

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Friday evening 24 September 1920

LUKE 22 v 32 and 33

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan
hath desired to have you that he may
sift you as wheat, but I have prayed
for thee that they faith fail not, and
when thou art converted strengthen
thy brethren"

The personality of the devil, though denied by many, is painfully known by all God's people, and it is not always that the sovereign permission of God in the temptations of the devil is recognised or felt. It has been, since the devil was permitted to enter Eden undefiled and defile the mind of Eve and, through her, of Adam, the business of that fallen foul angel to seek to destroy, to devour, ruin people. Dust is the serpent's meat and his spite always manifested in the world in some shape is particularly bent against the saints of the Most High. They are to feel painfully his power. Others are under it, and know it not; they feel it. Poor weak creatures, like worm Jacob, unable to stand for a minute alone, have the god of this world and the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, working against them, now craftily and unperceived, then violently coming in assaults against them, like terrific storms threatening to blow them away and carry them into destruction. I know not, of course, whether any of you are at this particular time tempted of the devil. If you are not then I may perhaps be only speaking in vain but if any of you are tempted by the devil then perhaps the Lord may have been seen to have directed one's mind to this important and blessed passage. And if we are tempted, but have an interest in this, we shall come off well, though we may suffer a painful and a shameful defeat, the scars of which will never never leave us while we are here.

There had been a dispute among the disciples as to which of them should be the greatest and Christ mercifully rebuked that spirit that

was in them and told them a humbling truth here, that Satan desired to have them, for the word "you" being in the plural takes them all in, though addressed so particularly to Peter because he was so forward in professing his loyalty and protesting that, whoever denied the Lord, he certainly would not. He of all would be faithful and go so far as to go to prison with, and to die for, his Master. But Christ rebuked that spirit and gave Satan permission now to move against this poor disciple particularly and he got a sad fall. I should not doubt for a moment that the scars left by that never were removed from his heart, his memory, though his sin was forgiven. He "hath desired", that is, he asked, he was obliged to get permission. "Satan hath desired to have you". In that mysterious chapter which I read we see there is a sort of intercourse between the Almighty God and the devil, Satan, an adversary. "Whence cometh thou?" How hast thou come amongst these My worshippers, the sons of God? It was a mysterious thing that when the saints of old in Job's day met together, then Satan that foul, defiling, wicked, powerful spirit was permitted to be in their midst. Ought we to expect that we should ever meet here or anywhere and the devil not be present, and ought we to be surprised if, here and there, one poor child of God is selected by him, pointed out to the Lord. You have just surrounded Job, mercies have compassed him about and do still. Nobody can get to him; his substance is great, and Thy hedge nobody can break without permission. Asking, as it were, that God would permit him to break down that hedge which divine power had put about His servant Job, that upright man, and the Lord gave him permission. A very solemn thing this, that that fallen angel should be permitted to address the Almighty and draw attention to the securing providence of God around that individual, and also make a declaration which the Lord would soon disprove that that servant, that child of God, only served the Lord because of what he had from the Lord. Some sinister motive, some by-end, some self-end Job had in serving God, and it was this, that God fed him and prospered him, therefore he feared God and served Him. And then the enemy got permission and it was a permission that affected evil men who were to be his agents and a permission that gave him power over the wind for the time, as if the Lord would put a singular power into the hand of the enemy. So he goes to the enemy. He goes to the Sabeans, he goes to the Chaldeans and he influences their minds, stirs up ambitious thoughts and covetous desires and they go in separate

bands, one to the camels, and the other to the oxen and asses, taking them away. And to cover all traces of themselves if possible they slew the servants, but one escapes in each case. Then he goes to the wind, this great god of this world, and he is allowed to send a wind, a great wind which, whirling about in the desert and wilderness, caught the house of the elder son of Job at every quarter and destroyed it utterly, and in its destruction destroyed all his sons and his daughters. Let men deny the personality of Satan if they will. As long as we believe in the inspired Scriptures, we must believe this narrative to be a true fact and we must believe that the god of this world has, if permitted of God to use, a great power by which he can injure people. But we must, as Job did, God helping us, refer everything back to God. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the Name of the Lord".

