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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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ISAIAH 26 v 4

"Trust ye in the Lord for ever for in the
Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength"

The preceding context tells of awful judgment. Babylon is to fall, the earth is to be emptied and turned upside down as a man wipeth a dish and turneth it upside down. It tells also of the marvellous goodness of God to Zion; of His greatness in that wonderful hill of Zion, on which He has set His King, and that He will, in the day of His coming, swallow up death in victory. A great promise, a wonderful work. And on the ground, this two fold ground of what God has done, and will do, the victories He has obtained and will yet obtain, there is to be a song sung. In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah, we have a strong city. There has been a strong city laid low. Babylon has fallen; destruction has come there. But the saints, weak in themselves, unable to defend themselves, these have a strong city. We have that city described in the Revelation. It is described also in the prophecy of Ezekiel - a strong city which will never be broken up, though besieged by enemies. Never be entered; the enemy shall not shoot an arrow into this city. By the way that he came against it, by the same shall he return, for, says God, I will put My hook in his jaws. There is no need for the fears that we feel, yet we do feel fears. We are the subjects of fears; a sight of the enemy excites fear. But, says the Lord, trust in Me. What an amazing thing it is to have faith, faith the gift of God, faith that stands in the power of God, faith that looks to the Saviour, that finds her life and her energy at the cross. Faith that says, I believe in God. I believe that it shall be even as it was told me. If we have the faith of God's elect, we have heard, and we shall hear, God's gracious word in our souls, and that will constrain us sometimes to say, we believe it shall be even as it was told us.

There are two special grounds in the text and in the context for

our trust. The first is what God has done. The lofty city He has laid low, the pride of man He has humbled. All enemies have been chaff before Him, driven away by the wind of His indignation. And if we see by faith this great God who wrought, and will work, who brought Israel out of Egypt, delivered Israel again and again from their enemies and gave them favour, I say if we see this, that will be a ground for confidence in Him.

And the second ground is this, that He has obtained the victory for the Church on the cross. Only omnipotence could have done that; only omnipotent love and pity in the Man Christ Jesus could have accomplished that great salvation of which we are to sing.

Now let us look at three enemies that each child of God has. Three enemies, and the man who does not know them is dead and blind. But the sinner who does know them fears often, fears where no fear is, that is, no ground for fear. But he does fear. The first enemy you have in the Scripture, the Apostle Paul tells us of, for he knew him. "The good that I would I do not, the evil that I would not that do I". "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." This is the first enemy. This is the worst enemy, this is the most subtle enemy, the most powerful enemy that the people of God have to encounter. The deep deceitfulness of the heart, the desperate wickedness of nature, fallen nature, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, these constitute an enemy called "self", called "the old man" which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. Do what you will, there is this enemy. Work as you will, there is this enemy. Be on what guard you will, there is this enemy. He will take you by surprise, he will deceive you by his subtlety, he will make you think he is dead because he is quiet for an hour or two, but there is this live enemy, active, subtle, powerful, wise. O what an enemy! And all who have proved this find that there is no strength in themselves to encounter this foe, to deal with this creature - the old man. O how corrupt.

Now we are not left in the Scriptures, nor does the Holy Ghost leave people in their own souls, in ignorance of how this enemy is to be met and overcome. Bless God for forewarning us, and teaching us

and telling us how to fight, to whom to go, even as we have it in the text - "Trust ye in the Lord for ever". O afflicted saint, this is the ground, this is the assurance, this is the only hope of getting well through, of overcoming. In this mountain shall the hand of the Lord rest. In Zion He is a mighty God and Saviour, to overturn, to overturn, to overturn, until He come whose right it is, and to Him shall the crown be given.

Let us look at what this trust must be placed in. Here is the enemy, a wicked nature. In a sense of misery, I can speak so much about it. I have such a painful acquaintance with this enemy that I can speak about him, but we are not left to despair. What is this great trust? It is a trust in the Redeemer. Salvation God has appointed for walls and bulwarks. Nothing else will do. Omnipotent love, the blood of the everlasting covenant, the mighty operations of the Holy Ghost. Here we have the full salvation and deliverance and victory that the people of God are to look for. To trust this is to lean by precious faith on the atonement of Christ. It is to abide in Him. "Abide in Me". It is to have your eye of faith taken off from every object. It is to have your whole soul fixed here as the Psalmist said - "O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed. I will sing and give praise". And the man who is as weak as water, as feeble and blind and foolish and helpless as a worm, will overcome so long as his eye is on the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is written in the Psalms, of Israel, that they got not the land of promise by their own arm neither by their own sword, but because God had a favour to them. And every soul reaching that haven of rest will unite, each with the others, with all the spirits of just men made perfect, in saying - "Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, unto Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." O weak creature, by your weakness you will prove that Christ is strong. Strong sins felt and mourned will bring strong grace. Strong lusts felt and confessed bring strong grace. A feeble soul obtains promises. Tossed about by his lusts, by his pride, by his vanity, he knows not what to do until faith says in his heart, lift your eyes up to God, look to Him. Omnipotence in Jesus, infinite merit in Jesus, a robe of righteousness in Jesus, here is the ground of this trust. And occasionally the Spirit of God comes down in some manifestation of

