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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
on Sunday evening 5 January 1919

ISAIAH 27 v 3

"I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every  
moment lest any hurt it; I will keep it  
night and day"

Almost as soon as I ceased speaking this morning this verse fell upon my mind. It is a most wonderful and exceedingly suitable passage for a poor church in the wilderness, for a sensibly feeble, defenceless sinner. God, in this chapter, and the preceding chapter, has promised to do great things for His people. He says, in the beginning of this chapter: "In that day" - in the day when God's glory shall shine upon the earth, and it seems to have particular reference, prophetic reference, to the latter day, that wondrous day that is yet to come in the fulness of it - "In that day the Lord with His sore and great and strong sword shall punish Leviathan the piercing serpent, even Leviathan that crooked serpent; and He shall slay the dragon that is in the sea". Figurative language to express the strength and fierceness and subtlety of the enemies of God's church, and also to set forth the mighty defence that shall be over her and the utter ruin that shall overtake her enemies. The Lord is to do it. He, with His great and strong sword, His judgment, His severe punishment, shall destroy all the enemies of His children. As when He destroyed the great Egyptian power in the sea, so shall He destroy in the sea of His wrath, all who shall rise up against His church. And in that day, which shall be so wondrous and glorious for His people, they are to sing. "Sing ye unto her", who see these dealings of God, "Sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine", a vineyard that shall grow from that wonderful Vine we were noticing this morning, a vineyard planted by the Lord. A vineyard that has been wasted by the wild boar and the beast. A vineyard whose hedges God was provoked to break down, so permitting enemies to come and trample the vine under foot, and bring desolation. That is a wonderful Psalm in which the prayer is - "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; Thou that dwellest

between the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up Thy strength, and come and save us". And you know the confessions that follow in that Psalm, the wasted vineyard, the broken down hedges, the incursions of the wild beast and the boar out of the wood, and the petitions - "Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved". And here, the Lord answers it, as it were, and says "In that day" - when the time comes for Zion to be rebuilt, and Jerusalem to be built upon her own heap, and to stand and remain after the manner thereof; "In that day" when the glory of the Lord is to be upon the earth - "sing ye unto her" - unto God's vineyard - "A vineyard of red wine", in which shall be the pure blood of the grape, that wine that makes glad the heart of God and man. "Sing glory to the righteous", the righteous who may be saying: "Woe is me, my leanness, my leanness". "Sing glory to the righteous". O, but what glory is there? The glory of justification, the glory of infinite love, the glory of sanctification, the glory of God's presence, whereby all the waste places and desolate heritages of Zion are restored and the wilderness made like Eden and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Sing this, this prophet in another place says, "Sing glory to the righteous"; God's glory. "Thy God thy glory". O, when the Lord comes, when the city which John saw descending from heaven, having the glory of God, whose light and whose foundations, and whose walls were all so wonderful and beautiful, then "Sing glory unto the righteous", that glory which is promised. And then, lest poor people should faint, as feeling their own weakness and realising their inability to stand and defend themselves, says the Lord "I the Lord do keep it". Lest ye should say, drought will dry and wither me, He says, "I will water it every moment". Lest any rude, wild beast and boar should threaten by appearing to be coming forth from the wood and say, I will trample you under foot, He says "Lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day". Mine eyes sleep not. Mine eye-lids do not slumber. I will keep it every moment. Every moment I will water it. This then is a very suitable word to a poor church in the wilderness, to poor people who feel their weakness, their wickedness and their inability to defend themselves. It is a very encouraging word. Suppose there is a little church planted in any place by the Lord; suppose it contains but few members, godly souls, precious in God's sight; suppose they are poor in this world, hardly able to keep open the doors and yet fearing God,

attending to the Ordinances of His house, and waiting upon Him in His Word, and these are weak, weak people. It is a feeble Church; they are troubled; each member finds himself full of exercises, and many a time may be saying, how can we stand? Now, says the Lord, looking on that little hill, "I will keep it". O, but say the fears of the heart, what if drought comes? "I will water it". I have plenty of love, plenty of grace, plenty of power, plenty of providences. "I will water it". But there are enemies, errors, devils, hearts full of sin. "Lest any hurt it", lest these come to damage it, harden it, turn it aside, move it to some error, seek to direct it to some wrong ways, "I the Lord will keep it night and day". May this word belong to us. We do not know what is before us, but there can be no doubt - there is no doubt in my own mind - that the Church of Christ has yet to know what trouble is, in a way and form she has not known it for some long time past; that in some way trouble will come to us, come to this nation, and the church of God will feel it. The vineyard is in the land, a wilderness, and a wonder it is that there should be that great thing in the world. And, says the Lord, "I will keep it night and day". I will never, never, intermit My care for My people.

