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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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THE TOWER FOR REFUGE

Text: Proverbs XVIII verse 10

"The Name of the Lord is a strong tower: the
righteous runneth into it, and is safe".

There is one feeling very often in the hearts of all who are born again; namely this, that they are surrounded by dangers, that they are full of dangers. Within are devils and sin, and without are devils and troubles in providence and snares. All these things together make them feel there is danger; and unless they are divinely sustained, covered, protected, there is no hope of their getting honourably to their graves. Peter thought himself quite strong enough in his love for his Master to escape the danger that had been foretold, and he protested his loyalty, declared that although all men should forsake his Master, yet he would not; he would go to prison with Him, even die with Him, but never forsake Him (Matthew XXVI v 33; Luke XX v 33) O how many of the Lord's people have felt like that and have been cured by a fall! How many have been brought to their knees by a broken back! My dear friends, it is very solemn and very dangerous to be confident in ourselves. It is very profitable to believe in our own weakness, and to believe that we are in the hands of God, and that if He for one moment takes away His protection, His support, and leaves us to any temptation, any difficulty, any providence, leaves us exposed to any circumstances that would lead us to deny Himself, ruin our own souls, we should be sure to fall. If we have a sense of this on our hearts, it will be a mercy for us. When that prayer is honestly prayed, it is a good thing. "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe" And when Christ's own word has a place in us, it is good: "Without Me ye can do nothing". (Psalm CXIX, 117; John XV, 5) It has had a place, in many a hard heart where there has been no place for it in a soft heart. And many a boasting professor has covered sin up or

attempted to excuse sin in him or done by him, by so solemn a truth, "Without Me ye can do nothing" But when Christ gives it a place in a believing heart, then a good use is made of it. The Spirit leads and enables the soul to make such a use of it. "O hold me up, make me fruitful. O cause me to fear Thee in all my ways!" We read that the devil, "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter V.8) and he knows our weaknesses, our propensities. And God may let him lay snares for our feet, and entrap us in some sin, ere we are aware of it. It is good, therefore, however mortifying to our pride, to have an abiding sense of our exposedness on every hand to danger, to death; to be convinced that if the Lord for a moment leaves us, we are exposed and liable to fall into some evil. May we not be cured by a fall, as Peter was. He got his pride broken, he got his strength broken, by that solemn fall. He was restored by grace, but he was ruined by sin. When it pleases God to exercise one well with a sense of his woe, then it is good for that one; because as Jesus in any way manifests Himself, there is a hope, a lively hope. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans VIII.31) It does not mean that none shall try, that no devil will attempt to overthrow us; but "Who can be so against us as to effectually undo us?" But still the Lord's people do feel dangers pressing on them from time to time; and the more lively they are, the more sense of weakness they have. Therefore they have the more need in their own feelings of divine protection.

Now it would be of no use for me to try and speak from this word, if I had a congregation of self confident people. As many of you as are self confident will find that what may be said will pass over you as being uninteresting and having no place in your hearts. Self confidence destroys many; may it never destroy us! "O but", the professor may say "it is a gloomy kind of feeling to be always feeling you are weak and liable to fall." That is so to him, but it is not so to the child of God in whom that feeling lives; for it makes prayer a necessity, and by the Holy Spirit it makes prayer a choice. It makes the Name of the Lord a necessity; it makes the support of that arm salvation. Therefore it is good, really good, to be out of love with yourself, to be brought to self despair; not at the beginning

only, but as you go on. Indeed, doubtless, the older people get, and the more the Lord exercises them, the more despair they feel.

If the Lord will favour us, we shall find out this truth expressed in the text: "The Name of the Lord is a strong Tower": the Spirit will open it, and we shall find the worth of it as well as the suitableness of it to our cases. Now I would mention the Name of the Lord as the scriptures speak of it. I can only do a little, but may the Lord help me to do a little; and what I do may He bless with unction. For, if I may turn aside for one moment, it would be to say this. I am more and more deeply convinced that preaching can be of no service to the Lord's people, if there is in it no unction. This is my conviction. As I get older, it gets more and more deep in my heart, that the Lord alone can make any word a minister may utter, profitable. He may utter many sound words; he may be particularly clear in doctrine; he may be able in some degree to trace out the experience of the Lord's people; and yet be dead in respect to usefulness. And this is one thing that I do more and more dread. I am getting to the end of my ministry, as I feel sometimes; and I want the end of it to be the best part of it. O that the Lord would grant unction, so that you may be really profited; and the word be so useful to you that you may say "I know that is the word of the Lord, individually".

