

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 27 May 1928

Psalm 119 v 117

Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe, and I
will have respect unto Thy statutes
continually

We noticed this morning that this prayer - "Hold Thou me up" is the prayer of a living man who was standing but who perceived that there were dangers and he could easily fall, and, perceiving this, this was his prayer. He did not turn to himself and say, I will stick to this ground, I will never give way, but, feeling his weakness, and having faith, he turns to the Stronghold, enters there, and perceives safety there. It is a great thing to be a believer, though, as I ventured to say this morning, probably very few of us half believe what we believe, what we profess to believe. But to have a little faith to enter into Jehovah Jesus, to see, to perceive, and feel Him to be the strength of God for us, to be the Stronghold in the day of trouble, to cast all care on Him, and realise in some measure that He cares for us, this indeed is a wonder. But there are not many miracle workers among us. Very few can say to a mountain that stands in their way "Be thou removed". I wish I were one of the few; I wish you were among the few. How frightened we are when we see trouble. To be safe, you must be in the Lord Jesus. He is the habitation, the house of defence into which no pestilence, no arrow, no death, can enter. "Blessed is the man who dwells in the secret place of the Most High and abides under the shadow of the Almighty". And then, looking for an answer, looking for a realisation of safety, he makes a solemn profession, avers his determination to continually respect the statutes of God. There are moments when people, weak in themselves, realising their weakness, can and do make solemn professions before and unto God. Their souls go out in humble confidence in Him and say - I will, we will, continually respect the statutes of our God.

What I would, if enabled, bring before you this evening then is this great matter of, first, the statutes of God; what are they? and

secondly the respect that the Psalmist would have to them. and thirdly, for how long will he respect them. He says "continually". A statute is a decreed limit, a law that sets up a standard, creates a limit, to go beyond which is sin, law breaking. God has statutes of this nature. The Jews understood them; the whole of the law given to them constituted their statutes. The centre, the circumference of their life, they found to be in the statutes. These statutes limited their movements and they were not to worship as their minds would suggest but as God commanded. They were not to form alliances other than this God would allow, and thus they were strictly surrounded. Prohibitions, commandments, directions given, and all of them together constituted what is in this word "statutes". They were spoken of by Moses again and again as laws and judgments, but they all come within this word, speaking generally, the statutes of God. Though there were many of them, I propose speaking of three only in which I think we could find all the others included, and these do strictly belong to the Lord's people in and under the gospel.

The first thing in the constitution of that Church in the wilderness was this, a priest was set up, and every approach that nation made to God, according to the order, the commandments, the sacrifices instituted, all the approaches of that Church were to be made through the priest. No man was to offer his offering as he chose. He was not to say, I have a bullock which is blemishless according to the law, but it is a long way to go to Jerusalem, I will offer it in my field. If he did that he was to be cut off from his people for this reason, that God had commanded that all the offerings made to Him were to be made by the priest. And this, in the gospel, is a wonderful thing and beautiful. It is this, a priest and the atonement are related and the atonement is related to sinners and the atonement is related to God, and these two parties are brought together, God and sinners, by the intercession of the mediator, for a priest is essential, first of all a mediator. This was a divine statute and is today. We have one High Priest and by His one sacrifice His people are perfected for ever. Now sinner, if you can say that you pant after God, that never can you be happy apart from Him, away from Him, there is just one direction or, to keep to the word, one statute, for you as for the whole of the saints of the Most High God. You may look into your heart, and of course you do, and O the

evils you see and feel to be there - what horrible thoughts, what dishonour to God is done in your heart, what vile things live there - until you can enter into Hart's language

Shocked at the sight, we straight cry out
Can ever God dwell here?

Now the gospel is for such people; it is difficult for them to think it, to believe it, but the gospel is just for such people. O but the trial of dying to live, of losing your own life, of hating it, that you may find and love it. The mystery you find here to be when you are enabled to look to Jesus, the great High Priest of our profession. What presumption it is for a person to profess to approach God without the Priest. The Socinian is always presuming when he professes to pray. The Unitarian is always presuming and so is the Papist and so is the Arminian who brings his good deeds and good tempers and good resolutions. But a sinner, under the gracious teaching of the Holy Ghost ventures his immortal soul, with all its undying interests, on the precious person of the great High Priest. He stands between, He is really between, and in a sense He is a double Representative. He represents the people for whom He is a Priest, to God, and He represents God to the people, who is gracious and propitious to them. Now, my brethren, if you are held up in your feeble faith, if you are enabled to go to God in prayer and supplication, there is just this statute to observe, this blessed Person who is worthy of all honour and praise and might and majesty and dominion. How attractive He becomes to faith. O poor sinner, God help you to obey the instruction of Hart

Pore not on thyself too long
Lest it sink thee lower;
Look to Jesus, kind as strong -
Mercy joined with power;

This is the statute. It respects Him who is called to be a Priest after the order of Melchisedec, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchisedec.

