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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
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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"

In commencing to speak to you I feel disposed to make one or two personal remarks. This is a day much to be remembered by myself. 40 years ago today I stood for the first time in this pulpit. How I came, a total stranger, from Liverpool to Brighton, I well remember, distressed exceedingly with respect to my call to preach. On the Lord's Day morning I arose after a sleepless night and was distracted, troubled, and walking in a room by myself, I noticed as the clock struck 10; I said to myself, one hour more and the people expect me in the pulpit. I said, out of a desparate state of mind - "Lord I cannot go like this and I will not". Instantly, as it seemed to me He said "I will help thee", and the power was such as to make me say - "Lord I believe it." And He drew near and held fellowship with me, and I very soon found myself longing to be in the pulpit. If I am rightly settled here, and I came the next year and shall have soon lived 39 years amongst you, I was settled that morning, and we may say I trust that we have had some good things, some good times, some mercies, some gracious appearances of God to us. There has been some efficacy in the word although I have had the pain of burying nearly every member of the church. There are I think three or four members of the church to which I came living, only that number. Still God has replenished us, and we have been held on thus far. Thinking as one almost must do at the recurrence of the day, one could only feel that there was just this one word on the mind. The whole verse is beautiful, full of encouragement to those who are weakened and are in dismay by many sights and fears from sights that they have and see.

By the Lord's help I would just bring before you some of the

matters which appear to me to call for our attention and are very encouraging to those to whom they may be applicable. Now I shall leave the personal part. It is never easy for me to speak of myself. I would rather, by the help of God, speak of others and other things. This chapter affords us instruction and encouragement in circumstances of trouble, in circumstances that are calculated to weaken, to dismay. The Lord calls upon the world, the nations of the earth, to keep silence before Him, for He is going to draw attention to what He had done in days past; to His call of Abraham. He appears to be the one particularly intended. "Who raised up the righteous man from the East, called him to His foot, made him a worshipper of God, called him from an idolatrous nation and family and called him to His foot, to be a worshipper of the true God. Who did it? The Lord did it, and gave the nations before him and made him ruler over kings. He gave them as the dust to his sword and as driven stubble to his bow. With 318 men Abram, before God changed his name to Abraham, went forth to fight against four victorious kings, and he overcame them and they were as stubble, as dust to his sword and as driven stubble to his bow. He pursued them and passed safely even by the way that he had not gone with his feet and brought back Lot and his possessions which had been carried away by these victorious kings and the Lord draws attention to these to encourage his poor people, and we need encouragement sometimes. You have many difficulties, you have sins, hosts of evils in your nature, hosts of enemies you have confronting you - the gates of hell. You may feel like Israel on one remarkable occasion when Israel pitched, like two little flocks of kids, while their enemies, the Syrians, the whole host of Syrians filled the country. These Syrians had, a year before, been defeated by Israel. Now said the Lord - the Syrians say that I am the God of the hills and not the God of the valleys, so they have come into the valley, the plain of Aphek. They have come there in order to show that I cannot defend and protect and deliver you and overthrow them. So Israel smote the Syrians and they fled discomfited, vanquished. You may be like Israel, two little flocks of kids, before an host of strong enemies and what can you do. Look at the difficulties that come in the way, temptations, sins of various sorts and O how dismayed you feel with regard to

these, how ready to give up. Says the Lord "Who raised Abram, who gave Abram victory, who gave enemies as the dust to his sword and as driven stubble to his bow? Yea, who led Gideon against the hosts of the Midianites, and with 300 men, each having a pitcher and a lamp in the pitcher and no sword, overcame the hosts of the Midianites? Who did all that? God sometimes sees His children so weak and feeble and dismayed as to pity them, as we read, - When He saw that their strength was gone, that there was none shut up nor any left nor any helper, then He pitied them and remembered His holy promise and brought them forth. Sometimes His poor people get so low in their souls, so weak in faith, so ready to halt, so ready to say - now there is no hope for us, and God comes forth in His grace, in His mercy and speaks to them as here. He says - Thou art My servant. Israel, thou art My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, My friend. God is so condescending in His speech to His children. They, being overcome by their enemies, indwelling sins, can scarcely think that God can speak kindly to them, yet He comes and says - Thou art My friend. It was not at a time when Israel was remarkably obedient. O, sin marred that nation from the day God brought them out of Egypt to the day they entered the land of promise and except on a few occasions, when God raised them up a righteous and a mighty king, Israel was remarkable for sinning, remarkable for disobedience, turning away from Him who had done so great things for them. And yet, this blessed God says - "Thou art the seed of My friend Abraham". I have taken you from the ends of the earth; I have called you from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, "Thou art My servant, I have chosen thee and not cast thee away."

