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Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham  
on Wednesday evening, 13th. March 1935

Text: Isaiah 35 v. 3 and 4

"Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm  
the feeble knees.  
Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be  
strong, fear not: behold, your God will come  
with vengeance, even God with a recompense;  
He will come and save you."

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This chapter has the great promise of the glorious gospel of Christ. "The wilderness and the solitary place," where you would expect no happiness or good of any sort or kind, "shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose." A dry, arid, solitary place, now shall be fruitful and beautiful. "It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God." This is gospel truth. The Old Testament saints did receive the gospel. The Apostle said they did not receive it, - the promises they did not receive, that is, in the open fulfilment of them as in the New Testament days these promises are received and seen; but in the spirit of them, Abraham saw Christ's day and was glad. In Eden, God promised the seed of the woman; and the prophets and the psalms, as Christ Himself said to those two sorrowful disciples after His resurrection, testified of Him, preached Him; and this prophet declares that Christ Himself, speaking by the prophet, is anointed to preach good tidings unto the meek. He is sent to bind up broken hearts, deal with poor wounded souls, "to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God;" and all this was promised - prophesied of - between seven hundred and eight hundred years before the coming of Christ and the fulness of the revelation of the gospel. What a gospel God's gospel is! It is called "the glorious gospel of Christ," and when it shines into the heart, it gives "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God;" and when it is given as a girdle, it girds up the loins

of the mind and enables the poor creature, thus blessed, to run with patience the race that is set before him. And when the throne of grace is set forth, as it was in Exodus, when the Holiest of all was separated from the Holy place; and the Ark with the tables of the testimony in it and the Cherubims over that Ark; then God said, "There will I meet with thee." All these are in the Old Testament, and if we had eyes to read and hearts to receive the Old Testament, we should find a great deal of gospel. It is full of it - but not as full as the New Testament, because then in the New Testament, we have the fulfilment of types and shadows; the removal of shadows by the substance; and Christ Himself fully made known: but the two books are one, - one organic whole, not to be separated. This chapter, as I said, is a gospel chapter. It prophesies of good, of prosperity, of great blessing and flourishing in the church of the living God; and, dear friends, if the Lord be pleased to open it to us, we shall find what is here exhorted to, fulfilled in us. It may be that these verses which I have read, are spoken to pastors, ministers of Jesus Christ, and they are commissioned and commanded and enabled to do what here is bidden, "Strengthen ye the weak hands." This makes the ministry of the gospel very solemn, very important. It includes what Paul speaks of in the Hebrews to the people of God, "Obey them that have the rule over you, --- they watch for your souls," and when they see weak hands, then the commission is - strengthen them. When there are feeble knees, then the commission is - confirm them. When their poor fearful hearts faint, then the commission is - say to them - 'Fear not. Be strong. Behold, your God, whom ye seek, your Saviour whom ye seek, the Spirit whom ye seek; your God will come with vengeance to your enemies, even with a recompence and He will come and save you; as you pray, as you desire, as you long for.' What makes our hands weak? I speak to those who know and fear God and have a hope in Him. The hand of faith that would fain lay hold, and keep hold, of the cross of Christ. What makes their hands weak? That is the first thing to notice.

This, makes their hands weak, - unbelief! The greatest foe you ever can have, is unbelief. The greatest hindrance to your running with patience the race that is set before you, is unbelief. Hart speaks truly of it:-

"If unbelief's that sin accursed,  
Abhorred by God above,  
Because, of all opposers worst,  
It fights against His love,

How shall a heart that doubts like mine,  
Dismayed at every breath,  
Pretend to live the life divine,  
Or fight the fight of faith?"

Do you really experience the power of unbelief, or do you sometimes think that you are justified in all the doubts that you entertain? Do you realise in any measure what unbelief is? ... It is a terrible foe; it is an enemy of God. There is nothing too bad for unbelief to conceive, and utter in the heart against God; there is nothing too evil. There is nothing wrong in you, that unbelief will not take advantage of. Any sin done, any word spoken that is wrong, any feeling that is bitter in you, any wandering from God, unbelief will take advantage of, to make you faint, and fear, and weaken your hands. May the Lord open our eyes to see this sin, for it is, I was going to say, it is the sin of sins. It is immoral, because it is against a holy, kind God. It is bitter, because it takes an unjust, a cruel advantage of infirmity that we may be the subjects of. That, weakens the hands.