the Lord Jesus so as that the sinner says to the enemy, himself even, "How say ye, flee as a bird to your mountain? In the Lord put I my trust." The Psalmist said what time he was afraid he would trust in the Lord, and that is just what every saint more or less distinctly feels from time to time. What time I am afraid of my heart, afraid of its deceitfulness, afraid of its violence, afraid it may trip me up instantly when I am off my guard, what time I am afraid I will trust the atonement. I will trust the Redeemer and look alone to His blood. No other way to get victory. God has appointed this way. Infidels are made believers, polluted persons are made holy, guilty persons are justified, weak souls are strengthened, ignorant people are guided, empty people are filled, all out of this blessed atonement of the Lord Jesus. All are secured by this salvation that God has appointed for walls and bulwarks.

"Trust ye in the Lord for ever". Look at this exhortation, see what God has done, as related in these chapters. He has broken His enemy to pieces, He has swallowed up death in victory. And now, when His poor people are troubled, He says He will spread forth His hand to save them, as he that spreadeth forth his hands to swim, and He will tread down His enemies as straw is trodden down for the dunghill. However much our pride dislikes this, it glorifies God that He saves sinners that cannot help themselves. When He sees that their strength is gone and that there is none shut up nor any left, He pities them. Trust then to Him. Trust not to smooth behaviour, trust to nothing within self; there is an enemy there. O what an enemy! Then by precious faith the soul is led to go out to God, and put trust in Him. In the atonement there is that perfection, and that strength that the Lord's people are conscious of needing. You know what I mean. You are conscious sensibly of needing the promise in this prophecy - "I will water it every moment. I will keep it night and day lest any hurt it". Here then is a great reason for doing what the Lord here speaks about, trust in Him. He gives faith for this purpose and He strengthens and guides it to this great work. "This is the work of God that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." So, my believing friends, with all the weakness and ignorance and fear and darkness and trouble that you have with yourself, this is the point, that God directs to trust in the Lord. "Trust in the Lord for ever". As long as you live, as long as you are in trouble, as long as you have

conflict, as long as your enemy breathes, as long as he has any skill to plot, as long as he has any enmity to spit out against the Lord, as long as he has any influence upon your nature, your mind and understanding and will and affections, so long, trust in the Lord. And people think it is easy, people think it is an easy business, whereas every believer knows that it is a sore conflict. He has to meet an enemy. Unbelief says, this is not the thing, this is not the way to heaven, and carnal reason stands up and says, this is not the way; there is no God to seek; there is no Redeemer to lean on; there is no blood to cleanse you; it is all nothing. But, says God, by His good Spirit in each living soul, "I AM". "Trust in the Lord for ever for in the Lord Jehovah" whom ye seek, whom ye desire to know, whom you would love, "in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength", to overcome all your inward trouble, and the great enemy that stands in your way. And what a mercy it is to see in Him this. Dear friends, it is in the covenant, it is in the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is the just expression of the plan of salvation that the Scripture contains. Every doctrine of the Bible in respect of the church is in the covenant. Every promise given to Christ for the Church is given to Him in the covenant. Every blessing He was to have for His people He had given to Him in the covenant. All the promises to the election of grace, all the grace they are to need and feel and receive, they find in the covenant of grace. "I have made a covenant with My chosen. I have exalted One chosen out of the people." There is not a doctrine of the gospel that you will not find in the covenant. The whole, so to speak, the whole plan of salvation is gathered up into this, bound up in this. And it is written that God showed Peter this covenant. A great sheet was let down from heaven. knit at the four corners, and Peter saw therein all manner of four-footed beasts and creeping things and fowls of the heaven, and God had made them all clean. To Peter, many of them were unclean, but God had made them all clean. And so He directs His people's faith to this covenant where the unclean are cleansed, the lost saved, and all gathered up into heaven. Trust in this Lord, this Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength.