Look at the love of this, the great love of God to his poor, sinning, erring people. He calls these people virgin. O virgin daughter. Defiled, exceedingly defiled though they were, He says "O virgin daughter, turn unto Me." So here He speaks encouragingly "Fear thou not". There are many things that are feared by the Lord's people. As I have named - indwelling sin. A mighty multitude of evils, evil thoughts, self-will, self-righteousness. Many things that you name not to your nearest and dearest. Thoughts, as Hart says, you can neither quell nor rout.

These are within. Bless God, they are not allowed to break out. It is a great mercy only God's eye and our own see things that are within. O what a world would the world be, nay what a place would this chapel be, if our hearts were all exposed and each could see, not his own only, but the others O who could bear the sight? What howling devils we should all be if our hearts were exposed to each others gaze. It is enough that we see and that God knows. Many things, blessed be His Name, never come to light. Blessed be His Name, He quells, He keeps down, keeps out of sight what we have in our hearts, but we know them. I know mine in a measure and the persistence of thought, the persistence of unbelief, the persistence of self will, the persistence of those lusts, those constitutional sins of ours, is such as that we are dismayed. The very persistence of them dismays us. We have the gates of hell, the craft of the devil, the wisdom of the serpent, the power of the god of this world we have against us. We have some circumstances it may be which are very opposed to our progress in the way to heaven; things which come, against which we have no power, which appear to be against us, which instead of helping, only seem to prevent and retard; things which bring out the worst of human nature in our thoughts at least - irritation, rebellion, mortification. By various things we see, we fail. The fear of death, it holds us in bondage often. Some are held in bondage to the fear of death all their life time. Unanswered prayers. Prayers that you have put up may be for years, again and again, still unanswered, and God apparently disregarding them. These things, to name no more, are very discouraging and give rise to many fears, and there is an eye that looks on a God that takes notice, a good God that takes notice. You perhaps, blessed with the fear of God, look principally at your sins and say - How can I expect the Lord to help me, seeing I am what I am. How can I think that He will regard me favourably, seeing that I disobey Him so constantly. He looks at other things - not passing this by, no, He chastens for them - but He looks at other things. What other things? His covenant. Calls His own covenant to His thoughts and owns them for his children. He remembers His holy promise. He remembers them in other circumstances. Yes, He remembers them in other circumstances than those circumstances that occasion their fears.

He says, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thy espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness in a land that was not sown." He remembers you when you gave up everything for Him, when your heart was warm to Him, when your affections were set on Him, when you valued nothing but Himself, when the world was like straw and emptiness to you and God everything. The beauty of His grace, the richness of His grace, the greatness of His love, the sweetness of His mercy overcame, attracted and drew you and you went after Him, willing to give up everything, willing to go where there was nothing, like Israel went into a barren land, a wilderness; no food, could not grow, no, could not go to buy, no, but were just dependent. And they were willing to be that for the moment; and God remembers those things. So, speaking to those fearing ones, He says, "Fear thou not". Be not afraid of these wants, these enemies, these sins, these things that trouble you. O but why should not I be afraid of them, one says? Why, because the Lord says "Be not afraid of them". He will have the sole and undivided confidence of His children. He will call upon them to look to Him and trust Him when there is nothing appearing beside Himself. He will be sufficient for them and make Himself known to be sufficient. Did you ever trust Him in death? Did you ever trust Him in circumstances of emptiness? Did you ever trust Him in a time of weakness? Did you ever cast yourself on Him when all around you was empty, was weakness, and darkness and confusion? He says "Fear thou not". What if the world is against you? I am greater than the world. What if there appear no source of supply? I am all. I am all. To Abraham He said "Fear not, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward". I say again to you, God will have the undivided confidence of His people. If you could say - Well now here is something tangible and I can lean on it with confidence in measure and then say I can lean on the Lord, well now your confidence is divided. But if it come to that - Lord I have none to go to, none to look to, no supply at all that I can depend on; alone must I look to Thee, and I do as far as I know myself, look to Thee now, well that will do my friends. That God will never forsake you. He who gets your undivided trust and confidence will never forsake you. Be not dismayed, I am with thee. "Fear not, for I am with thee".