Secondly, circumstances may, and do weaken the hands. If the circumstances be prosperous, then the hand of faith is weakened because the mind is diverted from God - turned away from God. If, more commonly, circumstances be adverse, then we look on them naturally; look on them from a wrong point of view; and the devil will take advantage and not suggest only, but declare at times, that adversity is sent because of God's hatred of you. You may not at the time remember Solomon's teaching, that is, teaching by Solomon, "No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them." Do listen to the exhortations of God's word. - "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons." God keep you from listening to the devil, and to any reasoning that there may be in your minds, when you are in trouble. God has a kind intention - a merciful end - in sending trouble to you, - "if ye endure chastening." But, adversity does weaken the hands at times.

Temptation, thirdly, may be a great weakening of the hands.

Sometimes, you may be tempted to believe that there is no help for you in God, and of course, the end of that kind of reasoning is despair. 'If God does not help me,' you may say, 'then I must give up. If the Lord will not help me, nobody can - help is in Him.' "An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength." Ah . . . temptation is a subtle thing, a powerful thing. It is called deceit and violence. The deceit of the devil. The violence of the devil. Sometimes, delay in God's answering prayer will be used to weaken the hands. Some of you may have for years asked for a particular blessing. It has not come yet. What then? . . . 'O', says the carnal, legal mind; an ignorant mind: ignorant of God, I mean, and His intention, 'you never will get an answer.' Yea, and the Scripture may be put before you as being against you. It may say you have asked amiss, therefore you wont receive anything. Delays look like denials to you, do they not? And you forget the exhortation, "Be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." These things, and others that may be named, weaken the hands.

What are the "hands", here? . . . Faith! Ready to die sometimes. Faith is a mysterious thing - it is the gift of God. -

"It lives and labours under load;  
Though damped, it never dies."

Yet, it does get very low. Little faith, - we read of - little faith. "O ye of 'little' faith." The waves trouble you; difficulties distress you: temptations discourage you. These things come, and the hands of faith are weakened. You would, if you could, lay hold of Christ, weak believer, would you not? But, you are hindered. You would lay hold. And if ever you have had a promise put into the hand of your faith, and you have held that promise, and you have pleaded it - now what? . . . You are ready to doubt it. It is not yet fulfilled, therefore the enemy says to you, 'You never got it from God.' Faith would lay hold of the cross. There is life, righteousness, holiness, peace, joy, heaven, - in the cross. O, no wonder that our minds, our carnal minds, are against faith. We want present things. Things that are seen, as Paul speaks, not things that are not seen. Faith's business is with unseen things. Faith's business is with the cross, with the gospel, with the throne of

grace. Faith's business is to believe in God. How are these weak hands to be strengthened? The answer generally is this - the glorious gospel of Christ, brought in by the Holy Spirit. Yet, ministers are here commanded - commissioned - to strengthen weak hands. This is done ministerially, when ministers are enabled to bring before their hearers the holy, the glorious, gospel of Christ. For example, what about the atonement? When this is preached, how do you regard it? You may say, 'I do not feel an interest in it'. But then, though that may be the case, you may - as God helps you, you will - listen to the atonement. You listen to it as it is expressed by, I think, William Gadsby, -

"The vilest sinner out of hell,  
Who lives to feel his need,  
Is welcome to a Throne of Grace,  
The Saviour's blood to plead."

Listen not then to the enemy who says, 'You have no interest in it because you do not feel an interest.' No, wait on God, making this plea - the Saviour's blood! Sink or swim, do that. Live or die, invited or not invited, as Esther said respecting herself and the King, venture to the throne of grace, making this plea - the blood of Jesus Christ! And when I try to preach it, do not object and therefore hardly listen. Do not object that you have no felt interest in it. God can give you that felt interest, but if He does not, do not therefore conclude that you have no interest. I think it is Rutherford who says, "Our sense of things is not our Bible." My sense of my corruptions would keep me from the throne of grace. Your sense of corruption may have the same effect upon you. Your sense of not feeling an interest in the atonement will hinder and hurt you and keep you from pleading that blessed, precious death of the Lord Jesus. O, do think of it! I would set this before you, as an unworthy Pastor trying to strengthen you by preaching this atonement, and putting it before you, that your sense of not having an interest in it is not the rule for you. The rule for you is to venture wholly on the blessed atonement of Christ and plead it, as you may be enabled. Let your sense of vileness, of corruption, of bondage, of law terrors; let your sense of being utterly unfit even to take the name of God into your lips; let that painful sense be an incentive to you, to go before God. There is no remedy outside Him, is there? No remedy

in your feeling of wickedness, no remedy in your weakness, no remedy in your vileness, - "The remedy's without thee," says Hart. "The remedy's without thee." Where? . . . "See it in the Saviour's blood."

