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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 12 June 1921

Text: Isaiah 41 v 10

"Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

This verse, as indeed all the scripture, sets before the saints an object. A subjective religion is unspeakably valuable and precious to all who are blessed with it, but first of all, though not first to the sense of a person, is an objective religion. You must have an object set before you before you can believe. How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard. How many poor people are lost in searching for good in themselves, God only knows. It is an unspeakable mercy to be led to look on Him who is the proper object of faith, the mighty God who speaks, the living God who reveals Himself, the Saviour who shows Himself. If you are going to heaven, you will have an object set before you. He is revealed in that wondrous promise written by Zechariah - "I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced." Then comes the subjective work "and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son". God will be first, God will make Himself the object of your faith if you have true faith and whenever any of us, and alas who does not do it, sets about looking for good in himself and wishing to have certain good frames and pleasing sensations in order to observe this, in order that he therewith may come to God, he is about a business in which he is doomed to fail if God is gracious to him. But you may say do you deprecate good frames and sensations? No. I wish that I were filled with them every day of my life and every hour of every day, but it is one thing to have them from the fountain of goodness and another and a different thing to take them as a penny to buy grace with. You must have an object and God is that

object. The mighty God hath spoken - "Gather my saints together unto Me". "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." It was a grand object to a bitten, poisoned, dying Israelite, when the brazen serpent was lifted up and he by faith looked thereon and found life by the look. "Life" as Hart says "attended every look". That is healing and dear friends what is there in self to look at? What do you find in yourselves to look at? Do you believe what you were just now singing "No help in self I find," and is that the result of a search for it? Do you believe that you are full of sin, that if one should say to you your nature is crammed with hypocrisy, you would have to say sorrowfully, I know it. Then what is there in self to look at, but that which causes shame? But when the Eternal Spirit in His kindness and love says to a bitten, wounded, mourning sinner, "Look to Jesus kind as strong, mercy joined with power", then all the sweet things you wish to feel, the health, the spiritual health you would enjoy, the comfort you would have, and the peace you would feel in your conscience, all, all come by that blessed One.

The text sets an object before us. "I am with thee. I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." All these gracious repetitions, not tautology, but gracious affirmation of what God will do. You look at self, I look at self, we all, as fearing God, look at our weakness, then at our foes, at our difficulties. How can we get through is the question then asked. How shall we get through this, how overcome that? Says the Lord, "Be not dismayed, I am with thee, I am thy God, I will strengthen thee, I will help thee, year I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." The Holy Ghost by Paul says "That by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, He has given strong consolation to all who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them" and their hope, the grace of hope, as an anchor, as a good anchorage - "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul" cast within the veil. Let us look a little at the word of promise which we reached this morning. "I will strengthen thee". We need it. "I will strengthen thee" for this particular purpose, to worship and serve God. The sole

object set before Pharaoh when Moses requested that he should let Israel go was this "Let My people go that they may serve Me." What that service was to be Moses declared later. We must hold a sacrifice unto the Lord, therefore must take all our cattle with us, for we must hold a sacrifice, a feast. We must go into the wilderness. This is a little different, nay, I wont say little, this is vastly different from the world's religion. You must go into the crowd and serve God. You must let your views be heard; you must make a great noise. Says God, My people shall serve Me when the eyes of the world are not on them. They shall go into the wilderness to serve Me and you, if you are strengthened to serve God, will find your way into your rooms. You will find your way to some lane, behind a hedge perhaps, and there in secret glorify God, in secret worship Him and give Him the satisfaction He intends to have in you. I will strengthen thee for this. Now in worship there are several particular things to notice. First of all faith. If you have no faith, you will never worship God. Faith gives Him in the heart and conscience a Being, as says the Apostle "Faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen". If God is not made real to you by faith you will never worship Him. Think of it. Is God real to you? He is "I am that I am". He is Jehovah. But He has most mercifully veiled His glory to bearableness, mildness and sweetness in Jesus Christ. Is God in Christ real to you? Do you believe that He wont be put off and satisfied with half the heart, but all of it? Egypt must not retain and detain you, God will have you out of it, make Himself everything that you may in spirit and in truth worship Him. Neither in this mountain nor in that nor at Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth. Your heart will kneel, your soul will bend itself before Him. You will be prostrate in your affections before Him in worship. Faith in Christ, faith that says, poor sinner, though your sin be so great to you as at times to make you wonder if it can be put away, remember this, it is the sin of a creature, and remember this, that the atonement is the atonement of Him who, though a Man, is also God, and therefore infinite and so sin, all manner of sin and blasphemy against the Son of God shall be forgiven, and I am disposed to say this, that the sinner who, with the keenest sense of sinfulness and with the

