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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 20 July 1932

Luke 18 verses 1-8

"And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men
ought always to pray and not to faint
..... to verse 8"

This instructive and solemn and encouraging parable was addressed by Christ to His disciples and if it please the Lord Jesus to make good what, in another case, He said, it will be a mercy to us - "The flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak they are spirit and they are life". This is one of the sweetest secrets of the Most High God in the hearts of His people, that while myriads read the letter of the scripture and gain nothing by the reading, the saints of God get here and there some healing, humbling, strengthening, rebuking, weakening and eventually comforting power from their reading of the Holy Scripture. What I propose, the Lord help me this evening, is just to speak about the first verse. The parable has an end, that is a teaching, a lesson, something to instruct us and to encourage us and to preserve us from fainting in the solemn and blessed work of prayer.

He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint. The latter characterises some of us; the former is the occasional mercy given to some of us. Why should we pray always? - the first question. The answer is that the Master commands it. A great truth this; He loves to hear the voice of His Church. "O My dove that art in the secret places of the stairs; let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is comely." One would be disposed to say that the groans of the Lord's people, their wordless prayers, their heavy sighs are the sweetest music in the ears of the Lord Jesus who here says - you must pray, and pray always. "I have given Him" says His Eternal Father, "for a leader and commander to the people", and this

divine word "Men ought always to pray" is one of those blessed commandments with which the Scripture abounds. "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it". "I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, open thy mouth wide", which is, bring many large petitions. Bring your bad cases, your weak cases, your failures, your falls, your backslidings, your temptations, your yielding to your temptations, your tempers, your malice, your bitterness, your hatred, your hypocrisies, shameful things. I know what I am saying; I am no stranger to this. And to whom shall we go with these things if we cannot, if we may not, if we do not, call upon the name of the Lord. Do not some of you say sometimes, "Lord what shall we do; what will become of us; how can we walk; how can we behave ourselves; how can we bear this trial; how bear this temptation, if we do not get help from Thyself". You understand what I mean. Therefore this holy commandment of the Lord Jesus is much to be observed. Pray always and faint not. In the face of your indisposition, a wicked spirit, in the face of your shameful sins, in the face of a legal spirit, in the face of sense and reason - pray, if thou canst or canst not speak, but pray with faith in Jesus' Name. No easy thing is it to pray; no easy thing is it to cast your burden on the Lord. A proud spirit, an independent spirit, a spirit that would go anywhere, to anybody, to any supply, rather than to the Lord and His goodness and fulness, this wicked spirit will always resist you when you attempt to seek the Lord. This gracious word is the authority dear friends. A thousand saints might say to a tempted soul, you should pray, but he would say you cannot give me authority to do it. And where is the authority? The Holy Spirit will say Christ's word is the authority. He does not say to the seed of Jacob, seek ye Me in vain. "Ho" He says, "everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come buy wine and milk without money and without price." "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me." If your heart be hard "try", says Thomas Hardy, "what hard hearted prayers will do." Pray, if thou canst or canst not speak. We need authority to venture and the authority is divine. "Come boldly", a most difficult word to a tried soul, to

one who is full of sin; who often, it may be in the night season regards himself as a greater sinner than all other sinners in the world, yet it comes - "Come boldly". Abraham staggered not through unbelief and counted death to be nothing when God said to him "Look at the heavens and see and count, if you can, the stars" and he believed God. And Christ said "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to this sycamine tree, be thou rooted up and planted in the sea, and it shall be done". This is the ground, this is the authority to a poor wretch, deserving hell, knowing that he deserves it, feeling that he deserves it. His gracious Lord says "Pray". Well, may this be a real encouragement to those who here may be feeling often discouraged.