Now I would speak a little respecting the Name of the Lord. The first need that I will take up and speak to in respect of this Name of the Lord being a strong Tower, is this: His Name as He is a Redeemer; "Their Redeemer is strong" (Jeremiah 1.34) We need redemption. And as many of us as are born again and are exercised, desire redemption. Christ bought His people; "Feed the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood." (Acts XX.28) That is settled. He will have the purchase of His blood with Him. He will sprinkle their guilty consciences by sending His Spirit. He will purge them from their guilt and defilement by that blood with which He purchased them. But there is a redemption which is exercised by the power of God; as when, in the word just quoted, the people were in captivity, and "all that took them captives held them fast; they refused to let them

go." Then the word comes in, "Their Redeemer is strong ... He shall thoroughly plead their cause." Take, then, these two particulars in respect of redemption: redemption by the blood of Jesus Christ, and redemption by power. That redemption by blood was accepted by the Father when He offered Himself without spot to God on Calvary. Then it was that all the sin of the land was removed; then it was that the whole church was purchased; that as long as any purchased sinner is in the kingdom of the devil, the Lord Jesus does not, in that particular person's case, see the travail of His soul. But he must come to that, and so the Holy Ghost is sent to quicken souls whom Christ has bought. And when that quickening has taken place, and conviction is passing in that soul, then from that time to the end of his pilgrimage, the poor, but the happy, the redeemed sinner, needs a Refuge, a strong Tower, a high place, in which he may be set aloft from all his mocking, cruel enemies.

And the first strong Tower is that justifying righteousness which the Redeemer wrought out. The Name of the Lord is "The Lord our Righteousness". This is the Redeemer's blessed Name. (Jeremiah XXIII.6) O what an amazing thing it is to be here! If you are led by the Eternal Spirit to this Refuge, this high Tower, then no law, no curse, no devil, no trouble, shall ever invade that Tower, and drag you from your safety. But the sense of danger is often very great. It is a keen sense of danger that comes at times into the heart when one feels his own depravity, when defilement is continually coming upon his conscience, when he realises that in himself, that is, in his flesh, there dwelleth no good thing; when he would do good, and he finds evil to be prevailing, so that the good he would he is not able to do, and the evil he would not he is driven or dragged into; - then, then is to him a time of danger. He may not be left to sink so low as to say "I shall find myself in hell". He may not be left to give up his hope or to give up anything that God has done for him. But he may be saying "O what a fall I may get yet! What broken bones I may procure yet! What distance may come between God and my soul! How I may procure darkness, confusion, bondage, reproach unto myself! How I may procure many cutting rebukes

from the mouth of God Himself!" And then what is he to do? O, his very soul says, "I will, as helped, fly to this Tower. May the Redeemer hold me up and keep me from falling. Hold Thou me up; hold me up by the right hand of Thy righteousness; help me by Thy Spirit; help me in prayer, make me lively, keep me exercised. Make me a poor, depending sinner, depending on Thy promises, on Thy blood, on Thy righteousness". And so the sinner, in his soul's exercises, flies to the Name of the Redeemer. "Their Redeemer is strong." None can redeem us from our death, our sleepiness, our propensities, our corruptions, but the Lord Jesus. Death will hold us, slumber and sleep will overtake us, our propensities will master us, our darling sins will drain away every drop of vital feeling out of our spirits, and kill our comforts, if the Lord do not hold us up. And so, He being the only One that can redeem us, the Lord's people are led to this Tower. The righteous runneth to the Redeemer's Name, and is safe. What a sacred thing this is! What a mercy it is to feel it in your soul; that there you are, exposed in yourself on the right and on the left, and chiefly exposed to your indwelling corruptions; then the Holy Spirit comes, and sets before your faith this Name, this high Tower, this blessed Jesus, the Redeemer of His children; and faith catches at that in a moment. As a swallow catches her food as she flies, faith catches the testimony that the Spirit bears to this great Name - "The Name of the Lord is a strong Tower" - catches hold of it and says, "Run into it". The righteous runneth into it, he goes to this Name, necessity drives him, love draws him, choice in his very soul brings him to cleave to it, and makes him say "O never let me be dragged out or depart from this place! May I cleave to the Redeemer all my days!"