Strengthen the weak hands . . . by preaching the righteousness of Christ. -

"Righteousness to full perfection  
Must be brought, lacking nought,  
Fearless of rejection!"

'I have not got that,' says one. - And is that a reason why you should not pray for it? - No! 'I get further from it,' says a poor child of God. - And is that a reason why you should cease asking for it? - No! 'I see nothing but my filthy rags and they sicken me', says another. - And is that a reason why you should not seek this blessed robe? - 'I give way to sin and temptation,' one may urge. - And is that a reason why you should not seek after this blessed robe to make you perfect before God? - No! This righteousness is to be preached for the strengthening of faith. . . . Plead it; pray about it: pray to have it brought to you. This is the way the weak hands are to be strengthened. . . . The promises of the gospel; the greatness of the gospel; the Person of Christ revealed in the gospel: the throne of God's heavenly grace revealed in the gospel. These, as preached from time to time, with the ability God gives, and the unction of the Holy Spirit, these, are to be set forth as reasons for strengthening of faith - the "hands" of a poor believing child of God. And all that we need, all that a minister needs to preach, is just that which the holy gospel, the glorious gospel of Christ, sets forth.

"Strengthen ye the weak hands." Look into this Bible. Seek its holy promises. 'Ah,' says the devil, 'you must not do that, you have no interest.' The gospel does not speak like that. May the Lord give you the hearing ear to listen to the gospel. Of course you are not worthy. Who is? Who is worthy? No man on earth, no spirit of just men made perfect in heaven ever was, ever could be, worthy of Christ. It is given on other grounds. The ground of eternal love; of eternal election; of the person of Christ; of the death of Christ: and all these, are like so many kind invitations issued by the lip of divine truth, -

"Come needy, come guilty, come loathsome and bare;  
You can't come too filthy; come just as you are."

When the hands of faith are strengthened, then there is a laying hold of Christ, a pleading of Christ, a cleaving to Christ, a following of Christ. Also, with regard to chastening - "Lift up the hands which hang down," says Paul, in that chapter which we were reading just now. The hands hanging down, discouraged, - greatly discouraged, - because of the difficulties in the way of running the race set before us. The difficulties that are in the way, by our own loose garments, our carnality; our worldly things; our worldly minds; moveable things which we do not want to have removed: which we would rather have, even though they were stumblingblocks, than have them removed. These things make the hands hang down. Now, says the Spirit by Paul and by Isaiah, 'O weak hands, - lift them up. O poor creature, - lift them up, minister, - lift them up. Tell the people what God is; what Christ is; what Christ did: what Christ is doing in heaven. Tell them of His precious blood that cleanseth from all sin; tell them too, that the chastening hand of God being on them is a sign of His love to them: a token of their sonship.' Have you considered that? Have you really, at any time, when you have been under the chastening hand of God, considered that? Why has the Lord sent this? Why have I got that trouble? Reason wont help you here. The devil wont help you here. Guilt on your conscience wont help you here. A legal mind wont help you here. - Why does God chasten you? Paul tells you. As many as God loves He chastens. Yes - have you forgotten it? Is the trouble of a saint different from the trouble of the world? A worldly man next door to you may have the same kind of trouble that you have. Now what is the difference? Who makes the difference? The difference is this, that the worldly man with trouble, has no exercise toward God. You, with the same kind of trouble, have an exercise toward God. Who makes the difference? God does. . . . He says to a son, 'I love you, therefore I punish you.' As Amos has it - "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you." So here - 'I love you my child, therefore I chasten you. I love you and I purpose good to you. You shall be a partaker of My holiness and ultimately be with me for ever; therefore I chasten you.' O, what a reason for us to endure chastening, this is! What a reason! For you, who are

chastened now, who may be under God's hand, from whom He may have removed a moveable thing. - The reason? - 'Why', nature says, 'I have every reason to rebel or to despair.' Faith says, - God says to faith, - 'This is a reason for you to rejoice; to be thankful that God has not left you to yourself; that He has not left you without conviction of His greatness and His majesty and His holiness; has not left you without conviction of your need of His chastening hand: nor has He left you without a remedy.' He has not left you hopeless, has He? Have you not had glimpses of Jesus Christ? You need to "Consider Him." - The Holy Ghost by Paul, puts this before us as a divine word, "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Hold on! O to have Christ set before us, as He is set before us, in that chapter. That important and beautiful chapter we read just now, is wonderful. And the purpose of it is this - to encourage us. "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood," - you have not got to the end of your resistance; nor have you got to the full realization of God's kind purpose in afflicting you. I think from that chapter I may bring three points before you. First, the love of God to the child of His. Second, the fruit of that love - divine chastening, - and third, the end of that chastening. - That ye may be "partakers of His holiness," and I would exhort you, my friends, to consider these things. It is the office of a minister to set these things before His people in order, for their instruction and encouragement. "Strengthen ye the weak hands."

