20). And when faith is strengthened just at the last, O may it be so with me and with you, that we may say, "whither the forerunner is for us entered," for me. No terror there, no fear of death there, no horror of the grave, but a looking for, a hasting into that wonderful inheritance. "Fight the good fight of faith."

The end of it is overcoming, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony;" (Revelation 12 verse 11). Who is he that overcometh, that overcometh the world, and all enemies, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God. May faith be strengthened in all who have it, to believe that blessed truth.

There will be a constant need for us to say, "Lord, Increase our faith," (Luke 17 verse 5), and "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." (Mark 9 verse 24).

Amen.