A righteous person is one who is redeemed and justified in the Lord Jesus. "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory" (Isaiah 45 v 25) A righteous person is one who partakes of the life of the Redeemer and does righteously by living by faith. The most righteous life that any creature on earth can live, is the life of faith. People talk about subjecting self, and cultivating holiness, and all that kind of free will and human power and goodness. But I tell you, dear

friends, that the most righteous life you can ever live is the life of faith. "The just shall live by faith" (Hebrews X.38) You will never live in sin when you live by faith. You will serve the Lord when you live by faith, you will fear Him when you live by faith, you will honour Him, you will find yourselves worshipping Him when you live by faith. Indeed faith is that clean grace that brings the sinner away from the love and power of sin by enabling him to cleave close to this Tower, the Tower of the Redeemer's great Name. He shall redeem His people. Jacob declared to Joseph that the Lord had redeemed him from all evil (Genesis 48 v 16) The Psalmist declared that the Lord had sent from above, and had taken him and had drawn him out of many waters (Psalm XVIII.16). And the Apostle said the Lord would keep him: "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom " (2 Timothy IV.18). And the Lord does redeem His people in these ways. In grace, in the Holy Spirit's working in divine providence, He redeems them; and they are led at times to see that He has done it. He redeems them from sin, redeems them from threatened trouble, redeems them out of trouble into which they have been plunged; redeems them from despair; and redeems them from the abominations of their nature; and redeems them from sleeping and slumbering. And as they see their redemption to be in Him, their souls by faith fly to this Tower: "I will call upon the Lord. He has heard me in the day of trouble; therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live." (Psalm CXVI.2) Running to this Tower is believing, is praying, is calling upon the Name of the Lord as He directs, and as His Holy Spirit works.

There is a Name which, in the next place I would mention to you; namely this: "The Lord of Hosts" (Jeremiah 50 v 34) "The Lord is a Man of war" (Exodus XV.3). We have hosts, hosts within us of enemies; who can name them? The Apostle Paul, as you remember, goes through the works of the flesh, he names them (Galatians V.19-21). The root of these works is indwelling sin; and indwelling sin may branch itself out into innumerable things, bad feelings, wickedness, lust, pride unsullied, and every sort of evil may be branching out from time to time; so that you say "O the hosts of enemies I have in my nature!" They are there,

and you look at them and weep over them sometimes. And sometimes they so work as that you enter into Paul's language, "The flesh lusteth" - worketh, willeth - "against the Spirit." (Galatians V.17) To lust there is to will; and to will is to work, in this case. And the flesh does it; it lusts, works, wills, struggles. aims, but never rests. It is like the troubled sea that cannot rest. O this bad nature! O that I could put my foot upon it, as a poor minister, and trample it down ministerially. My friends, I have nothing good to say of it. I have had such proof in myself, and I see in the scriptures that the Lord has created all men's hearts alike, and says that there is no man that doeth good, no, not one. (Psalm XIV.3); so that I do wish to trample human nature under foot. Let men cry up human goodness if they will; I will cry human badness. And it branches out into many things.

Now who can deliver us from this? defend us from this? Who can fight my battles? can come and be a Leader and Commander to me, as I go forth against these enemies? Is this your language, is it your cry: "O do defend me!"? "The Lord is a Man of war". He is the Mighty God, the Lord of Hosts. "The Lord of Hosts is with us" we read; "The God of Jacob is our refuge". (Psalm 46 v 7) You will never get through without the Lord of Hosts; you must be defeated. So will every sinner who goes forth to battle as a professor in his own strength, every man who says "Now I have got a start" (There are myriads of professors saying so); "The Lord has given me a start and I must go on as well as I can." No more praying for the Holy Ghost; if He has come, He is always with you. No more asking for the forgiveness of sin; once forgiven, you are forgiven always - and all that kind of thing. O how many of these professors will find themselves slain by their own sword, their own resolutions, overcome at every turn. And "like sheep they are laid in the grave" (Psalm 49 v 14)

Now what of a poor sinner who feels afraid of himself? Peter's painful case is set before us in the scripture and the poor feeble sinner says "I am just like poor Peter, and I have no more strength in my soul than he had in his. But whereas Peter had that sad fall in his self-confidence, my confidence in myself