Then also - "And confirm the feeble knees." Feeble knees make walking difficult, if not impossible. Feeble knees, mean stumbling. You will stumble when your knees are weak. It is a little dangerous to try to walk when knees are extremely weak. What is this weakness? It is, to repeat myself, it is unbelief; it is temptation; it is wrong use of conviction: it is a wrong use of chastening. The Apostle says, "we walk by faith, not by sight." When you walk by the sight of your sinfulness and of your sins; when you walk by the sight of your afflictions, though they be but for a moment comparatively; when you walk by the sight of your disposition, your natural aversion from God and a constant disposition to turn away from Him: when you walk like that, it is a feebleness in you. You stumble, you "stagger like a drunken man," you get to your "wit's end." You scarcely know how you are moving,



or where you are moving to, such is the feebleness of our knees, of your knees. Ah, and they keep you from praying. A feeble knee is a knee that can hardly kneel down before God. Is it not so? Are you not greatly discouraged at times and ready to give up all prayer? Are you not stumbling at God, and stumbling at His Word, and stumbling at His promise, and stumbling at the gospel liberty, because you have no present sense of interest therein? I would again urge that on your notice, because you may be greatly troubled because it is true of you and in you. You have not yet full liberty, but that is no reason against holding on. You say, 'It is a reason in me' . . . It is a wrong reason - it is a wrong reason! - Says the Spirit, by Paul, "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

"Confirm." . . . How is a minister to "confirm" feeble knees? He can only do it ministerially, not effectually. The efficient cause is in God. The ministerial reason is in the Scripture. He must deal with the Scripture when he attempts to confirm poor feeble knees and he has to do it this way first. By the gracious invitations of the holy, glorious, gospel of Christ. "Come unto Me," says the Lord Jesus to trembling souls, burdened souls, labouring souls, labouring against that, against which they have really no power. "Come unto Me." How? . . . By the power of faith. 'Little faith, - come to Me. Bring to Me your difficulties, burdens, fruitless labour, come to Me with all of them.' - "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." Now when any minister, sent of God to preach, sets these things before his hearers, - when I am endeavouring to set these things before you, then it is a ministerial confirming of feeble knees; - feeble indeed. O, but there is more, infinitely more reason in God the Father, in God the Son incarnate, in God the Holy Ghost, for taking courage and endeavouring to stand before Almighty God, though your knees are feeble, than there can possibly be reason in you for despair. "God is greater than our hearts." says John, "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart." Where, is He greater? . . . In Christ! Christ is the strength of God, Christ is the wisdom of God; and He says, commissioning a minister, "Go ---- and preach the gospel to every creature." - 'Go where I lead you, guide you and fix you in My providence, in any church; go and preach to the people the glorious gospel of Christ.' Divert,

as well as you can, their gaze from their wicked, wretched, weak, miserable selves to Him who is "the Strength of Israel" and who "will not lie". If God could lie, God could die. He cannot lie, His word is the word of promise. His word is a word of oath, and the oath is by Himself, because He can swear by no greater. Therefore, it is the labour and the burden of the commission of sent ministers to speak the thing that is right, of God; and in doing so, there is this fulfilling of the commission, "Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees." Tell them of the blessed gospel; "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them." The wilderness shall entertain them, that is, they shall find all entertainment there. The desert, arid, dry, unproductive, no produce there to sustain those who are in it, - "the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly." Ah, a desert heart shall do this. A desert soul shall do this. Why? ... Because the Rose of Sharon comes!

May the Lord strengthen us, strengthen you, by this my feeble testimony; so that the devil and unbelief and affliction may not turn your heart away from God, but be rather a reason why you should fly unto Him, as in it, is your only hope and ground and reason for moving toward heaven. May the Lord help us in this great matter and help you to regard the gospel - though I have done it very feebly, - the gospel, which I have tried to set before you.

Amen.

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