deepest shame upon his spirit because of his sins, goes in the power of the Holy Ghost to the cross and there perceives and believes that the blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to cleanse him from all his sins, that sinner in that act of faith gives God glory, glorifies the atonement, the goodness, the mercy, and love of God. He may not know at the time that he has an interest in that atonement, but believing it and believing it to be more than his sins, believing it to be sufficient to cleanse him from all his transgressions and pollution, he does glorify the atonement and gives pleasure to God and that is worship, that is the worship of faith that pleases God; that the worship in which is a full surrender made by the sinner, through faith, of himself; that is the worship that makes a sinner a receiver and God the giver; makes the sinner the subject of the act of forgiveness that shall come sooner or later to him, and God the blessed One who does that act upon him. Worship is, if I may so speak, in every faculty of the new born soul. The understanding, the reason; reasoning, corrupt reason and corrupt reasoning, the understanding that says "why", "why", "wherefore", "but", "if", "how", this is brought into subjection to God. Every thought is brought into subjection to the obedience of Christ. He reigns. Why, and how He made an atonement, how He could, the holy and the just One, be made sin, how God could punish His dearly beloved Son, how the Son of God could make Himself just that vicarious person a perfect substitute, how the love of God and the justice of God could be harmonised in that person's work and death, you may not be able to comprehend, but faith says it was so, it is so. All I want says the sinner is that what Christ did on the cross may be in my heart that thereby I may be reconciled unto God, reconciled unto God in the body of the flesh of Jesus through death. The understanding is brought to bend, willingly to bend and give up everything that is dear to it in its corruption and the will is brought to this, yes the will is subdued. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power." I suppose that there is scarcely a more beautiful instance of subjection of a person to Christ in this particular than you have in Mary, who left all her serving, all the anxious care, to Martha, and for the time just sat at the feet of the Lord Jesus, and that was according to the ancient promise, the ancient word. It says "Yea

He loved the people. All His saints are in Thy hand and they sat down at Thy feet. Every one shall receive of Thy words." It is great to find yourself willing to be saved by grace. Some people think that that is not much, but the Lord's people know that it is a vast thing. Willing to give up everything, willing to abandon yourself, willing to give up that idol, that loved object. O no nature says. Yes, says the believing soul, I do feel that I can yield all up; the will is submissive and the affections are engaged here. If ever we get a sight of the Lord Jesus as the Church got when she said "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons" it is sure to follow, as you read, "I sat down under His shadow with great delight and His fruit was sweet to my taste" or, as the marginal reading is, "I delighted and sat down under His shadow." She looked on Him with faith; she saw His beauty, His glory, His greatness, His sufficiency, and she said "I delighted in Him as I looked on Him" and the effect was "I sat down". I wanted rest, I sat. No other object. I loved what I saw; I loved Him I saw and I sat down in divine contentment, submission to His gracious will. I loved Him. This is worship. A sinner hating his life to find it, to love it. Losing it to find it; giving himself up entirely under the mighty operation of the Eternal Spirit and God strengthens for this. "I will strengthen thee". Now what is the strength that is needful for this worship which I have so feebly and briefly described? It is the strength that the atonement affords. It is the strength of the grace of Christ, as Paul says to Timothy "Thou therefore my son be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." It is the strength of the love of God; it is the mighty moving of the Eternal Spirit; it is the strength that the Trinity in the covenant of grace imparts. Each person in the Trinity is concerned in the salvation of a sinner. This is the strength. "I will strengthen thee" Every sight of Christ gives strength to the one who looks on Him, Every sight of his precious righteousness gives strength and the soul comes sooner or later to say "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength". Then we find that by strength no man prevails. "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear. The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid." O believer, you do not know, I do not think we ever shall know fully, at least