The second statute that I would name is the offering that was

commanded by the Lord. Once every year a blemishless bullock was to be slain and laid on the fire and burnt to ashes, and that fire that had consumed the sacrifice - at least some of it - must be taken by the priest from the altar and put into the censer. On that fire was to be sprinkled some incense and with blood, and fire, and incense, the priest, the high priest, must enter into the Holiest of all. My friends, the atonement of the Lord Jesus thus strongly and clearly and beautifully typified, is that one offering whereby sinners are perfected and find access and acceptance. Access. Sin shut us out of Eden. The blood of God opens a door into the Holiest of all. Sin, law, barred the gate, and justice defends the gate, so to speak, blocking the way to it in every direction, and the blood of God satisfies that sword, and a new and living way is opened for the vilest of all vile people into the presence of God. And this gospel is beautifully expressed by the Apostle Paul in the Hebrews. The willingness, the loving willingness of the Lord Jesus is expressed, quoting from the Psalms by the Apostle, and then the word of the Lord is - "I come to do Thy will O God. Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me. In burnt offerings and offering for sin Thou hast no pleasure. Then said I, Lo I come". "No pleasure" there means that God could never receive satisfaction to His justice and His law by all the sacrifices that were offered under the old dispensation. They were a shadow of good things to come; the anti-type of all these types is the Lord Jesus, His great work of offering Himself without spot to God. This He did once in the end of the world when He appeared and put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Now, guilty friends, fellow sinners, let us look at this. We are here before God, we have fallen natures, original sin. We have practical sin, sin done by us; the sin done by Adam is imputed to us, solemn mystery. "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned". And then you come to the transgression of each individual, and when conviction of sin is lodged in the conscience by the Holy Ghost, there is a guilty creature, a defiled wretch, condemnably and condemned; a perfect death, a perfect condemnation, never to be increased as to the nature of it, and now a perfect atonement, a perfect justification, a perfect sanctification through the one offering of the Lord Jesus. That is a beautiful word - O may the Lord make it over to you and to me as we may be under conviction - "Jesus, that He might sanctify the

people with His own blood, suffered without the gate". Now what would you mix with Him? You say, of course, nothing, and I believe every living soul means that, but then how unconsciously poor sinners are moving sometimes as it were with their very backs to the Lord, while they show their faces to be to Him. Why, says one, if I had but a broken heart, if I could but repent, if I could only feel for a minute a little love to the Lord Jesus, but in spite of such things I am full of hardness, deadness, ignorance, distance, legality, and am always wanting to take something in my hand for access and acceptance. Well then your eye is not, at such moments, on the statute. It is away from it. It is on a poor heart, on an unstable mind, on an uninformed judgment, and the stumbling it is to such poor people the Lord only fully knows. Now to come to the bottom, to be killed, to die, to have nothing but sin and guilt and weakness and ignorance and folly and death. And in that condition, here is the difficulty; here is the difficulty in that condition. This is difficult but the Holy Ghost is able to bring us to it. You may have a hope of, if one may so call it, a hope of evidence. Now you have had a nice feeling, now you have felt a little repentance, then you have some softness of heart, and on these gracious things you build and don't observe the statute, and this building does not stand. It cannot, for this reason; the repentance goes, the softness ceases to be felt, and hardness of heart supervenes and the evidences, being gone, the building falls. Very difficult to come to this point. It is when we are dead that we begin to live; when we are in bondage, feel bondage, then liberty comes. If a man will save his life, says the Lord Jesus, He must lose it. If he live, he must die. If he will love his life, he must hate it. Said the Psalmist, I will observe Thy statutes, I will respect them. "O that my steps were directed to keep Thy statutes" is a prayer at the beginning of this Psalm. And some of you may say O if we only knew how to keep this statute. Well, hang about the Lord, hang about His cross, His death, His merit, and the day will come - it may be near - when you will find that it is in your heart to live on Christ. Then He is your life; you pass from under the rod into the bond of the covenant.