Here were these poor disciples of Christ who had but little understanding at that time in the nature of Christ's kingdom, the nature, that is to say, of inward religion. The kingdom of God within them they little understood, and now the time is approaching when their Lord and Master would be taken away from them and when they were told of this their hearts were filled with grief, as well they might be, lacking as they did that understanding of the nature of Christ's kingdom. What, are we to lose our Head? Shall we no longer have His protection, no longer see His power? Shall we lose Him whose society has been as a heaven to us, whose teachings have made us wise, as far as we are wise? It was a solemn thing to them to be told that Christ was going away. Why, Elisha was grieved when he knew that the Lord would take his master away from him, and these poor disciples were indeed grieved. They showed their loyalty, their love, their cleaving to Christ though they had so little understanding. They showed their heart in their grief and you will show your heart in your grief if Christ should go away for a time.

And when the hour came for the Lord Jesus to be in the hands of His enemies, and when Christ would have His word to Peter fulfilled, - "Satan hath desired to have thee that he may sift thee as wheat" - then came the enemy, then came the great wind and blew Peter away from his steadfastness, and stirred up all that dreadful wickedness of his nature, so that instantly he said - "I know not the Man" Do not think

you are safe. You will be safe for heaven, but do not think you may escape temptation.

Say could the tempter try
To shake a tree, so good, so green,
Good God, defend the dry

we may well pray. Though some of us have grown old in the service of God and in His ways, we know not how we may be tempted, how we may be overtaken, what passions may come, what a blowing up of the power of some sin there may be, and what a trying to save our skin by yielding to temptation we may fall into. "Satan hath desired to have thee", to have thee in his power, to have thee under his control, to have thee for a prey, to have thee to get victory over thee, to have thee for his meat. "Be sober" says Peter, "be vigilant, knowing that your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour". There is more in that word than we perhaps think - "Dust shall be the serpent's meat". God grant we may never be his meat. He hath desired to have thee, he has asked to have thee, he has made request for thee. As he made request to go into the herd of swine, he has made request to enter a poor child of God, to enter his heart with some vile temptation, or as with a sudden blast of wind, or by some subtle temptation to hide himself from view and just to overcome the tempted one. He hath desired to have thee. We may well pray Christ's prayer, the prayer rather that He taught - "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil". As long as the hedge of divine protection is round us in providence, and in grace especially, we are safe, but give the enemy permission to break down the hedge, and where shall we be. You may think yourself well settled in the truth, and you may be. You may think yourself divinely assured of heaven and you may be, and you may thereby be allured into a security that is not good. Peter was deceived and allured into a security of his loyalty. Oh he was sure that he was loyal. He was at the bottom. He was sure that he believed Christ was the Son of the living God, and did, but he did not reckon upon his own ignorance of Satan and upon his ignorance of Christ's kingdom as to the purely spiritual nature of it, and being thus allured and thus improperly secure, he was exposed. We may be exposed, yes we may be exposed. Who knows how many militant protestants will be exposed and their certainty of themselves,

because they can boast of their protestantism, will give way and be no more solid and no more a protection for them than tow in the fire. The blast of the terrible ones, when it comes as a storm against the wall, needs divine protection according to the Scripture. "Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall." Satan may be allowed to touch our circumstances. He was permitted to touch Job's possessions, went right home to him. He may be allowed to blow up some pride in our minds. He went and blew up the pride of David's heart as he was the king and moved him to number the people, whereby the people were reduced by many thousands. He may tempt a person by representing things in so fair a light as that they see a goodly land as it were before them, as did Lot. He saw the land was goodly here and he chose that and Abram took what was left, but it was a sore choice for Lot, a sorry choice that he made. He may set the world before a person as he did before Demas who, for the world, forsook the Apostle Paul, the Lord's servant, and no doubt Christ. Ah and he may tempt the Lord's people today in exactly the same ways. He may move, represent things in a false light, dangle some glittering thing before their eyes, blow the pride of their nature up, distort things entirely to them. He hath desired to have you. You think of this, "Satan hath desired to have you", desired to have you under his authority and power, desired to have you so that he may move you off, take you away from, your one only dependence, and if it is so it is terrible. There are two temptations which are more or less common to the Lord's people as they come along in their way. The first is this that when they need help he tells them that there is no help for them in God. Persecute and take him, there is no help for him. That is a sad temptation and if it takes hold of you, you will understand the power of it, for, as instructed by the Lord, you know that "vain is the help of man". If therefore you are tempted that there is no help in God for you, what shall you do? Where shall you go? to whom look? on whom lean? You are like one bereaved. But he will go beyond that and he will tempt you to atheism and you may find that in your heart which is said to be in the heart of the wicked. "The wicked hath said in his heart, there is no God". If you are not tempted to this, do be thankful. Fall on your knees and bless God, O believer, if you are free from that temptation. The wound of it, the bitterness of it, the