here, the delight that faith gives to God as it moves in the soul, the pleasure it is to Him when a sinner comes and looks to the atonement and feels the power, efficacy, sweetness of Christ's precious blood. This is worship, this is serving God. It does not comport with our natural notions of service, but it is a true service that God is pleased to accept in His Son. "We, receiving a kingdom", the kingdom of God's grace, therefore, says the Apostle "let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." There is another thing I would name to you. This, that when you really serve God, you do adore Him. He has the undivided adoration of your soul. You look at the Man Christ Jesus and there you perceive the beams of eternal deity coming forth, bearable there, and reaching your soul in their tenderness and their love and their sweetness and their greatness, and you adore that Person. Jesus is Almighty God. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father". The faith of the sinner climbs up, the adoration of the soul reaches deity through the Lord Jesus, in the Lord Jesus, and nothing is sweeter than to be enabled to fall down in adoration. Also admiration will always accompany you when you worship God. To see mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace kissing each other; to see all the perfections of deity in Christ meeting all the claims of the law, all the demands of justice, all the sanctions of holiness divine meeting in Christ, having full satisfaction in Christ, this will bring to you admiration. There may be much in nature for you to admire, many things about you, you may admire. The providence of God, in all its wisdom, and its far reaching effects, you may admire. You may believe that, what now is beyond your comprehension, your apprehension, how that good can come out of what seems an unmitigated evil, but when you are worshipping Him this has gone and you admire, you admire wisdom and omnipotence. "I will strengthen thee" for this.

This is, as far as I understand it, a great part of vital religion, of God pleasing religion. Fruitfulness from Christ, fruitfulness in your heart of love, of faith, and God must strengthen or it will never be carried on.

And in the next place look at His kind promise further "Yea I will help thee". And here we may take up another line briefly. I will help thee to bear the cross. I will help thee to live in the narrow way and walk. I will help thee to overcome difficulties, to resist sin. I will help thee cheerfully to take up that cross I give thee and carry it, and we need this help. Take our inveterate enemy first of all, indwelling sin. He who understands even a little of what indwelling sin is, understands what a life of trouble is sin that dwells in us. The old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, that opposes every motion of faith, that laughs at all things divine, that scorns humility before God, self-abnegation. Sin that says in the heart "there is no God". This awful sin we all have; it brings us into captivity; it brings us painfully to understand Paul's conflict "When I would do good evil is present with me. The good that I would I do not and the evil that I would not that I do. O wretched man that I am". This sin. I will help thee says the Lord. Thou art disposed to idolatry; I will help thee then to worship Me, to resist idolatry. Thou art disposed to self-dependence; I will help thee to resist it. Thou art disposed to rebellion; I will help thee to submit. Thou art disposed to go thine own way; I will help thee to walk the narrow way. We need God, we greatly need God. Try to take a step by yourself, and who has not done that many times, and failure comes, and shame follows. But when, in this business, you go before God and confess to Him your absolute inability to resist sin, then you find promise of help acceptable to you. I will help you to resist sin. The Apostle got the help very sweetly and this was the form it took in his soul, namely a triumph of faith. "I thank God". Having asked the question who should deliver him from the body of sin and death that was so bitter, so burdensome, he said "I thank God through Jesus Christ." He had a prospect; He could endure the reproach of Christ, struggle against sin and bear all the ridicule and censures that sin in his heart would pour on the Lord Jesus, all the blasphemies of his wicked nature. I will strengthen thee to resist sin. He who lives in sin, who finds pleasure in sin, knows nothing about God. He who lives in himself knows nothing about God. But he who, finding God about him and teaching and

helping and guiding him, finds also a resistance to every step toward heaven, then he needs help to resist that resistance, to resist the devil, resist the devil of indwelling sin. I will help thee in this. I will help thee to take up the cross and follow Me. The cross is not the same to every child of God. God knows what will be a cross to you. It is something that will gall you, chaff you, make you feel weak, stir up rebellion sometimes. It is something that perhaps few or none at all can see. It is in your conscience, your spirit, God has laid something on you. It may be a public cross that everybody can see and that is exceedingly bitter as some of us know. But the cross is that which mortifies the flesh, that which tells us we have no rest here, which says this is not to be your life, this is not to be the way you are to walk. You are to walk with Me in affliction. The cross is a bitter thing to flesh and blood, and say you, I wont bear it. The elder son, he was the self-righteous one. The younger son was the one who was brought at last to a right place. Now you may say to God, I wont do this. I have said it to Him but He can give you grace to ask Him to permit you to do it. There may steal into your heart that perhaps He wont let you do it after all your rebellion, then you will run to Him and say do give me grace to do it. I will help thee to take up the cross willingly, to follow after the Lord. Dear friends, this makes the way to heaven easy, while to flesh and blood it is exceedingly difficult and painful. This brings sinners to glory in their infirmities, as did the Apostle Paul. Sufficient grace is given; sufficient grace comes into the soul enabling it to say "Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmity" What for? "That the power of Christ may rest upon me."

