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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 8 October 1933

ISAIAH 35 v 3

"Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the
feeble knees"

The preceding context is very wonderful, an expression of the purpose of grace and of the fulfilment of that purpose. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. 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, and they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God." What is communicable of God is here promised to be communicated. The wilderness and the solitary place, and the desert. Not the terrible place described in the preceding chapter - Edom is to be destroyed; none shall inhabit that land; the creatures spoken of shall possess it for ever, from generation to generation - but a wilderness soul, a wilderness church, shall see and enjoy what is here promised. And it is on this ground I apprehend that the commission was given to the prophet in the text and context that follows: "Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees". What makes the hands weak? Sin; an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, gadding after other things that do not, cannot, profit. Failing eyes weaken the hands. Mine eyes fail while I look upward. Sins done, and conviction of them, without the present sense of the blood of Jesus Christ, will weaken the hands. Unanswered prayers, failing hope, hope that may appear to have perished - not really, but apparently. My hope and my strength is perished from the Lord. That was Jeremiah's experience and it weakened it. Non-fulfilment of words - begun but not finished matters - weaken the people greatly. Expectations raised by the movements, the operations, and grace of the Holy Spirit not yet realised and the tempter coming and probably even roaring in the ear, you are deceived. God did not bring these things to you. And you may be disposed to say with Jeremiah, Lord Thou hast deceived me, and I

was deceived. Darkness of mind will weaken your hands. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that walketh in darkness and hath no light" Confusion, trouble, difficulties, obstacles, dangers. You cannot see in the dark and you are afraid to move and afraid to stand, uncertain in your mind, and so you are weak and cannot take hold of God. Hands of faith. Hands may be weak also for another reason, namely infancy; babes in Christ. Hands are used to lay hold of things, to grasp them, to retain them in the face of opposition. A babe in Christ has life, eternal life in his soul, but he does not as yet know what he has to know, what he shall know by the grace of the Spirit, and so he is very weak and can hardly move his hands toward the Lord Jesus and he is troubled about that. If there be any here feeble on that ground, though you be children, though you speak as children, mark this the Scripture speaks of growth and seek that you may grow in faith and lay hold of that which, as at present, is before you but not in your hand.

"Strengthen ye the weak hands". This is a divine commission. If men speak without a commission from heaven they may say many right things, but they cannot speak with unction. Here is a prophet of God, and he is inspired to write the wonderful things contained in the first and second verses and on the ground of them he is to strengthen weak hands. He is not to say, O you should not have weak hands, nor, you must make your hands strong, you must exercise your muscles, you must do this or that. That is not the ground God sets him on, not the reason God gives him to fulfil this, his commission. Something outside himself is to be preached to him. Tell him that though he be as weak as water, that though the shaking of a leaf will make him tremble, that though he cannot stand a minute when anything threatens him, tell him this, that God is God. Tell him of Jehovah; tell him what Jehovah has promised. To strengthen weak hands is to preach the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; to preach that the Son of God incarnate is the strength of Israel. This is to begin with to preach - teach, declare and expound; for that is what preaching really means - what Christ is. Take that first; what is Christ? Who is He? When He was here men guessed about Him, conjectured that He was this man and that prophet. They were mistaken. "Whom say ye that I am?" asks the Lord of His disciples. "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God" was the answer. Noble truth, everlasting

truth. "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God". How did Peter get that knowledge? By revelation. What is Christ in this particular? He is God's messenger. He is called by Paul in the Hebrews the Apostle of our profession. An apostle is a sent person, sent with a message. Sent; not running voluntarily, as one did who wanted to take news to David about the war, but one sent with a certain message. Christ came, and as He speaks in the person of the Psalmist - I have preached Thy righteousness to the great congregation; I will declare Thy Name. How came Christ to declare the Name of His Father? Because that Name was in Him. Moses, prophesying of Christ, said - A prophet like unto thee shall the Lord your God raise unto you. Him shall ye hear. And what are we to hear that will strengthen us?