The third statute I would name is this, the Covenant of Salt. Every sacrifice must have salt. "With all thine offerings" says God, "offer salt". This, as I apprehend, means the grace of God in the

heart, that is to say, the work of the Holy Ghost, His gracious operation. Now this gives an eye, a heart, a belief in the Priest and His Priestly office and this brings a sinner to enter experimentally into the word - "By whom we have access unto this grace wherein we stand" and this word - "Accepted in the Beloved". And these two things do constitute the happiness of the saints. Access. Justly shut out, justly cut off by transgression, no access by the law, a flaming sword to cut you off if you venture, and now a new and living way opened. And the salt of grace in your soul makes you turn away from everything to this one Person, the Lord Jesus, our great High Priest and to His offering. And this blessed salt in the soul brings a sinner to look to the Lord alone. These are the statutes, and I am of the opinion that if you were to look narrowly into all the statutes of the Levitical dispensation you would find their anti-type in the three statutes I have named. The statute of the Priesthood - God will only allow access to Himself through the Person of the Lord Jesus. The statute of the death of Christ - the Priestly offering perfecting for ever those for whom He offered Himself without spot to God. That is the everlasting statute, the everlasting gospel, a perfect atonement. O, if I only could properly emphasise it. A sinner lost; a sinner saved by this. A sinner condemned; a sinner justified by this. A sinner cut off, cast out, and shut up under the law of condemnation, and that person delivered, brought out and brought up from the pit, and standing perfect and complete in the atonement of the Lord Jesus. Look, with all the vision God gives you, to this atonement my brethren. And then the Covenant of Salt, don't leave that out. May the Lord grant grace, the work, the grace of the Holy Spirit coming into a sinner's heart, according to Christ's promise - "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you". This salt preserves, this salt makes the offering of a broken heart, through Jesus Christ, acceptable.

Now in the next place I am to notice the respect, the respect of a sinner to the statutes of God. "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe and I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually". Respect is not a casual glance, not an indifferent look. I believe it is the same word that is used when it is said that God had respect unto Abel and his offering. That means it is a look of approbation, a look of confidence, a look that affects your heart, a respect that, coming

from the heart, is the respect of faith, and faith approves Jesus Christ and His offering; it approves them well. Now you can enter into this, some of you, can you not? Here is the Lord Jesus and here is His perfect atonement and sometimes, when you are depressed by sin and distressed with a feeling of distance and of hardness and confusion and you say, I do not know what to do, the Holy Spirit brings before your eye, the eye of faith, this blessed Person and His perfect work, and faith looks therein and says, O I believe all I need is here. There is no remedy that I want, that I need, but this. There is no door into God's presence but this for me. There is no plea that I can make, and no reason I can offer to God why I should be forgiven, but this. "I will have respect unto Thy statutes". Now Christ said, in the days of His sojourn, to some - "What think ye of Christ?" What respect have you to Him? "What think ye of Christ?" May I put the question to you dear brethren. What do you think of Him? Have you any regard for Him? Do you regard Him more than the Socinian, than the Unitarian? Do you think of Him other than the man thinks of Him who says, He tries to make men happy and would do it if they would let Him. Do you think otherwise of Him? Ah, says one, I think this of Him; if He would but bless my soul, if He would but forgive my sins, if He would but take me in, if He would kindly give me His flesh to eat and His blood to drink, I am satisfied I should get to heaven. Well, that is a respect; that is a sweet respect, a God-given respect to the statutes of God. And the more we look at Christ, the more we look into the perfect law of liberty, the more we see in His precious atonement, the more we are attracted, and I am glad that this does not belong to the first work only. It will be for the grey head as well as for the young; for the end of the pilgrimage, as well as for the early days of it - this blessed Saviour of sinners. "To whom" said His disciples, "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" Said the Psalmist in another Psalm - "Whom have I in heaven but Thee and there is none on earth that I desire beside Thee". This is respect. Have you got it? This is the respect of faith, approving faith, and I will add, it is the respect of love, the respect of love. Love is a beautiful thing; it is so naturally, but O the spiritual love that God gives to His saints by shedding abroad His love in their hearts; this beautiful grace that cleaves to Christ, hangs about His cross, love, attended by faith, for they are always going together. Looking beneath the ignominy of His death, it sees the glory of