scar of it, they know who have gone through it. It is a sore thing to be tempted that there is no God, to have it set before you. No tongue can express the awful blank that is then before the spirit and the gloom that fills the mind and the darkness and the death on the whole of creation and the future. How dismal circumstances, how deadly as they may lead you to evil and hurry you into some wrong things. No God; where will you go? What can you say? No God. "Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you", put you in a sieve and shake you, and move you. Move you from your blessed standing, move you from that that has held you at times, move you from prayer, move you from hope, move you from stability. O you know, who have gone through temptations, the moving power of them, the sifting power. Ah and the sifting will sift a good lot away that you may have thought good, a good deal of your own confidence, and your own wisdom, and your own strength. You may have thought sometimes you have got through one temptation, now you will watch here and if the enemy comes again you will know, but the likelihood is he wont come that way a second time to you. Some unsuspected avenue, your sight or your hearing. He hath desired to have you. He envies your happiness, he would devour your peace, he would devour your soul, he would devour you. He would have you for his company, for his friend, though he is a friend to nobody. He would have you with him, he would have you as wicked as himself. He hath desired to have you away from God, away from prayer, away from home, away from simplicity, away from purity, and carry you away to some dark place of misery and wickedness, to carry you away altogether like the wind carries a leaf away just as it will, and the leaf has no power to resist. He hath desired this, and a solemn thing it is. Now if any of you are tempted, tempted through providence, tempted to infidelity, tempted to believe that there is no help for you in God, may you be kept from saying, we will resist. Though the Lord says "Whom resist steadfast in the faith" yet that steadfast resistance must be on your knees. If you think you can sit down and argue with Satan and reason with him and by that overcome him, you are overcome already in the very thought. He who thinks he can resist argument with argument; he who thinks he can by reasoning resist the reasoning of the devil, is already defeated. He already is in the hands of the enemy, and when the Lord opens his eyes to see it in mercy he will say, O what a fool I have been or rather made myself. Tempted,

tempted to believe the Scriptures are not inspired, tempted to believe that the great revelation of God did not come from God and is no revelation, or tempted to believe that the kind promises God made were not made by Him to you. To believe that all things continue as they were, notwithstanding the promise of God to come to you. To believe that there is no answer to prayer at all, that because God has, in an infinitely wise, eternal decree ordered, arranged, and fixed everything, therefore, whether you pray or no, things will just fall out according to that purpose, that decree, that arrangement, and therefore, why pray, why pray at all, no good in it. Yea, tempted to such awful distraction as that sometimes you may be driven off your knees and driven out of your room, made to feel that you can no longer hold on. Tempted to curse God and die. And all this Satan is permitted, having requested it, he is permitted of God to exercise poor people with, the people of God. We know the strength of the stream if we swim against it. Men may be tempted and carried away of their own lusts and know nothing of a tempter, nor of temptation. But when temptation comes to a living soul whose struggles are after God, who can say, who does say, I want Him, I would have Him, I would love Him, I would be found in Him, I would wear His robe of righteousness, walk in the purity that His blood communicates, in the holiness that His Spirit imparts, that man, struggling after God, knows the strength of temptation. You can never know how strong temptation is until you are enabled in some measure to resist it, but when it comes suddenly and, like a wind, carries you off your feet, then you are just prone, wounded, defeated, like Peter. Now there is another side to this matter. You can fill up particulars for yourselves as to the temptations. You have had them, you may have them now, as to your circumstances, and your state, and God and all good things. You can fill up for yourselves.