First, that God laid sin on His Son. If sin troubles you - woe be to you if it does not - if sin troubles you, weakens you, distresses you and causes you to fear living and to fear dying as you are, then this may be preached to you. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all". When that good news enters the heart of a babe in Christ, of a young man who is distressed, of a father who gets confused sometimes, it becomes instantly a strength. Recollection of his father's house strengthened the prodigal son to turn his face and direct his feet to his father and when faith rises in the power of the Holy Spirit and moves towards this blessed One who was made sin, then there is a real communication of new vigour to faith and the sinner says, I will go to God. And a strange experience you may have, yea, a double experience respecting sin. You may say sometimes, my sins are infinite. How dare I pray? None can express the difficulty of prayer that is experienced by some when their sins appear to be infinite. That arises from seeing sin and not Christ. When good news comes then faith is redirected, not to forget, not to deny what sin is, and what sins you have done, but to look on Him who made an end of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Nothing will more wonderfully, sensibly, powerfully strengthen faith to say to the Lord "Pardon mine iniquity" - what a strange reason He gives - "for it is great". Divinely communicated strength will make you lay hold of this. The spider taketh hold with his hands and is in kings' palaces, and the poor believer - whose faith has been shaken at times so that he has

said, I do not know that I am a believer; I am afraid I shall never be a believer - by a sight of Christ crucified says, I will take hold; I will lay hold of this that is seen by me in the glorious gospel of Christ and this wonderfully enables him. The Apostle Paul, writing to Timothy, young Timothy, says this - having spoken of the evil of sin and the love of money which is the root of all evil - says to him, but thou O man of God, flee these things. "Lay hold of eternal life whereunto thou art also called". This laying hold of eternal life means laying hold of Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. It is laying hold of Christ who was made sin and who made an end of sin. Mind, therefore, when you begin perhaps to feel a little strong in your spirit, the reason of it. Look narrowly at that, the reason of your feeling even a little bit of strength. If it be short of this, Jesus Christ and Him crucified, it is sadly, terribly short. But if, with all your sins, all your delinquencies, failures, all your shortcomings before your eyes; if, with God's holy properties before you, making you tremble at the thought of approaching so glorious a Being, you get a glimpse of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, you will say, I will go unto God. Yea, you will cry, "O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy".

"Strengthen ye the weak hands" by the everlasting gospel. I do not know of anything else to preach to you but this, nor do I wish to know anything. Let flesh and blood, that shall not inherit the kingdom of God, go down. But I would say again as I have said to you in the past, I wish I could trample this beast under my foot in the pulpit. None but the Son of God will do. I know it for myself, but when you hear in your heart the glorious gospel of Christ, then your faith will be strengthened.

"Strengthen ye the weak hands". The blossoming of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The glory of Lebanon, a mountain in the land of promise with that wondrous tree, beautiful tree; Carmel, a wonderful pasturage; Sharon, where blooms the rose; these, these, shall see the glory of God, the excellency of our God. Now this must be in the Person of Christ for, speaking of Jehovah, John says "No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son which is in the bosom

of the Father, He hath declared Him", and Paul says to Timothy that God dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see. No man can approach that. The immensity, eternity, independence, and all the glorious properties of Jehovah are hidden from human gaze, nay, from angelic eyes. But what may be seen of God is in Christ; what may be known of God is knowable in Christ, and nowhere else. Therefore in trying to strengthen any weak hands that may be here now, I would say none but Jesus can strengthen them. His grace is sufficient for the weakness of His people.