The second reason I would name to you is the divine example of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. In the days of His flesh He offered strong crying and tears and was heard in that He feared; cried unto Him that was able to save Him. O what legions of devils stood in His way; what reproaches broke His guiltless heart; what a burden He carried all the days of His life on earth till the last moment of it. And yet, it is written of Him, "I have set My face as a flint; I know that I shall not be confounded. He is near that justifieth Me; who is He that condemneth Me". And He pleaded the promises of His Father given to Him; He had the Spirit given to Him and this is an example for us to follow in His steps. He not only redeemed His people, but He left them an example that they should follow His steps. What an example. He never failed, never faltered, never discontinued. The Mighty God, yet the servant of His Father, prayed, as you know in the Gospel it is written, how continually He turned to God in prayer. May we be enabled to follow His footsteps. It is very difficult for me to say this to you, seeing that I so little know what prayer is. There is the Scripture; whoever is short, there is the example. "Call upon Me". I pray; pray you. And after this manner pray ye "Our Father which art in heaven". If the multitudes of professors would cease crying to God as their heavenly Father without any inward teaching and warrant and witness, it would be a blessing.

The people who wish to do it are afraid of doing it often, but sometimes it wells up suddenly and it goes out even to the surprise of the poor sinner "Hallowed be Thy Name" You can never utter fully, adequately, the reverence and the awe of the Lord God that is in your heart. You feel, every saint more or less distinctly feels, the great majesty of God and the intimate relationship that is expressed in the word Father. If David said to his friends "It is no light thing to be a son in law of the king" what do the saints feel at times - no light thing to be the children of the Most High God; no light thing to have that intimate relationship that is to continue for ever. Yet here says the Lord Jesus in the eleventh chapter of this Gospel which I read - "After this manner pray ye, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come" Jesus spoke to His Father and He sent a message to his doubting disciples "Say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father; to My God and your God". Now, trembling believer, do not hurry. If you are afraid, do not hurry, but God help you diligently to seek that blessing, the spirit of adoption, the witness of the Spirit whereby you will, of the most sweet, humbling necessity, cry "Abba Father".

The third reason I would bring before you is this, the supply, the source of supply, grace abounding over sin; love slaying enmity; blood cleansing the conscience, purging it from dead works to serve the living God, and the Holy Ghost given in answer to prayer. O what a source of supply. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven, give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him." If some of you said to me, that some days your single petition is for the Holy Spirit to be given to you, I should not be surprised. What an inestimable gift, that divine Person, the third Person in the Trinity, given to dwell in a saint; to make a sinner His temple and to teach him how to pray according to the will of God; that, though he may sometimes say his praying is like the chattering of some poor creature and he makes a noise, yet in his heart his groans are according to the will of God. God worketh all things after the counsel of His own

will. O brethren, God give you and give me more earnestness in praying for the coming and the indwelling and the teaching and the sealing of the Holy Ghost. We are right when we are under His influence; we are humble when He brings us to our knees and to the throne of grace; we are broken when He leads us to see the broken-hearted Saviour and to behold by faith the infinite load of guilt imputed to Him, and the vicarious death which He died when He said "It is finished" and dismissed His spirit. What a gift is the gift of the Spirit. If you live in the Spirit you wont fulfil the lusts of the flesh. If you live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit; and you know, in the Romans, the great stress that the Apostle Paul was inspired to lay on walking after the Spirit and minding the things of the Spirit, and being spiritually minded. And these things intimate that the people of God under the guidance of the Spirit, mind His things, care for the Scriptures, care for the honour of God, care for their souls, mind the blessed things of Christ, His Person, and His work; His mediation, His power, His grace, His glory. This is the source, and if one had wisdom and grace and strength to enter much into the expansion of this, it would be perhaps profitable. It runs into justification which every guilty conscience, under the teaching of the conviction of the Spirit, desires. It runs into sanctification, which every new-born person longs for. It runs into the High Priestly office and work of the Lord Jesus, especially at times when you are led to see that He suffered, being tempted, and is able to succour them that are tempted. You think of it; He is in heaven, but He remembers the wounds which He received and the death which He died, and He sends the succour of that acquired sympathy that He has. I use the word "acquired" advisedly, as I understand that passage in the Hebrews - "In that He Himself suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted", and dear Hart has a word to the same effect

That human heart He still retains
Though throned in highest bliss,
And feels each tempted member's pains,
For our affliction's His.