I will strengthen thee, I will help thee. I will help thee to run the race that is set before thee. We have a race to run. All run in a race, one only has the crown. There is set before the saints an end, an end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls. This is set before them, a deliverance from sin, an absolute justification, a perfect sanctification, a deliverance from the body of sin and death, a blessed heaven. This is set before us. God sets it before every child of His. This is the

mark of the prize of our high calling. This is that the Apostle had before him when he said that he laboured, that he was enabled to strive, if by any means he might attain to the resurrection of the dead. This is that that is before the Lord's people, a good finish, a victory to be given, a crown to be won, yet freely given out of love and mercy. The end is approaching us. To some of us it may be an awful thought. It is, according to Job. "Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Some of you, alas for you, if you come to the end as you are now, will prove that word to be true "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness" but does not want to go. He knows nothing better than this world, sees nothing better than this dark world. With the saint it is different, blessedly different. There is something before him better than this life. The Holy Spirit sets it before him, a glorious state, an absence of sin from his being, the presence of his soul with God. "Absent from the body present with the Lord." This is the end. I will help thee to pursue though thou art faint. I will help thee though thou art ready to give up sometimes. I will help thee to make a fresh start though thou faintest. I will strengthen thee with that precious bread that strengthens man's heart, and I will help thee with that wine that cheers the heart of God and man. I will give thee fresh views of my mercy, of my love, of my goodness, and thou shall thereby receive such energy as to get on the way, feeling, this is the way the prophets went, this is the path of tribulation and the end of it is heaven. One of our old friends who has been dead many years now, good old Mr Evans, who lived in Buckingham Road, often said to me when he was over 80 years old - This hill I covet to ascend, its difficulties do not me offend. And then he would pause and say to me, why? and answer his own question, because my home is at the top and then he would speak of his hopes of heaven. This is the case with the Lord's people. There is a hill to climb. The house of the Lord is built on the top of the mountains above the world. There are difficulties, there are hills. Oh but sometimes God's people, through faith, can say the difficulties do not offend them. The way seems long, and they are often wearied in it, though not weary of it. The end is before them. They receive it by faith. "I will never leave thee." I, the Lord, will come again and receive you unto

Myself that where I am there ye may be also. You wont manage this by yourselves. You must have divine help for this. I will help thee. I will help thee to run with patience the race that is set before thee. Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness. These things may seem to be the same but there is no tautology in the text. I will uphold thee in thy good estate. Thou shall never fail. "He will keep the feet of His saints and none of their steps shall slide." God's people are put into a good state. He changes their condition, their state. Children of wrath are made children of the Most High God. Servants of sin and of Satan are made servants of the living God. Men who run away from God and turn their backs on Him now have their faces turned to Him and they want to know Him and the power of His resurrection. He puts them into a good state in Christ and it is not a little noticeable that in the Epistles the Holy Ghost says again and again to the Church which is in God, which is in Christ, and Christ Himself says "I am the vine, ye are the branches". There is union and this union expresses a state, not only an experience. That comes too, but it first of all expresses a state. A living vine sustains every branch in it. The state of the branch is just that, that it has union with the vine, hence its fruitfulness, let me say in passing. Now I will uphold thee in this. Has God put us into this new, blessed, state? A new creation it is called. Enemies say we will go and take these cities though the Lord is there. Says the Lord I will uphold thee and thou shalt not be moved. "The righteous shall hold on his way and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." This promise then takes in the great truth of final perseverance. "Who is he that shall harm you if ye be followers of that which is good". Who shall turn you out of the way if I uphold you? "Who", as the Apostle asks "shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect. It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God." So this upholding as received by faith, as spoken home again and again, will bring you to say, each for yourself - Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or persecution or famine or the sword or nakedness? No! Why? What shall overcome all those enemies? I am persuaded, says the

Apostle, I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor tribulation, nor anguish, nor sword nor peril nor devil, nor enemy of any sort or kind shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

"I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." Take this to be the righteous dealing of God with a sinner in the Covenant of Grace, and there you have a necessity, if I may so speak, for how can God put away that one whom He has loved, for whom He gave His Son to die and who has been quickened into eternal life by the Holy Spirit? I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness. What will the effect of all this mercy be as we receive it into our hearts? It will be quickening and sanctifying and humbling. It will produce sweet confidence with awe and fear of sinning and displeasing God. It will, in a word, lead to righteousness. As Christ prays, so it will be. "Sanctify them through Thy truth. Thy word is truth". It may be today, as of old, that we are slanderously reported that we say "Let us do evil that good may come" We say this, and God is our witness, that if we could live as we would we should live without sin. We should live to the praise and glory of God. We should be good neighbours. We should be the best masters and the best servants. We should excel in those things which God, in the precepts of His Holy Word, has given us to obey. So may the Lord bring all this goodness, this promised mercy and help and strength to us that we may be for His praise and glory.

AMEN.