Strengthen then the weak hands, first in respect of the law of sin which is in our members. If you neglect this, if you do not get exercised about this, the law of sin which is in your members, you have no exercises concerning victory. But if the law of sin which at times, to use a legal word, runs, runs in your mind, your affections, your attention, your disposition, your will, if the law runs in those particular qualities of your nature, then you will say, with shame, woe is me, woe is me. "O wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from the body of this death". Now it may be that some of you who are old in the faith still find this law in your members, and you are troubled. Dear friends, the decrepitude of age does not mean weakness of sin; I know that. Is there any strength that can meet this? O, yes. Listen if you can to Christ speaking concerning this. This is His word: "Sin shall not have dominion over you for ye are not under the law" - that provokes, irritates, condemns, - "but under grace" that rules, sweetly rules, powerfully rules, and gives occasional victories in experience and a promise of everlasting victory when death shall come. Take this again, a begun matter unfinished. Take Joseph as an example of what I intend. The matter of his exaltation was begun by God when He gave him the dreams. Doubtless, according to the record, we may say, doubtless Joseph expected that God would fulfil what He had promised him in those dreams. What was the way to the fulfilment? Egyptian troubles, false accusation, prison, feet hurt in fetters, the trial of faith. Peter speaks of the trial of faith as being precious. But until the word of the Lord came, concerning Joseph it is said, until the word of the Lord came, the word of the Lord tried him. Until the word of deliverance came, the word of promise tried him. You will be weak if you have got begun matters; you may be very weak at present because

they are not fulfilled. God has started you in some way but you are not at the end of it, and the way is difficult. There are valleys, there are mountains. The one you cannot ascend and overcome, the other you cannot fill up yourself. What are you to do? The Holy Spirit will say this one day, in substance if not in the word: "Be not ignorant of this one thing that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." That will cover all your troubles if the Holy Spirit brings it to your heart; strengthen your hands. O you will take hold of God. O, the wonder of this; no living tongue can express what is in that taking hold of God. Jacob did it; he had power over the angel and prevailed. He wept, he supplicated; he had power over the angel, over time, over delays, over crosses, over contradictions. He had power over all of them and could say in respect of his matters what Paul said in respect of the shipwreck he was expecting - I believe God that it shall be even as He said unto me.

"Strengthen ye the weak hands". Strengthen the hands of faith with respect to God's silence. Sometimes He is silent and that awakens great concern in those who have heard His voice. "Be not silent unto me lest if Thou be silent unto me I become like them that go down to the pit". Are you afraid of silence? One may ask this, when did you last hear from Him? What did He say to you? What expectations did He raise in your hearts, and now after that communication He is silent. He is not working in you, not working for you as you may be realising. "Strengthen ye the weak hands". What by? What is the remedy for this weakness? You say doth His promise fail for evermore. What does He say? Put Me in remembrance. Faith says to Him: Remember Thy holy promise. Jacob did it: Thou didst say. When your faith is strong enough to put that before the Lord you have got a good case and are in a good case - Thou didst say. Your hands will be strong enough to carry the Scripture to the Lord, strong enough to put Him in mind of the time when He spoke to you, of the circumstances about which He spoke to you, of the promise He gave you, of the prospect He set before you. Hands will take hold. "Strengthen ye the weak hands" to keep what you have got. Ah, one says, I cannot do that. If you try to do it on the naked remembrance of what God said, you will fail, but if the Holy Spirit brings to you the holy property of Jehovah, namely His faithfulness, then you will keep your hold and you will be enabled to