I should like, for a few moments, to give to you a few evidences as I may be enabled out of the scripture of the presence of God with a person, with people. I do not like generalities. I believe, with Bunyan, we may be lost in generalities. We want something definite, something particular, something personal. Now if God is with a person, the fear of His great Name will be in the heart of that person. There will be a fear of God, a reverence of His majesty, a fear of displeasing Him and walking contrary to Him. You will want to walk before Him in faith, in prayer, in hope, in humble trust. You will be enabled to commit yourself to Him with all that troubles you, all that concerns you, all your necessities. "Cast thy burden on the Lord". And if He is with you, you will wish to fear Him as to desire to do it. The fear of His Name will be with you. You will find the spirit of prayer in your heart betimes. It is a great and blessed evidence of the presence of God with a person, when that person can pray. Not when that person kneels down regularly perhaps at certain times, and yet though conforming to that way of worship, has no heart to pray, that is no evidence of God's presence. But if there is a spirit of prayer. If, whether you can kneel or not, if in the day and in the night you find your heart ejaculating its petitions in sighs unspoken, groans unuttered, going to God, kneeling in your heart and soul before Him, even when working with your hands, that is a very sweet sign of God's presence. "I" says He "will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication, and they shall look upon Me." I will come within their vision; I will come within the range of their sight; they shall see Me whom they have pierced. O it is a great thing to have the spirit of prayer. You mark this in your own cases, my friends. See how the matter goes with you as between God and your souls. If you are sending messages to Him, prompted, taught, enabled, encouraged to do so by the Holy Spirit, depend on it, some word becoming to you is on its way. An answer must come, long though it be; an answer must come. Another evidence of the presence of God with a person is this, that the scriptures will be attractive. Naturally we get hold by some things; some book attracts and holds your attention; some

business catches your mind; some friend engages your thoughts. If God is with you, His word will be with you. Now and again you will find a peculiar attraction in your heart to the scriptures; you will find yourself drawn to read them, read them with more than usual attention, read them with prayer, following Hart's advice "Join prayer with each inspection". And when that is the case you are not lacking some instruction. Scriptures speak to you, they tell you of God, draw you to Him, to His mercy, to the cross of Christ, to the atonement. They set heaven before you, as that reward to which you look and by which you are enabled to esteem the reproaches of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, having respect unto the recompense of the reward. If God is with you, you will get such manifestations of Jesus Christ at times as that, though you may not say - I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" you will say this, if I could but reach Him, if He would but come into my soul, I should lack nothing. My heart would have all its wishes, answers to its prayers. I should be rich indeed. Christ does visit sinners; He draws them; His grace draws them. "And I" says He "if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." Do you feel attracted to Christ? Is your heart moved to Him, to His Person, to His work, to His mediation, to His blessed death, to His glorious life, to His power, to His fulness of grace? Well, if so, He is not far away. He draws whom He loves, for whom He died. If God is with you, you will find that the very troubles that have dismayed you, and the sins which have weakened you, and the fears that have brought you very low, will be the occasions and reasons for your praying and seeking God. Yes, the adverse wind that has blown in your face is put behind your back as it were to help you to the Lord. Like the wind in the sails of the windmill, it drives them round. It works the mill. And so, trouble is made useful, made an occasion and means and reason for your calling on the name of the Lord, because He is with you. When He is against a person it is quite different. Trouble frets. When Ahab, having disobeyed the Lord and let Benhadad go, though he should have destroyed him, and the prophet told Ahab what he had done, and what the effect would be, we read - he went to his house displeased, and when God is against a person, troubles displease him and discourage him and there is no prayer,

no calling on God. Further sins take place, as in Ahab's case. Then he began to sin the more and coveted the vineyard and so on. Well if you have the Lord with you, these evidences I have named will not be lacking altogether in your experience. And do notice them; see if you understand what it is to have the things I have named. I might go further. I might speak of a revelation of Christ being given, of the application of His atonement and of the communion, but I leave these things.

"I am with thee" says the Lord. "I am with thee". Now when the Lord speaks of being with a person there is a great deal in it. You may be with a person and do him no good. You may walk with a person and talk with a person and you may part. There is no effect. When God says "I am with thee" there is something particular and sooner or later it comes to this - "I am in you". Nay, He is in the person always, only sometimes He is felt and perceived to be within. And, as John says, so it is "Greater is He that is in you than all that are against you". What a host does a child of God carry about with him when he carries all his treasures, all his good things, by faith. All his treasures he bears with him. He has his God. The Trinity is in a child of God. The Father said to His children, "I will receive you. I will walk in you. You shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. The Lord Jesus is in His people the hope of glory. This is the mystery that has been hid from ages and from generations, but which now is made manifest to his saints which is Christ in you the hope of glory. And the Holy Ghost is in the saints. "What, know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Holy Ghost dwelleth in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own". O my brethren, what sacred people the Lord's people are, being made a temple of God. And if the Lord is with you, then who can overcome you. And the point is a point of encouragement. "Fear not I am with thee". Therefore, though the devil may come, he wont hurt you really. Though the wicked rise, they shall only be as a dog round about the city, barking, never coming in. Though pestilence should walk about, and though arrows of death should fly, none shall enter thy dwelling. "I am with thee".