And, if I may, I will venture to put it thus. This strength lies in His promise. The promises of God are yea and amen, never to be altered. "The promise of God is in Christ yea and amen to the glory of

God by us". The glory of God by the people of God in whom they are all to be fulfilled. That is God's strength. It is written - God, that cannot lie, promised eternal life. Think of it, we are all a lie. "Every man at his best state is altogether vanity", just a lie, nothing better. God's character is this - God, that cannot lie, and He has made a promise. The strength lies here. The strength of God is owned by all, but O it is great to feel it in the promise which is made over by God the Spirit to every living soul more or less distinctly.

And the strength of Jehovah also lies in His love. "Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee". This precious, eternal love, given to a sinner is cast round him in the Person of Jesus. "I drew thee with bands of love". The love of God - the love of the Father, the love of the Son and the love of the Holy Ghost - I drew thee with that. The cords of a Man, the Man Christ Jesus. This is the strength of Jehovah. In no other way does God exhibit and make known His strength in Zion; He makes it known in this way.

And the strength of God in the church of God lies in the covenant which He makes with them. "Gather My saints together unto Me, those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice". The sacrifice that the saints make with God is this - they deny self, take up their cross and follow Christ. Not much, some people think, but every one who is brought to it by the Holy Ghost knows what a crucifixion it is. Paul said he was crucified with Christ, and it is nothing less than that that is intended. Take up your cross, deny yourself. Good self, strong self, wise self, righteous self, obedient self, meriting self; deny this self. Ah, when men are brought to it, they find what Christ said to be true - "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man", rich in himself, "to enter into the kingdom". God's strength is here, that when He brings a sinner to Himself in this way of making a covenant with him, that then the Holy Spirit is in that sinner. The life of God, and the grace of God, and the wisdom of God, and the strength of God, are all in that sinner. The very act of self-denial is by this strength. The very taking up of this cross by this person is by the strength of God. Trust in Him. If you are led to make a covenant with Him there is in that the

strength of the Lord. Trust in Him, trust in His goodness in this.

And the strength of God lies, in the next place, in His faithfulness. His faithfulness reacheth to the mountains, the very heavens. And it is here that, if God has passed His word to you, His character is at stake. He has bound His honour to you, united you to that that is His very highest glory, that He changes not. Trust in the Lord for ever. Trust in the Father's love, trust in the blood of the Son, trust in the grace of the Spirit. Trust in Him who, having taught and enabled you to make a covenant with Him, will not deny Himself, and not deny His own work. He will have a desire to the work of His own hands. Now that is the first enemy, and against him God must arise or he will overcome us.

The second enemy is the world, and the Apostle John speaks of the world - "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life". These are in the world and the world lies in wickedness and is the enemy of God. The Apostle Paul says, if we are not to have to do with the world we must go out of it. We all have some relation to the world, have to do in some way with the world, and when that world comes, in some form, against the child of God, he finds that he has a counterpart of it in himself. The prince of this world came and had nothing in Christ, but when the world comes it finds something in us and I think I am right in saying that never, since the church of God existed, was there a greater degeneration, were there more enemies in the world against the church than today, and one might especially say, when the world, as far as we know it in Christendom is rising up and all talking about the Lord Jesus. They are out, as they say, to get the world for Him, and they use worldly means and they use that which dishonours Him. His Divinity, His wisdom, His vicarious death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension into heaven, these are all denied, denied by religious people, and if you were to speak to some of them about doctrine, they would instantly say to you, we do not want doctrine, we want religion, and we have to do with this world. You may think, well but we in Galeed have not much trouble with that world. Well you have got trouble some way in the world. There is some sort of relationship between you and the world and will be while you live. You may not have

to do with the subtelties of a false religion, of science falsely so called, but you have business, you have business people to deal with, and you may come across religious people, and if it is so you will find that there is an enemy to God. There is something in the world; why be so particular? Why separate yourselves as you do? Do you think you are the only people who are right? But O the subtle appeal that is made to our fellow feeling of creatures, our creatureship and common creatureship. Now how are we to stand? If we go to the world and have its friendship, then we are told by the Holy Ghost in Scripture what that means - "The friendship of the world is enmity with God". "If any man will be a friend of this world he is an enemy of God". Separation, separation, separation, this is the thing. All religion that does not bear the stamp of heaven, that has not the mark of the Holy Spirit's grace and teaching, that has not the seal of the Spirit on it, that does not separate us from the world, from religion in the world, all, all is vanity. But if we have that seal and that life, that grace, that teaching, that discipline that God blesses His people with, then we shall be separate from the world. I pray, said Jesus to His Father, that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil of the world. I pray not for the world, but for the men that Thou hast given Me out of the world. I pray not that Thou shouldest take them away from it at present, but while they are in it, Thou shouldest keep them from the evil of it. It is not evil to go to business, but if you get swallowed up in business, and your soul gets dry, and your conscience hardened, and your affections deadened, then you are under the power of evil. Every child of God says, Lord, I cannot keep myself, and the Lord does not say, I expect you to do that. He says: "Trust ye in the Lord for ever". As long as these difficulties surround you, as long as these temptations in the world come against your course, as long as you have this kind of evil presented to you, trust in Him to bring you honourably through it. Trust in the Lord to keep you separate, trust in the Lord to enable you to hold on your way and to make your hands stronger and stronger through the grace of the Holy Ghost. In the world we are to have tribulation; in Christ, peace.