Let us look at it a little, then, by the help of God, as it respects the Lord's people. "I the Lord do keep it". This vineyard, which has wine in it that glads My heart and that glads the hearts of all who are Mine, I will keep it. A vineyard - its being as a vineyard - shall be maintained. That is the first thing. The being of a church comes from God and must be maintained by Him. And the being of a Christian, as a Christian, is as much from God and must be maintained by Him. John saw that holy city, he describes, coming out of heaven from God, which sets forth the origin of true religion, the source of a new heart and a right spirit. And, coming from God, he said there was in her, and on her, the glory of God. "Having the glory of God". This is contrary to nature; this is contrary to the whole world, for the world lieth in wickedness. Every saint has a nature that is contrary to himself, to his old man, and every church, and the whole invisible church of Christ, has a being that is miraculous and contrary to the whole world. You who know the Lord, who are born again, possess a nature that your old nature cannot love, but hate. You possess a nature the whole world must be against; it came from heaven; it has the glory of God in it. It has the glory of love, for

the love of God is bestowed upon every one born again. It has the glory of omnipotence in it. It is an invincible, omnipotent call that brings into being a Christian. It has the glory of justification in it, for the guilt of sin is removed by the blood of Christ. It has the glory of sanctification in it, for the pollution of sin is removed by the grace of Christ. It has the glory of divine power in it, for the power of Christ's resurrection is in every believer, creating his faith and supporting it. I, the Lord, do keep this. "No man can keep alive his own soul". As it is true of our being, our nature, that "In Him", that is God, "we live and move and have our being", so it is true spiritually. We live as Christians and have our being and move as Christians in the Lord, nowhere else. There is an atmosphere in God, if I may use such a word, there is an atmosphere in God that the Christian breathes, from which he derives his health and vigour, but it is contrary to the atmosphere of this world, and of our natural and moral being. O, what a great thing it is to be made a Christian, to be made a vineyard, to have spiritual things made great and first to us, and in us. What is it to be kept? "I the Lord do keep it". To be kept is to have in you the operations of the Holy Ghost. Not, if I may so express it, not a great act of naked omnipotence, but many and constantly repeated acts of gracious power, the power of Christ's resurrection. In what way does this wonderful keeping show itself in individual cases, in cases of churches? It shows itself first by faith growing. Paul speaks in one of his Epistles of the faith of the church, to which he was writing, growing exceedingly. That is an evidence of being kept. That is one way by which the saints are kept, as Peter teaches us when he says - "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." There is that beast reason that Luther speaks of, that beast unbelief, that we know something about if we have faith, and these would ruin us in a moment if we were left. Now the Lord keeps a church, He keeps a soul, by maintaining and increasing faith. How does He do this? Why, I can show you in a moment, as far as I have ability. To those of you who have faith, it would be like a demonstration. Whenever you get one single ray of light from heaven, one beam of mercy in your soul, one word of the gospel made known to you in a way of gracious power, there is in that such a demonstration of God as that your faith lays hold of it and is strengthened by it and grows. Now I am sure I need not say another word here to prove that I

Speak the truth of your own experience, those of you who have experience of God's goodness. And that is how the Lord keeps faith going. It stands in His power, moves in His power, acts on Christ in His power, goes to Christ in His power, lays hold of Him, as did the faith of the centurion who said "Lord I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof. Speak the word only". To get hold of Christ - O, blessed be God if we are kept in this particular way, faith living, struggling, panting, longing, hungering, thirsting, looking, laying hold - this is how God keeps His people's faith. Communications from heaven are necessary to the maintenance of faith in its freshness, its vigour, its acting. But there is trouble about it, always trouble about it in some form. The Thessalonians received the word in much affliction but with joy of the Holy Ghost. They go together. Professors may think if they have joy they will have no trouble; if they have trouble they will have no joy; but it is a great mistake. You can have the two together so sweetly that you will hug the trouble and bless God for it. I know it is true; I do not speak fancy; I am speaking a sober truth. Yea the Scripture says - "We glory in tribulation also". Yea, Paul and Silas, with smarting feet locked up in the stocks, sang the praises of God at midnight, and many a soul has glorified God in the fire. Faith grows, not by speculations in the armchair, but by demonstration in the furnace. "I the Lord do keep it". How does God keep it? By keeping prayer alive in the soul. Two things, to say no more, generally attend praying people. First, necessity; second, attraction. First, necessity, soul necessity, sin working, temptation trying and giving pain. Necessity for grace, necessity for God intervening, necessity of some kind coming will attend a praying person all his days. But not only that - attraction. O, blessed be God for attraction. O, you take a handful of inert earth, and put near to that the magnet, there is no motion. Put some steel filings into the earth, then there will be a motion, and if you have grace Christ will attract, love will attract, blood will attract, fulness will attract, mercy will attract, ability and wisdom will attract, and by these two things the people are kept by the power of God, kept praying. The trade of begging is the trade in which a Christian thrives. Beg your way and you will get to heaven. It does not matter how poor you are, you cannot be too poor for God. The poorer the wretch the welcomer at the throne of grace. Christ is the Friend of sinners, of sinners. He