I would now direct your attention to the Lord's kind, merciful word, O sweet word, O sweeter mouth that uttered it. O blessed God of all grace that spake so kindly to one who was about to fall, and He knew he was about to fall, but His love was there. He was about to deny his Master but his Master said, I love you and I pray for you, and though, in the acting of it, your faith shall give up the ghost as it were, yet in the root of it it shall remain. The fruits of faith are very tender, but the root of faith is more hardy than any root that

you can think of in the whole of creation. The Lord preserve the little fruit that we have if it please Him. But here He says "I have prayed for thee".

Now the first remark I would make on this point is this, that the intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ is founded on His appointment to be a a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec by His Father, and this is glorious, all glorious; I know not how to express it. The Father looked upon a poor, weak church and saw that the god of this world would aim at the destruction of that church and He called His only begotten Son to this great office of Mediator, that is Priest. "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec". No other could bear this office. Jesus was called to it. Paul says to the Hebrews "No man taketh this honour unto himself but he that is called of God as Aaron was", and Christ was called to this great office, and this great honour, to be a priest, and in His priesthood lies the very essence of intercession. 'Tis founded upon this, His appointment to the office. 'Tis founded upon His precious atoning work

Founded on right Thy prayer avails

My brethren look to the Mediator. You never will be overcomers but through the Mediator. I would, feeble as I am, and unable to do it properly, direct your attention to the Mediator. "I", your Lord and Master, your High Priest, your only prevailing Intercessor, "I have prayed for thee".

And the next remark I would make is this, namely the mercy of this being such a personal thing with Christ. He had taken Peter, as it were, in His arms apart from all others, Peter alone, and asked His Father to preserve him. And did the Lord ever pray for you? Did He ever pray for me? "I have prayed for thee". I have presented My infinite merit. I have presented My will, having accomplished the will of God, to My Father on your behalf. "I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am". My brethren this will do, this will recover us, this will defeat Satan. "I saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven", and Satan will fall as lightning from every tempted soul in God's own time. "I have prayed for thee". We sing sometimes "Pray Thou for us", and we want Him to do it. Is there any

power but Christ's intercession that will prevail in heaven for us? No, no arm but God's can reach us to save us. No rebuke but God's can rebuke the enemy and the avenger. He says I will rebuke the enemy and the avenger and an instance of that rebuke of Satan we have related in Zechariah's prophecy where Joshua is set before us as before the Lord clothed with filthy garments, and the adversary at his right hand. Satan stood, that is the adversary stood, at his right hand to resist him. If you wish to go to heaven, the devil will resist you and especially when you are convinced of your sinfulness, when you look upon your own filthy rags, then will come the adversary to resist you. He will tell you you are a hypocrite, how can you think that God will have anything to do with you. That you are a vile person, how can you think a Holy God can look on you, but with abhorrence infinite. That you are a weak creature, and - O this will be very piercing if ever you get it - and that you have consented to sin, that you have committed sin, that you have done it with your eyes open, that you have given way here and there, that you did not resist when you should have done, that you have restrained prayer before God, that you have yielded to some vile influences, and that the motions of sin in you have not been so hated by you as they are by gracious people. And if he comes like that, if that be the form of his resistance, it will put you to it. I know it will. I know it for myself. And yet this devil, this adversary there, is defeated. The Lord Jesus says, "The Lord rebuke thee O Satan, even the Lord which hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire." You will never find your sinfulness contradicted, You will never find any such thing put into your mind as that these filthy garments are not as filthy as they are represented to be. Never, the case is bad, the case is very evil. That is not disputed. But O there is a remedy for it. Take away his filthy garments. I have given thee a change of raiment. That is the remedy my friends. O beloved saints, tempted saints, there is the remedy. When your eyes are on your filthy garments you sink. When your ears hear the resisting Satan, then you fear. But O when your eyes see the Lord Jesus, and when your ears hear Him say, I have given thee a change of raiment, then you will stand. "I have prayed for thee". "The rooted stock" therefore "shall still remain. Leaves may languish, fruit decrease, but more shall grow again". Yes, and the prayer of Christ will bring you to find the water of life near the root of faith. You shall be a tree planted by the river of water, and