is gone, I hope rightly gone, and I must depend on Thee, I must come to Thee. I am driven to it, and my whole soul chooses to come to Thee. I want Thee, Lord. O defend, defend my helpless soul. Let me not be a prey to any iniquity; 'Let not any iniquity have dominion over me'; neither my pride, nor my unbelief, nor my worldliness, nor my carnality, nor despair, nor dismay, nor rebellion, nor stubborn silence, - 'let no iniquity have dominion over me'" Well, can you run to this Name, my friends, as into a high Tower, a strong Tower, a place that will set you aloft from your enemies in your experience, and say "The Lord is on my side, I will not fear"? Can you say sometimes "One thing have I desired of the Lord; that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in His temple." (Psalm XXVII v 4)? And looking at your weakness and at the strength of your enemies and their numbers, do you sometimes cry out "O send out Thy light and Thy truth! Defend my soul, cover my head in the day of battle, and be to me all that I stand in need of." The Name of the Lord is this strong Tower; "The Lord of Hosts" is this. "The Lord is a man of war". He said to Jehoshaphat by the prophet, "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle" (2 Chronicles XX.17) The best fighter in respect of his indwelling sins is that poor sinner who is led by the Holy Ghost to cast himself by precious faith on the Lord who has promised to defend and bring through the battle, giving victory. It is a great thing to have a place of safety, and to be in quiet from fear. "Whoso hearkeneth unto Me shall dwell safely and shall be quiet from fear of evil". (Proverbs 1 v 33) And this is the place. Poor, weak creature, there is no reason for despair. No. The weaker you are, the more you will value, as He is shown to you, the Lord God your Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts. He is a "Man of war".

.....and by thy weakness
Thou shalt prove that Christ is strong

How suitable this is to us who feel our weakness, who feel our many enemies, and know something of their strength! How suitable it is when the divine Spirit opens this great truth! There is

the Name of the Lord "the Lord of Hosts". He can command all hosts; He can make your enemies weak or give you a powerful feeling in your soul that shall enable you to say,

"Stand up, my soul, march boldly on"

He can teach your hands to war and your fingers to fight, and enable you to say to Him, "By Thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall". (Psalm XVIII.29)

And here I will mention a secret, this namely, that God does, as He favours His people, as He defends and protects them, and as He fights their battles for them, He does keep them from feeling that they are safe in respect of themselves. You will never find, as God is with you, that you can look upon any lust, and say "Now that is dead, and will rise no more". No, you will say, "Who knows in what form this may come to me tomorrow?" There is a constant sense of weakness whenever the Holy Ghost is working in the soul. All the strength to fight, all the armour to defend, all the skill to use the armour, and the sword of the Spirit, you will have to receive from the Lord. And His Name therefore will be your only Refuge. Whenever a child of God thinks he has got past some sins, and that he needs no more prayer in respect of those sins, the very feeling shows how sin has deceived him. Sin that is asleep he may be tempted to think is dead; and he has a rude and painful awakening later on. I have gone through this so I mention it to you, and warn you as my beloved friends. You will always need the Refuge, the strong Tower for safety. You will never, never be so rid of indwelling sin as not to need this strong Tower. While you are in this world, you will be sure to need it. You will need the Name of the Lord given as the scripture gives it; namely that He is "the faithful and true witness" (Revelation III.14). This is the Name of the Lord given in the scripture. Faithfulness is God's alone. Treacherous dealers we all are. This the people of God feel - treacherous dealers, treacherous dealers. Faithfulness belongs to Him. Faithfulness is "the girdle of His reins" (Isaiah XI.5)

Faithfulness is a relative term; that is to say, it relates

to some engagement. If the Lord had not promised to meet with two or three who in any place should meet in His Name, He would not be bound to come; and those who meet in His Name would not be able to go and ask Him to remember His holy promise. But since He has said, "I will meet with you whenever you meet together in My Name", He is bound, He is bound by His promise (Matthew XVIII.20) He must come. And faith asks Him because He has made the promise. Now that runs through all that He has said. There is an engagement, an engagement in the covenant. "I will bless you"; an engagement made with His people: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee"; an engagement with a particular person: "Thou art Mine. I will help thee." Now when God makes this engagement with His poor people, they get trouble, which seems very contrary; but they do, they get trouble. Abraham had a great promise, and Abraham had a great trouble. He had to wait for the promise. It was contradicted by nature, by everything in nature; and however he could get a fulfilment in his own experience of that promise, nothing in nature could inform him. He was shut up to God. And you will find the same trial probably come to you, in respect of some engagement or promise that God has entered into with you or made to you; such a solemn decay and such a natural impossibility of its fulfilment that you will say "How can these things be?" And nature will die.

Now what is a poor creature in this case to do? What can he do? Nothing, without the Lord, nothing. But with the Lord he can do this, and he does it. He runs to Him, he runs to Him the faithful God. He goes to Him and says "Lord, Thou hast spoken to Thy servant and promised to make him a great house, a house for a great while to come. Do as Thou hast said. Therefore hath Thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto Thee." (2 Samuel VII. 27); a particular prayer founded upon a particular promise. Not a general word spoken to all Israel, but a particular word spoken to David. Now you will find that come into your own experience. Take Jacob's case. His God said to him "Return to thy father's house and to thy kindred. I will deal well with thee, I will be with thee (Genesis XXXII.9) Yea, the first word the Lord spoke to Jacob stood him in good stead:

"Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (XXVIII.15) That never left him. Perhaps some of you got many years ago as a special gift and blessing a word from God; and it will stand you in good stead, my friends; it will never give you up. Though you may forget it for a time, though when you may very much need it, the enemy may endeavour to snatch it from you, and circumstances and appearances all unite to say you will never get the fulfilment of it, - yet when the faith that God gives you is in exercise, you will go to the promise, and say with Jacob "With my staff I passed over this Jordan and now I am become two bands. O God, the Lord which saidst unto me, return unto thy country and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee; Lord, do as Thou hast said. My brother Esau is coming with 400 men, and I am afraid of him. I offended him, I injured him, I lied to my father; now I am in this great strait, and have no power; what am I to do? Lord, remember Thy promise, do as Thou hast said." This was the power that Jacob had; strong it was too. He went to a faithful Promiser. God had promised him; could he fail? Has God promised you anything? Can He fail? His word endureth for ever. Said the Psalmist: "For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven." (Psalm CXIX.89) A Christian man is firmer in his state than heaven and earth, when that state is made good by a promise. If the Lord has bound Himself to you, and He has done so if He has given you a promise, then heaven and earth can sooner pass away than you can fail in respect of that which the Lord made over to you in the promise. It is very beautiful to faith to see this. May we get the sight by the powerful teaching of the Spirit! To see a faithful God who has witnessed in our soul of His love to us, who has given us a word, a word full enough for our mortal days, and full enough for our eternal blessedness; given us His own promise; - it is very beautiful, I say, to see this by faith. And when we so see it, we shall run into this Name, run to the Lord, that is. "The righteous runneth into it, and is safe". Bread and water are sure in this world, and eternal glory is sure to all the seed to whom the Lord makes over His promise. Indeed, when the Lord makes over His promise to a man, it is as if He made over Himself; for

"The written and the Incarnate Word
In all things are the same"

This, then, is one Name of the Lord, which is a strong Tower:
"The faithful and true Witness" It is the Name, you know, that
Christ has in the Book of Revelations. "The faithful and true
Witness". He came from heaven to speak His Father's words; He
sends those words by His good Spirit to His saints. "The Lord
sent a word into Jacob, and it lighted upon Israel" (Isaiah IX.8)
And many a word has He sent out since, which has lighted upon a
poor creature, upon you, it may be. Ah, you can say it
sometimes, "Thou didst say". Well, this will keep you; He has
said, "I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee".
(Hebrews XIII.5).

Well, dear friends, if this is so, can we wonder at Solomon
saying that the righteous running into this Name of the Lord, is
safe? He must be safe. What harm can reach the soul that is
wrapped up in a promise? What harm can reach that sinner to whom
the Lord has bound and engaged Himself? I speak it with
reverence, God must fulfil His word; He cannot deny Himself. So
He says by His servant, "He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy
II.13). We must live on promises, my dear friends. We must be
like beggars, go to the Lord as He enables us with His promise:
"Thou didst say". How often have I had to go and mention some of
His gracious promises to me! So you have had to do, and we must
do, do to the end. We are shut up to this: "To whom shall we
go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." (John VI.68) Dear
friends, did He ever come to you? "Yes", you may say "but we
have grieved His Holy Spirit, we have vexed Him and He has turned
to be our enemy, and He fights against us." And now what are you
doing? What do you feel you must do? "O" you say, we have to go
and confess and confess and confess; and that is all we can do,
and try to wait upon Him." What will He do? He says, "I will
see you again" (John XVI.22) "For the iniquity of his
covetousness was I wroth, and smote him. I hid Me, and was
wroth". And what then? Was he corrected? No; "he went on
frowardly in the way of his heart". And now what will the Lord
do? O, the faithful Witness says, "I have seen his ways, and

will heal him; I will lead him also and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners".(Isaiah LVII.17,18) Ephraim was joined to idols, Ephraim was smitten; the Lord spoke against him; and now what? "O" says the Lord "is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him." (Jeremiah XXXI.20) "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within Me, My repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger" (Hosea XI.8,9). And so I might go on to show that the guilty worm, the treacherous dealer, who has left his dear Lord and Saviour many and many a time and been guilty of many and many enormities, but through grace coming back to the throne of grace, he finds the promise holds good: "I have blotted out", says the Lord "as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee". (Isaiah XLIV.22). That will do. O when the power of that comes, that will do. We can live on that.

"My heart can on Thy promise live,
Can on Thy promise die".

May the Lord help us to run into this Name, and find a sweet and sacred safety in our consciences.

AMEN.