intercedes for sinners. He draws sinners; He loves sinners, and He keeps them. O, what a vineyard is a church, is a soul, of red wine, when he is praying. Look at the attraction to Christ that a sinner is who is attracted by Christ. "O My dove that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let Me see they countenance, let Me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is comely", and you are as ugly to yourself as sin can make you; as loathsome as sin can make you. You wonder how God has borne with you and perhaps sometimes you wonder how the saints bear with you. Without any affectation, I can say that of myself. And yet, here is a poor sinner attractive to Christ, and Christ keeping that sinner. The moments that he feels ready to slip with his feet, Christ is keeping him. He keeps his love moving. O, love is a sweet grace; it is the eleventh commandment, as Usher says, when Rutherford, or Rutherford's wife, asked him, the stranger disguised in Rutherford's house, how many commandments there were. Eleven, he said, and she reproved him for it. And the next day, when he, the Archbishop was preaching in Rutherford's pulpit, then he brought forth the eleventh commandment. "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another". Ah, and it is a sweet thing to love. Love to Jesus Christ and love to His, how sweet a thing it is. Is there nothing to damp it? O yes, plenty in you to damp it, and plenty in the world to damp it. "Because iniquity abounds, the love of many shall wax cold", says Christ. Did you ever fear yours would go? Did you ever feel as if it had gone? Look at the truth; no love for it. Think of Christ, and feel no love to Him. Pray, and have no power. Talk about religion, and have no life in it. O, what a thing it is to have love revived. One way in which it is revived sometimes is a touch of Christ's grace. Sometimes a view of His sufferings. Sometimes a stroke of God's hand in providence attended with mercy in your spirit will revive your love. Sometimes a sweet moving of the word of God upon your heart will revive your love. "I the Lord do keep it". May you be kept; may I be kept. There is nothing between us and a serious, dreadful fall, but divine grace. No resolution will do it. No strong moral feeling will do it. No mere conviction will do it. God may use all these as means, but of themselves they will never keep you. There is nothing between us and apostacy but this promise - "I the Lord do keep it". "Hold Thou me up" says a sinner, sensible of his weakness, "and I shall be safe".

When any turn from Zion's way  
Alas what numbers do  
Methinks I hear my Saviour say  
Wilt thou forsake Me too?

Alas, with such a heart as mine, how can I hold on? How can I keep my face Zionward and be asking my way thither? Only by power. "Kept", says Peter, "by the power of God, through faith unto salvation". "I the Lord do keep it" growing, keep it in its state, keep it in an increase, giving it the increase first. "I the Lord do keep it" humble, a praying church, a humble praying soul. "I the Lord do keep it" by strange providences, keep it praying by necessity, by attraction, keep it loving by the same merciful attraction for the beauties of Jesus, the word of Jesus. The Names of Jesus expressed into the heart by the Holy Ghost will always attract, infallibly attract.

"I will water it every moment". By this we may understand the coming down of truth, of grace, of mercy, like showers of rain upon the mown grass, and these showers are promised in the Psalms. In one Psalm, of the Person of Jesus Christ, it is said - "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth." "My doctrine", says God by Moses, "shall drop as the rain and My speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb." That is watering, when the Holy Ghost comes upon you in some fresh operation, when He lets down into your heart some gracious word, when He mercifully opens the love of God, when He speaks kindly some gospel promise, when He makes known in His own light and teaching, the Person of Jesus in some particular way in which you perhaps have not known Him before. This is rain, this is watering the vineyard. I the Lord do water it, and "I will water it every moment". Not now and again, like a deluge, but "every moment", like a life giving, and life preserving, shower. It is a great wonder that in the world, deluged as it is by sin, there should be a vineyard, and if it could be so, it is a greater wonder still that, in this polluted world, there should be a vineyard preserved. One good man has used a figure like this which one may mention to express this watering. He said it is a miracle for a little torch to be kept alive in a tempestuous sea. It

is a miracle of grace for a poor sinner to be kept a believing, praying, fruit-bearing soul before Almighty God, and a miracle for a Church to be kept, kept to the principle of the doctrine of Christ, kept at the cross of Christ, kept at the footstool of mercy and to receive the sweet showers, tokens, dews, influences, operations of the Eternal Spirit from time to time. "I will water it every moment". You may not be sensible every moment of this watering, but if you have God with you, you have got the promise, and it is being fulfilled in some way except at that awful time when a fearful state of backsliding is upon us. When God is provoked to break down a hedge, O that is very solemn.