there the root shall take in the blessed water of life for nourishment. You will take in by precious faith something of a revealed Christ, some point in His gospel, some testimony of His atoning work, some view of His divine righteousness, some little sense perhaps of His eternal love and, taking that in, you will be just like a tree whose roots have got nourishment and you will be rooted and grounded in the love of God, rooted and grounded in love. And this is the effect of Christ's prayer - "I have prayed for thee". And when that is so you see there will be some effect in respect of the condition that you have been brought into. Job's faith was maintained and he said - "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away". He had no eye for the Sabeans and for the Chaldeans, nor for the fire that came from heaven, nor for the wind, but only saw God, and when a temptation has passed, as to its fierceness, if not altogether has passed away, you will find your faith rooted in God. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away". The Lord has done this. It is best to be as it is. It is the best for me to be as I am. And when Peter was converted O how he did strengthen his brethren. He said to them - You are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation. He said to them - "Be sober". I was unsober once, particularly. I was so unsober and so unknowing as even to contradict my Lord and Master and Saviour, for when He told me that I should forsake Him I declared to Him I would not. I protested to Him my loyalty, but now I speak with another heart and voice and I say to you "Be sober, be vigilant". Look about you, do not be secure. Do not think that because the Lord has redeemed, therefore Satan will never be permitted to come against you. Be sober, because you know this, you know it by divine testimony, that your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour. Now resist him steadfastly in the faith. Do not say what I said, you will never give way, but resist him steadfastly in the faith. Pray to the Lord to keep you, to strengthen your faith that you may hold the atonement, that you may hold the righteousness of Christ steadfastly, that you may hold the eternal goodness of God in Christ steadfastly, and then you will resist successfully.

"I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not". The rooted stock is there. The leaf has languished and died and the fruit all gone, but the rooted stock remains, that blessed faith that God gave, and this dear eternal Redeemer, Jesus Christ, whose priestly

office and priestly sacrifice and priestly intercession in heaven shall be your security, He intercedes, He has an interest, He carries the whole church on His breast. Deep sculptured in His wounded breast are their names and He carries them all in His hands. My sheep are in My hands. And He carries them all in His intercession. And when it is an individual case, He carries Him. When it is a weak sinner, He carries Him. "I have prayed for thee". You may think your prayer does not enter and I was going to say it does not matter, although it does, in another sense, but this is the prayer that matters - "I have prayed for thee". Pray on poor soul. I say it matters a great deal whether our prayers enter but that that of all others matters is the prayer of the Lord Jesus - "I have prayed for thee". Thy case lies in heaven. O if thy case lies well there it lies well everywhere and the end must be good. Think of it, my friends, does the case lie well with God? You cannot miss - though you may suffer, yea suffer shameful defeat - you cannot miss if the case lies well with God. Cases do lie well or ill with God and when a man can go like as Peter did when he went out and wept bitterly and in his heart would pray to the God of all grace, that man's case lies well, and the chief reason and the bottom reason and the prevailing reason and the all surrounding reason and the eventually converting reason will be this - "I have prayed for thee". I will bring thee through, I will see thee well to the end of thy pilgrimage. I will rebuke the enemy and the avenger and My Father who is greater than I, who has appointed Me to this office of Intercessor, He will preserve you and no man can pluck you out of His hand. He has appointed Me to pray and I will pray and do pray for you, and He hears My prayer, and when the prayer is heard it is answered and the answer comes down in God's time. O, but the answer may be delayed. Yes, even the devil may be permitted to delay it. For three weeks, in Daniel's case, an answer was delayed but it came, and your answer is sure to come to you when Jesus Christ prays for you. May the Lord help us. I do not know, I say again, if I have spoken a word to suit any case, but I have, I know I have, spoken what is true and may the Lord make it useful if it can please Him so as that we may be sober minded and brought off, if it may be, brought off from Peter's vain confidence. "I won't forsake Thee" was his protest. He protested it but he did forsake his Lord. Yes, and particularly sinned, swore and cursed and denied his dear Master and gracious Lord. He said "I know not the Man". You think you could not do it but

you could and would if you were tempted and the Lord did not hold you up in your faith as to its acting. What, do that? Yes my friends. O it is a solemn thing to be a sinner. I feel it is a solemn thing for a weak sinner to be tempted of a mighty devil, a poor worm to be, as it were, under the heel of the god of this world. Then what can save him? This prayer - "I have prayed for thee". May the Lord pray for us and bring us to heaven.

AMEN.