

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
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ISAIAH 35 v 3

Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm  
the feeble knees

How many of you have ever realised your creatureship, your sinnership, and thought solemnly, painfully, of the day when you must appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ? Have you seen something of the glory of Jehovah in His law? His blazing justice, His forbidding holiness, His divine and just claim on you to obey Him, making it your bounden duty to obey Him which means to love Him with all your heart and mind and soul and strength and your neighbour as yourself. If that has never been the case with you, if it never is, what is there before you but eternal perdition. O sinner, God make you think of it. When a man is brought to solemn consideration of his condition as a sinner, it is to him a very awful thing to be, to be in this world and to be hastening to eternity. God give those of you who are in so sad and terrible a case as being indifferent to God and to your own everlasting interests, to realise what you are and where you are hastening to, even hell. But when people are born again then they come into trouble; they come into tribulation. They begin to know that they are strangers in the earth and that that God whom they would find is invisible to them, and that wrath which they would escape hangs over them and follows them and the commandment, which they cannot keep, constantly insists upon obedience. And those who have been brought on into liberty in Christ, they find tribulation. It is through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom, and the tribulation today is not so much external as internal. The world, unless we meet it, unless it sees us, unless it has something to do with our religion, or our religion interferes with them, cares nothing about it. The world does not care, but the devil does, and our hearts do, our nature, and so there is trouble. The heaven we are seeking seems far off, and if ever it has been made near it may have receded from us, and our views may now be dim, if even we have dim views of it. Christ said "In the world ye shall have tribulation".

Tribulation is a bitter thing to the flesh but God says "What is the chaff to the wheat"? Tribulation is a separating business. Tribulation is separating the chaff from the wheat; the flail, the old-fashioned English flail, the present threshing machine. Tribulation; the cart wheel that used to go over everything on the threshing floor for this purpose, to separate the chaff from the wheat. You have got chaff; I have chaff, more chaff than wheat it seems, if there be any wheat at all. We have the chaff and God only notices it for the purpose of blowing it away. We notice it because it cuts us, wounds us. We have to give up some of the dearest things and leave ourselves. The hardest business that ever a child of God can have is that, self-denial.

Now such a path as this brings two things; it brings out bad things; our natural tempers, unbelief, rebellion, wishing things were other than they are, fretting against God. This weakens the knees. Tribulation brings out other things, good things. Grace, grace saying I would be right; grace giving you to pray and call upon the Name of the Lord. Well, it is a fine thing, and a great mercy to be asking for the old paths and seeking your way to Zion. Feeble knees mean great weakness, and unsteadiness, and liability to fall. You cannot be steady if your knees are weak and God knows how weak some of us are. We might indeed be called weak kneed people; we find standing and moving in the ways of God very difficult. The commission of the prophet was this: Confirm these feeble knees. There is plenty of provision for the confirmation; may the Lord grant it to us.

First of all, the knees of prayer; the knees of your hearts, when you are not in the posture of prayer, physical posture; when your hearts kneel or would kneel. When there is, in those particular exercises weakness then there is great trouble. Conscience upbraids, Scripture reproves. Conscience tells you that you are in a poor case. What will strengthen the weak knees in this matter? The Holy Ghost tells us in the Romans: "We know not what we should pray for as we ought", but the Holy Ghost pities, comes near, comes alongside, and comes within, and makes inward intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered. Here God is necessary; here we cannot get on without Him, and feel it. When the weak knees are weak then the throne of grace is not much visited; No. Business,

correspondence, visiting friends, attending to your matters, without God; these things do evidence weakness of the knees in respect of prayer. We do not then follow hard after God. Lazy desires which kill the soul are the only things that we seem to have. Nor is God's silence very painful. Indeed there may be that in you, may have been that, fear perhaps the means of recovery may seem severe. "Fondly we flee from pain yet ease cannot content . . . ."

Life in the soul will never let you be really happy without God, and yet so depressed may that life be, so distant may you get from God, so indifferent to His present blessing, as that you are a person whose knees are feeble in respect of prayer. That is one great weakness. There is no remedy for this but that which God gives. There is no substitute for it. You may increase duties of this and that sort, but there is no substitute for secret prayer. The minister must find it, the hearers must find it, that when prayer ceases as to energy, perseverance and waiting on God, there is no substitute. And I tell you this, dear friends in the Lord, that if your knees are weak in this particular your souls are lean; your consciences may be getting hard and your minds very indifferent to things divine, and your affections may be set on other things than God. The Lord give us who are, in this particular, in a bad case, grace to awake from our sleep and arise that Christ may give us light.