"Lest any hurt it I will keep it night and day". Does anybody want to hurt it? In this day, when everybody is supposed to do as he wishes and believe what he likes, is there any opposition to grace? Never was there more, but there is not the power to show it yet. O, there are plenty of Pharaohs and plenty of Herods in the world today. Herod sought to destroy the young child's life, but, says God, "I will keep it night and day". What is this blessing but God's gracious protection, His sweet, loving care and tender mercy over a people, over a soul? And one of the most sweet things you can have - after you have lived in a profession for some time and have had tokens for good to look back on, and see how the Lord has led you and preserved you - when you have said, my foot slippeth, then you say, "Thy mercy O Lord held me up". When you fretted at the prosperity of the wicked and at your own adversity, and then you see how God brought you on, and brought you into the Sanctuary, and taught you there how things really were - not as you had seen them - then you say, "I was as a beast before Thee. Nevertheless I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand." You were kept. Sin tried to hurt you eternally; God kept you. And He keeps in a particular way. Here let me say, He keeps by His fear. He keeps a person in trouble by His fear. He keeps him from harm by the fear of God. Joseph feared God - "How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God" Perhaps if one had said to Joseph, did you feel any special influence? did you feel any particular power at that moment?, he might have said, No? I was not conscious, but I felt a dread of offending a good God; I dreaded displeasing a heavenly Father; I saw the evil of sin. Who gave him that dread? Who gave him that sight? Why, his God did, and

the fear of the Lord moved in him, so that he said, "How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God". Nehemiah was kept. His predecessors had done some things which may have been more or less lawful for them to do, but which, in the times in which they lived, would seem to have been not at all good. And what said Nehemiah? "So did not I because of the fear of God". That was a bar; Nehemiah could not do what a worldly man had done in the office before him. "So did not I because of the fear of God". Do you feel a power when any temptation comes? Do you fear falling, yea and before it comes, do you find yourself moved to pray, as Christ directs, "Lead us not into temptation". The Lord keeps us. How often you may, on your knees in secret, have said, if temptation overtakes me today, keep me; do not let me go into it; keep me from sinning wilfully. "I the Lord do keep it". "Lest any hurt it I will keep it night and day". We do not know how much we owe to that blessed grace, the fear of the Lord, that holy, filial fear. But when this Scripture, to which I have thus drawn your attention, has its fulfilment in some perfection - which, as yet it has not when applied to the church of Christ - O, what a glory there will be. When love is perfected in sinners, and they have not fear, which hath torment, what a glory there will be. When Christ pours out His Spirit in such abundance as to fill His children, according to the Scripture - "Be filled with the Spirit" - what a glory there will then be. Let us, in the meantime, as the Lord may help us, thank Him for any measure of fulfilment of this word. Have we been kept from falling foully? Have we been kept from apostatising? Have we been kept with our faces Zionward, with our hearts crying out - O show me the way wherein I should walk? Are we panting after the knowledge of God, and for an increase of the knowledge of Christ in His Person, the knowledge of Christ as our Redeemer? O, if we have been so kept there is an abundance of reason for us to thank and bless God that we have partaken, in a measure, of the fulfilment of this Scripture. "I the Lord do keep it". He won't forsake the work of His own hands. Weak believer, press on, and cry as well as you can to God. Remember what Bunyan says about faith's acting - "Faith", he says, "acts in two manner of ways. First she walks as long as she can and when secondly she can walk no longer, then she cries, 'Lord save me'". May we go on. There was as much keeping when Peter was sinking and crying to God as when he was walking. Not the same comfort, but he was really held up from sinking altogether.

"I the Lord do keep it". I will keep the truth in it and keep the fear of God alive and keep My Name in it. I have set My Name there for ever and ever. May He be with us. Nothing will keep us but His gracious power. Remember that - let me say it again - there is nothing between us and a dreadful fall of some sort but the power of God.

AMEN.