obey that Scripture in the Revelation: Hold fast that which thou already hast that no man take thy crown. Dear friends, we are weak creatures; poor unbelieving believers some of us are, but there is a strength communicated at times by this blessed word of promise, and His faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Think of it - a good God. I have loved the character that the Apostle Paul gives to God in his letter to Titus; it has been a stronghold at times; namely this, "God that cannot lie"; "God that cannot lie". Hath He said and shall He not do it. Hath He promised and shall the promise fail of fulfilment. You might easily promise to do something to a child or a friend which you find a little later you have no ability to perform. God never promised what He could not do; never will. Christ has the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwelling in Him; Christ has all the pleasure of God dwelling in Him; all the love of God and the grace of God and the purposes of God and the goodness of God fill Him, and therefore He can do what He has promised, and He will do. O, but my case one says. Your case. What are the nations to God? As the drop of a bucket. What are your wants? Finite. What is His resource? Infinite. Here is a ground for a minister to stand on and say to his hearers who have a little faith: Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart. Wait I say on the Lord. Whoever believed on Him and was put to confusion. Whoever went to Him by faith, little faith, and was turned away unregarded. "Strengthen ye the weak hands". Jerusalem was surrounded by hills. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord" - infinite in goodness and mercy - "is round about them that fear Him." Therefore with all your weakness and fears and shakings and sinkings, look to this great One who has said: The wilderness - not a good pasturage, a dry, arid wilderness where you can grow nothing, make nothing, find nothing to nourish you; the wilderness of your heart, of your nature, the wilderness into which God has allured you by His goodness - shall be glad. Ah you will be glad one day when the Lord fulfils one word in the Psalms: "Thou wilt compass me about with songs of deliverance". I said to the Lord once, that cannot be true of me for I am surrounded by trouble and He said this, wherever there is a trouble I will plant a deliverance. Compass you about. Think of it. Not one thing here done and all the rest open, exposed, barren, dry, but compassed with goodness. O what a God we have, what a good God we have. And now says the Lord to His servant Isaiah, I have got poor, weak people about Me,

now go to them and when you see their hands hanging down and realise that that is from depression of mind and fears of heart and temptations, and when you see that they are intent upon looking at themselves and at their disabilities and weaknesses, tell them this, that the wilderness and the solitary place even where they are, yea are themselves just that, shall be glad for them. Why? Because God has said He will do this. O hang about Him, go to Him, hanker after Him, for you cannot go and wait and pray in vain.

To see the glory of the Lord. Just a word here. They shall see the glory of the Lord. What is that? Not his eternal, unseeable glory in His Being, but His revealed glory in Christ; that is the glory. The glory of redemption, definite, absolute. The glory of justification without works; the glory of sanctification given and wrought by the Holy Spirit; the glory of wisdom teaching you how to go to the city, giving you light to see what you are to avoid, the pits, the snares, the difficulties, and to see what to follow after, even God in Christ. The glory of the Lord; it covers the soul. It is one day to cover the earth, but it covers the soul, it covers the church. "Arise, shine" says this prophet to Zion, "Arise, shine for thy light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee". When you have Christ in you the hope of glory, you have this glory upon you. When you have submission to the will of God in affliction, when you can take affliction as from Himself, though it may come by a human hand and means, when you can lose sight of the second hand and just say, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done" and suffer all the evil and wrong that may be inflicted, then the glory of the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord you have upon you. So teaches the Apostle Peter. Glory? There is a weight of it; much of it cannot be borne here. There is to come an exceeding weight of glory. What is the connection there? Trouble. The professor who misses trouble misses more than he knows. "Our light affliction", light viewed in the sweet teaching of the Spirit, "Our light affliction which is but for a moment" - lasting years - "worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory while we look, not at the things which are seen". You look at your trouble, your business troubles today; you look at what was once very solid now becoming liquid; you look at your poor, failing health; you look at your old age, your grey hairs, and you look at your weakness and many things that are evil, and the body of sin and

death, and you say these are not light, these are not for a moment. But when you look at God - O, if I could be the means of directing you to this - when you look at God, when your eyes are turned to Him, then you take hold, you receive new courage, you are fortified against your troubles, and evils and enemies, and you can say, I believe God; I believe God that it shall be even as He said unto me. Therefore what Solomon says in the Proverbs becomes true and true in experience in a measure: "The righteous is an everlasting foundation". (Proverbs 10 v 25; Matthew 7 verses 24 and 25) Solid, he stands on the foundation that God has laid for him. Therefore may we be strengthened. "Strengthen ye", tell these poor, weak people that they have a good God; in the Covenant of grace He has declared Himself. Tell them that there is a feast prepared for them, that there is a Saviour for them; yea, and according to their desire and need, a great one. He shall send them a Saviour and a great one. Now I must leave the second part of the text. May the Lord in His great mercy make a little use, if it can please Him, of the feeble remarks made. May He make them strong in your hearts.

AMEN.