And what will strengthen these weak knees, what will make you find that the chief attraction of your heart is in God? What will make you feel that business, of which you may be very fond, the family to which you are attached, duties of life which you wish to discharge faithfully, are all in a true sense sinking into a kind of nothingness compared with the glory of God and the health and prosperity of your souls? What will do the turn? Communications from God by the Holy Ghost. Trouble driving you, Christ attracting you, the Spirit guiding you, the truth guarding you, love moving you. Then you will find that your knees are strengthened which means that your heart is like the Psalmist's who on one occasion said, "My heart is fixed; my heart is fixed. I will sing and give praise." How short I come myself in respect of that Scripture. I have looked at it, thought of it, wished I could say it. "My heart is fixed." "O God my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise." When you try to straighten crooked things by your own hands, you fail, but when the Holy Ghost is in you

prompting you to secret prayer, to seek communion with God, to have power with God, to overcome, then you are in a good way. The gospel is the strength. Christ, in His Person is the strength. His grace is the strength, His blood is the strength, His righteousness is the strength, His smile is the strength.

Confirm, establish, the feeble knees, feeble in respect of standing in the old ways, the old paths, and enquiring your way to Zion. Do you profess to be pilgrims and strangers in the earth? Do you profess to have no abiding city here? Profess to be seeking a city which hath foundations, whose maker and builder is God? Then how does your heart accord with your profession? Well, the devil tempts, either violently or with great subtlety; sin rages, craving and determined to have its desire and you are weak. Do you seem sometimes to have your back on God and not your face? Do you sometimes feel as if you will give all up and the very feeling shocks you, and yet you have no power against it. Do you feel sometimes like an infidel? Do you listen to the tempter who makes you say, or would have you say: Where is their God? and you feel you cannot say where He is. He hides Himself. You go forward, He is not there; backward, where He did work, but you cannot perceive Him; on the right hand and on the left He hideth Himself. How weak you will be; too weak to stand. Strengthen these, confirm these, feeble knees. Confirm them in their pilgrimage. We are strangers and pilgrims and they that say such things are seeking a city. If they have a mind to go back they may have opportunities, but they say, No. When their feeble knees are confirmed by some soft secret word they say, No. To Zion we are bound; our hearts are that way, our views are that way, our feelings are that way our aim is in that direction. Strengthen, confirm, make them stand. When this confirmation takes place by some gracious communication from God then the man stands fast. Jesus stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem and the Spirit of Christ works that same stedfastness, in another measure, in the soul and you say by faith, my soul is set on heaven. I am set on Christ. No other help, no other end have I. I would fain be found in Him not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, and I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Confirm the feeble knees in respect of the truth, the truth as it

is in Jesus. It has fallen today. What is called Christendom has little or nothing of Christ in it and the doctrines of sovereign grace are very much now discredited. But what are they? They are the life, the hope, the peace, the comfort of the Lord's people, and they are sanctified by the truth. When it comes with power it always sanctifies. The measure of light, life and power in you will be the measure of your sanctification. I do not mean that sanctification which is imputed - Christ is made sanctification - but I mean that sanctification that is an experience of the power of the truth of God. For instance, if the Holy Spirit should set that on your hearts: "I beseech you by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service, and be not conformed to this world", what would the effect be? It would be two-fold. A conviction that you cannot do that of yourself; a conviction, a feeling of power in your soul, enabling you to do it; to take your cross up and follow the Lord Jesus. That would be a confirming of your knees and you would stand in the good old ways; you would stand in the truth of God; you would feel that the truth is more precious than anything in this world, that the integrity of the truth, by the grace of God, you would hold as fast as you could, and stand in the defence of it in your spirit. What is the truth as the truth is in Jesus? It is the truth of the Son of God coming, being made flesh and sin. It is the truth of His precious death by which He made an end of sin. The truth of His burial, of His resurrection, of His ascension into heaven, making intercession there. It is the truth of the Father's love in sending Him and not sparing Him, the truth of the Spirit's grace, without any measure in Him, and in some measure in your own soul. This truth is precious. It is not dry doctrine; No, it is life, it is understanding, it is power, it is goodness, it is meat and drink. "Confirm the feeble knees". One passage of the Holy Scripture in this particular would so reveal the truth in its reality, its spirituality, its meaning, its intention, its fitting your case, as that you would say, I cannot express what I see in that word. I cannot speak of the power I felt as it came into my soul. It drew me after Christ; it made me willing to follow Him whithersoever He might be pleased to lead me. It made Him the "Chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely". Ah, it may come like a flash and then go, but you will never forget it. In my earliest days I got that flash, and I have never forgotten it really.