The Lord lead us into this. If we are led into this it will give another colour and meaning to temptation, and it will give another grasp, through the Holy Ghost, of the position of the Lord Jesus in heaven, who has that touch of sympathy within Himself that His tempted members need. Pray for this; this is the supply.

Now I must touch on another point related to this, namely, our needs. They are many, they are great, they are constant, they are persistent. O what need sinners have who are taught of God. They need supplies of grace in their afflictions. We are much more anxious naturally to have affliction removed than we are to have grace to bear it. Doubtless this was Paul's state of mind with respect to the thorn in the flesh, for thrice he besought the Lord to remove it from him. But he got an answer which made the affliction acceptable, made his weakness, his glory because therein the strength of Christ was perfected. You may be in a hurry to get out of trouble, but if God means good to you by your trouble, you will thank Him for the trouble one day. You will say, He gave me grace to submit to it; He enabled me to take up the cross and follow Him; He gave me grace to say to Him in sincerity - Thy will be done in my heart even as it is done in heaven. He gave me grace to see His glory in afflicting me, that it was a tribulum (threshing sledge) to separate the chaff from the wheat; the crucible to remove the dross from the gold; the discipline to make me a disciple in the steps of the Master and to give me an understanding in that Scripture - "It is enough that the servant be as His Master". I was tempted, you must be; I was afflicted, you must be. God showed me the path of life in and through the affliction, and I saw the pleasures at His right hand, and that is how you, in more or less a distinct measure, will find your way to heaven, and by faith you will get glimpses of the path of life and feel hope in the way God has ordained for you.

Our need is grace; Paul's need was grace; and when that piercing thorn was to continue with him, then said the Lord Jesus to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee" and that brought a

mighty change in his heart. "Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmity. I am glad that the strength of Christ is perfected in my weakness". Dear friends, the Lord give grace to you, to me, to come to that; to say of affliction, the will of the Lord be done and to find by the teaching and grace of the Spirit, that the strength of Christ is perfected, revealed, made known in operation in our weakness.

Trust in Him, and by thy weakness
Thou shalt prove that Christ is strong

Our need of grace is again to subdue our iniquities. Unregenerate people do not know that. They have got a will; they can do as they like; they can attend a place of worship or not, just as they choose; read the Bible or not, believe it or not, just as they choose. Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, have lust, pride, vanity, covetousness which is idolatry, hardness of heart, forgetfulness of God, unthankfulness, unholiness, opposition to everything that is good and how shall they reach heaven after which they are running. My grace, that is enough. "Sin shall not have dominion over you for ye are not under the law but under grace."

And the devil; God shall bruise him under your feet shortly. That is His word and grace to believe it will make you sometimes say, I shall get through; I shall be a victor.

Christ, who conquered for me once
Will in me conquer too

Is this praying without difficulty? No. Faint not, said the Lord; give not up. Why? What is there to make us faint? Plenty of things. One is God's delay to answer. He may keep you waiting for years and exercise your heart; waiting for some mercy, some particular blessing; either in your own soul or in your family or in the business, and O, your difficulties. What is the use of praying for this again and again and again? Opposition, great opposition. "Hold fast the profession of your

faith" says the Spirit by Paul "without wavering". Is that easy? No. There is nothing in the way of life that is not opposed by the flesh. Therefore, says Christ, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint", not to give in. The Lord Jesus, by Paul, said of chastisement - "My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him, for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth", and yet He alone knows the readiness there is in us to faint and to give up. What should I wait for the Lord any longer? God give us prayer. Some may have a child or children for whom the spirit of prayer has been given, yet no answers come; yea, more worldliness may be seen in them; they get further away apparently, and O the difficulty in continuing in prayer. You may have some spiritual attainment before you, that you may be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, little thinking at times that the way to an answer is a growing in weakness, in inability, a sense of your lacking everything that you desire to be filled with. Not faint; do not give it up.

Yield not then to unbelief
Courage soul there yet is room

And this blessed Lord Jesus did not say "and faint not" without reason. He knows His own resources which are infinite and therefore you can never draw too much nor ask too much, nor wait too long for the blessing that you are led to pray for. May the Lord help us.

AMEN.