The third enemy is the devil. "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour." If you do not believe it, it makes no difference to

the truth of it, but if you be living people you will find the devil is your enemy. He will let you have no peace as long as God allows him to trouble you. Rutherford says, you will never have Christ in peace while the devil lives. That is, as long as ever the Lord allows this devil to come against your soul, against your religion, against your experience, you will find that he will trouble you. And the more you know of the Lord Jesus the more violently the devil may tempt you. As soon as the Lord Jesus was born, then the devil stirred up Herod to seek to destroy the young child's life. And if Christ is born in us, the devil will have the same aim, to destroy Christ in the soul. He set Paul at this business, Saul of Tarsus. O what havoc he made of the saints. He made some of them curse Christ. If we had more knowledge of God, if we lived nearer to Him, we should find the devil also would be nearer to us, and would be roaring against us. If we had more communion with God we should find, one of these days, we should be taken to some pinnacle, some place in the wilderness, and find a variety of things to attract us. And if the image of Christ was more on us, we should find the devil shooting his arrows more at us against His blood, against the perfection and sufficiency of His righteousness. Whatever good points we may have in our experience, against these points the devil will bend his strength and tempt us. Occasionally I have felt as if I could be thankful to be tempted of the devil. You may take it as a sign in your favour. He would not tempt you if you were one of his friends. He would not tempt you if you were running the way of the world. And perhaps, especially, if a poor minister is enabled, with some zeal, to lift the Lord Jesus up, the enemy won't be slow to go to that minister and make sore work in him, perhaps between two services on the Lord's Day. Now, with this enemy, what shall we do? Ah, some of us have sighed about it. Are we to have no relief, no respite? Yes, there is relief. As the enemy departed from Christ for a season, so he is made to depart from a saint for a season. You will get rest, you will get rest sometimes. You will find the sweetness of Christ prevailing over all the evil of your nature. You will find the power of Christ enabling you to separate yourself from this untoward generation and you will find the power of Christ bidding the enemy leave you for a time unmolested.

Now, says God to this tried people, with all these enemies,

trust in the Lord. Go to Him with them. Helpless people have this great matter set before them. It is said to them, "In the Lord Jehovah", who is even in Jehovah Jesus, "is everlasting strength. No weakening of this strength, no exhausting of this strength. This arm, this mighty arm, is raised for the defence of the saint. The goodness of God endureth continually in this, so that the tempted, the tried, the afflicted, may say to the enemy: "How say ye to my soul, flee as a bird to your mountain?" Why do you say that? The goodness of God endureth continually. Whatever you may say, this goodness will outlive everything you may say. Whatever you may do, this goodness of God will undo and leave the saint unharmed. Therefore, brethren, we have great reason to do as the Lord says: "Lift up your head". Every reason to endeavour to do that, there is. "Lift up your head, your salvation draweth near". "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly". The day is coming when that foul spirit will be forbidden to hurt the saints, yea there will be an infinite distance between the devil and the church. The church will be in heaven, and the devil in hell. Therefore may the Lord help us to regard this word as a great encouragement. "He bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, even to the ground; He bringeth it even to the dust". What then? "The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor and the steps of the needy." Poor trembling souls will, as it were, hear Christ say to them one day, come and put your foot on the neck of this enemy. The foot shall tread down the city when God has done it. The victory is given to them. The foot shall tread it down. Therefore, "trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength". What then may be said to Zion? "Thy God reigneth". O what an amazing mercy for trembling sinners, for weak creatures, for poor worms, that God should have given in Holy Scripture such a manifestation, such a revelation, of Himself, and that He should bring to their hearts, by His good Spirit, the same things that He has written in this Book for their encouragement. May the Lord help us, may He arrest our trembling souls, by so gracious a declaration as this. May He guide us to it and say: See, trembling ones, see My strength, see My promise, see My oath, see what I am and what I can do and put your trust in Me to bring you honourably through all your troubles and at last land you in heaven where I am. May the Lord help us for His great Name's sake.

AMEN.