"Be not dismayed". To be dismayed is to be weakened, greatly weakened and to be weakened is to realise that you have before you, about you, enemies and difficulties, with whom you cannot cope. It is to have your eyes set on self in its weakness, on trouble in its strength, on enemies in their rage. To be dismayed is to have your eye off God, off His power, and His promise and His goodness and His fulness. Like as Israel in the wilderness. They set their eyes on a barren land; they looked on bitter waters and they murmured. They forgot God; they looked at a barren land. Here we are; here is a wilderness, a barren land, arid. Here are some waters but they are so bitter we cannot drink them. And that is all they looked at. Do you know what that means? If you do, you know what it is to be dismayed, weakened. Says the Lord, "Be not dismayed". And He gives a reason, He gives a great reason. He does not say, well, I will multiply your flocks; I will turn these bitter waters into sweetness. He does not say - you shall do this and possess that. But He draws the attention and the heart to Himself. He says "Be not dismayed for I am thy God". He will have that to be sufficient. I have said it before, let me repeat - God will have the undivided confidence of His people. He will make it enough for them. "I am thy God" It was enough for three noble confessors once they returned to stand against the whole strength of Babylon, in resisting the commandment of the king to worship the image he had set up. Oh but they had enough in their God. They braved all, they ventured all, they found God sufficient. "I am thy God"; thy God in an empty land; thy God in trouble; thy God in the midst of thy sinfulness; thy God to help thee; thy God to fight thy battles; thy God to compass thee about with favour as with a shield. My friends, it is quite enough if God is for us. "If God be for us" asks the Spirit through Paul, "who can be against us". He did not mean that nobody would speak a word against, that no difficulties would arise, no enemies confront us, no wants and no troubles distress us. Nothing of the kind. What he meant is this, and He means it still. If I am for you, who can effectually hurt you. "On this Rock" said Christ, concerning Himself, whom Peter had confessed "On this Rock will I build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it". They shall plot; I will defend you.

They shall fight; I will fight your battles. "I am thy God". If the Lord only enables you to make this out by faith in Himself; if the Lord enables you to seek the witness of His Spirit, and bears witness with your spirit that you are His, then you will have enough. Toplady well expresses it when He says

I am rich to all the intents of bliss
If Thou O God art mine

You want nothing else really. Good Bunyan says "I want little here below, and that little not for long". And if you have God you won't lack the little. "He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things."

"I am thy God" I am thy covenant God. There is a covenant of grace. Yes, ordered in all things and sure; it is a covenant that will never be broken by Him who made it. You have not made it. The Trinity made it and He will never break it. "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put My laws into their mind and will write them in their heart, and will be to them a God and they shall be to Me a people, and they shall no more teach every man his neighbour and his brother saying know the Lord, for all shall know Me from the least to the greatest of them, saith the Lord, for I will forgive their sins and remember their iniquities no more for ever", and that is the covenant. And let me just draw your attention to the kind of people who are in it as set forth by the sheet let down in a vision to Peter, a Jew who had never defiled himself by eating anything common or unclean. And when he was told in the vision to arise, kill and eat, in that sheet which he had seen containing all manner of four footed beasts and creeping things and fowls of the air, you know what he said - Nothing common or unclean has entered my mouth. But, says the Lord, "What God has cleansed that call not thou common," which means that sinners, Gentile sinners, are in that covenant. Ah it is a great thing to be in this covenant, a great thing. Some people God will cast out of His lap. May we not be of that number.

Some people God will cast out of His lap, as a stone is slung out of a sling. His enemies; O may we not be of that number. And some people are afraid that they are not in His covenant and to these He comes and speaks kindly and graciously "I am thy God" I am thy promising God. I have promised thee and I will fulfil My promise - "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" Ah, if the Lord has promised you anything He will give it you. If He has promised to teach you as the covenant runs, He will teach you. But then His teaching will trouble you, for He will teach you your sinfulness. Then His teaching will comfort you for He will teach you His love and His mercy. If He is your covenant God He will be about you with favour, compassing you. "Thou wilt compass the righteous with favour as with a shield." If He is your God He will be a fortifying God for you and you will say in time with Joshua as he protested to Israel - You know, He said, in your heart and in your soul that not one word of His good promise hath failed. You will say the same; one day every child of God will say with respect to God's dealings with him, and His words to him, not one single word He hath said to me has fallen to the ground.

"I am thy God". And if He is a performing God, the next and last word He will say this morning is this "I will be your glorifying God." Whom He called, them He justified and whom He justified He also glorified. This is what awaits God's people. Glory. This is that that shall be done for them all before God. "Fear thou not for I am with thee; be not dismayed for I am thy God" and that is enough when it is made over to any person by the Holy Spirit. If God be for us who can be against us.

AMEN,