What it opened to me, what I saw in God, and in the doctrines of His Word in a moment, the instruction, I shall never forget, I hope. "Confirm the feeble knees". Confirmation means establishment; it means an opening to communion with God, and here what weakness some of us have. O my friends, how weak some of us are with respect to this. Do we seek it? What do we understand by communion? It is being bone of Christ's bone, flesh of His flesh, and members of His body in particular. It means sacred union with Him. When you feel Christ in you the hope of glory, when you feel so united to Him as that His glory is on you, when you feel that you are enabled to tell Him in simplicity how dear He is to you, how precious, how necessary, and that you would not, if you might, do without Him; that your very soul chooses Him, loves Him; that you understand, in your measure, the feelings of Mary when sitting at Christ's feet. She chose to be there and He confirmed her in that choice, saying that good part which she had chosen should not be taken from her. Communion with Him is seeking to know His mind, as Paul speaks: "We have the mind of Christ". And the mind of Christ is that you must follow Him through tribulation, and you have that mind. And the mind of Christ is that He came to discover that which eye had not seen nor ear heard neither had the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for them that wait for Him and love Him. And communion is receiving something from Him and giving something to Him. There is a mutual communion between Christ and His people when His people are favoured. He tells them His heart; they tell Him theirs. He calls them His; they call Him theirs. He tells them He will help them; they say they believe it. He tells them that He will guide them with His eye and afterward receive them to glory and they depend on Him by faith, and that is communion. He tells them that they shall never want, and they, looking at His fulness, believe it, and rely on Him, depend on Him. Communion is viewing Him in His Person, His work, His glory, and you love Him as you see Him, and pray that you may hear Him oftener and depend on Him more simply and singly; committing yourself to Him as unto a faithful Creator. Confirm the feeble knees.

The commission was a beautiful one, having spoken of what the Church should be. The wilderness of the Church should become a beautiful, blossoming, fruitful Church, that the glory of Lebanon should be given to it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, the glory

of the Lord should be seen, and the excellency of our God, and when these mercies are seen then there is a confirmation. Confirmation also means this, that the confirmed ones are confirmed in their interest in God. Some of you may feel sometimes that if you had it you would give a world to know your interest in Christ. Nothing, you feel, nothing would be too big, too great to part with to know that you are in Christ, that you have eternal life in Him, but you doubt it. Sin, O the monster sin, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, how these interfere, weaken the knees. You cannot stand against the enemy. So shaken, so shaky are you, you cannot stand. You feel ready to fall and give up and your interest, if you had a hope of it, seems snatched away from you. Says the Lord to His servant, and His servants today, confirm those poor, feeble people. Tell them of my love, of my death, of my resurrection, of my intercession; that I care for them. Let them see a type of this in Judah. "Judah hath not been forgotten nor forsaken of his God though their land was full of sin". Think of it poor believer, shaking as you may be - "not forgotten". The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself perfect in strength and wisdom and goodness toward all whose hearts are perfect toward Him. But, you object, my heart is not perfect toward Him. He knows the bent of the mind. You see a river meandering; here it flows, there it turns, again it turns, and if you were to walk after all its windings you would go perhaps many miles and would hardly be able to believe it was the same river you started with, and that it was going toward the sea. But if you measure it by a straight line, God sees that straight line in your soul. God sees it and He says, I do not forget that soul; I won't forsake that soul. When that comes in in power it confirms the sinner in his interest in God and in God's interest in him.

Confirm him in Christ's word. "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto Myself that where I am there ye may be also". O, some of you may say, we are very far from that. You may be in your feelings. You may be very near really. That city which hath foundations, whose maker and builder is God may be very near to some; they may be very near to it. But confirm the feeble knees in respect

of that. What? Tell them what Christ said. "I have overcome the world". "I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice". And then at the end of those dispensations of grace and providence in you, I will come and receive you unto Myself that where I am there ye may be also. Do not expect a smooth path, but pray for strength to walk in a rough path, having shoes of iron and brass. God will give them; you will be content when you get a sense of having them, but there they are. The shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace, and you are moving by grace to that habitation that the Lord has prepared. Confirm the feeble knees.

Confirm them in the doctrine of the Trinity. Confirm them in that doctrine that their hearts may be established in it, that it may be so dear to them as that they would part with life rather than give up that. The doctrine of the Father in His eternal relationship to His Son; the doctrine of the Son in His eternal affiliation to His Father; the doctrine of the Spirit proceeding from them both; the doctrine of the Trinity. It has been well said, and I have admired it from time to time, for many years: Salvation is built on distinctions in the Trinity. One in essence, Three in Persons, and each Person has His own particular part in salvation, and those distinctions are known by the operations of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of sinners. May the Lord establish us here in that blessed doctrine of the Trinity spoken of, declared by John in his first epistle. "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one." And if we be God's people we are going to see them and to have their society, and this God will have our society. You cannot believe it; the Lord can cause you to believe it, and establish you in it. "Confirm the feeble knees". We need this confirmation, greatly need it.

The little children need it, the young men need it, and the old men need it; there is no child of God who does not need this confirmation. I wish it might please God to grant that many here may be born again and be brought to feel their need of Christ and of God in Him, and then, though they will have, as all have had, and are now having, tribulation, they will get strength and confirmation from time to time out of Christ. They will receive blessings from His fulness, and rejoice in Him in hope of the glory that is to be revealed.