infinite merit in that death; it sees the glory of the Trinity glorified in that death. It sees that word - I have glorified Thee and I will glorify Thee. God glorified His Son and His Son glorified Him, and faith and love go hand in hand to this Person and His sacrifice and lovingly approve of Him and of it. Can you come here? Shiloh is the great One to whom the gathering of the people is to be. When you kneel before Him, does love go out? When you are guilty in your feelings, does faith go to His atonement? Are you able to venture on Him, without graces, without good things? Can you venture as a sinner, lovingly looking at Him, respecting this blessed limitation, as if God should say - Now not outside this, but within this, will I accept you and bless you. And this is the respect of hope. "Hope", said the Psalmist - "Hope thou in God". Hope in God in your own nature, hope in God on Calvary, hope in God who, though buried, saw no corruption, hope in God who purchased the church with His own blood. Hope in God who, having shown Himself alive after His passion, by many infallible proofs, entered heaven, of whom it is written - "Whither our Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus". Hope is a beautiful thing; it says in the soul, do not despair. It says there is no ground, no proper ground for despair. It says, look to the mighty One, look to the efficacious blood of the Lord Jesus, look to His promise which is indeed from His own heart. Hope in God. It is the respect of hope, beautiful hope, that shall never fail. Hope that is destined to die the sweetest death, to expire in a glorious vision, to expire in a wondrous fruition, to expire in the uninterrupted glory of God when the soul, free from its prison of clay, shall enter into heaven.

Now one word more, not to be tedious, on this point. It is the respect of pleasure, the respect of satisfaction. My friends, there is a river at God's right hand, full of pleasures for evermore. O the drops that we mourn over here of earthly good, but there is a river of pleasures at Thy right hand for evermore. At His right hand is the Lord Jesus; at His right hand there are the pleasures of holiness, the pleasures of happiness, the pleasures of God's smile, the pleasures of an endless summer, the pleasures of worship in a temple not built with hands, of a Sun never shadowed by cloud, and they are all in these statutes, these divine pleasures. And some drops come, some drops come even to sinners here and they make fruitful a barren

land, they restore the waste places and the desolate heritages, and they bring broken hearts into sweet contrition and bondaged souls find liberty here. He said "I will have respect unto Thy statutes".

And lastly, how long? Why, continually. Take continually in two respects. First, as to the bent and trend of the mind. This, even when you are not conscious as moving as you would with alacrity and delight in the ways of God, is within, is it not? The needle naturally has one point. It may be violently put away from that, but it has no rest. God is the centre of His people's life, hope, and all. Temptation, indwelling sin, and affliction, keenly felt at times, will turn away the soul, divert the attention, and put the lame feet out of the way, but even then if you could come and appeal to one who is in that condition - Now are you at home here? Is this where you wish to be? Is this state according to your mind and your heart and your will? - he would say, No, I am not at home, I am not near the Lord. There is a continuance in nature in certain directions, yet that nature may be turned away for a time. There is a natural appetite to a man but disease may vitiate it, and there is a natural tendency and bent in a living soul to the living God, but the disease of sin will sometimes enter in between, vitiate and turn the poor sinner aside. I wish I did not know this as I do, but I can talk about it because I painfully, and to my shame, know it. But then, in the next place, you take it actively. Is not it wonderful that ever a man, who hates God by nature, should love and delight in Him? "Delight Thyself also in the Lord". I think it is one of the most beautiful of all experiences you have here when, contrary to the bent of your fallen nature, you find and feel and say - Now my delight is in the Lord, the Lord Jesus. And here I would come back to my old point, and I shall never, I hope, get far from it while I live and speak. I must come back to the Priesthood. Priesthood? Why, my friends, we are lost without it. We are utterly lost without it. I have not a shadow of a hope apart from it; neither have you, and you know it, who are taught of God. Then what a wonder it is to look with delight on His Person. May I again quote Hart

O could we but with clearer eyes
His excellences trace

Could we His Person learn to prize
We more should prize His grace

It is wonderful to me, with all my carnality, and worldliness and atheism, to find myself delighting in Jesus Christ and being able to say I cannot do without Him, I am not happy without Him. Ah there is coming, there is coming - and some of us anticipate it sometimes - there is coming a day when we shall delight ourselves fully, without interruption. "Continually". There is a longing for this blessed Priest, this High Priest of our profession. Come again to His atonement; you will always be having to turn to that while you live, for you are always needing it. Since the promise is for every moment, there is a need for every moment, a supply for every moment, a rich supply, a full Christ, a full atonement. May we never forget it; a full atonement. Sins past, original sin - I hope you will never be left to deny it - original sin. Before you ever can do an act of sin, original sin depraving us, obliterating every good thing that God created in us, and death, death, moral death, legal death. and then your own transgressions, going astray as soon as born, speaking lies. Who can express the sinfulness of a person's life, the turpitude of his spirit? And these are all covered, all covered. The atonement covers, washes away, buries out of sight, casts behind God's back, all of them into the depths of the sea. Now this is delighted in. "I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually".

Now dear brethren, I have set before you feebly what I believe is in this Book and what I am certain must be in your souls if you are going to heaven; must be there. The atonement must terminate in the conscience; the Priest must have to do with you personally. Mind that. The atonement reached God, satisfied Him, pleased Him. It must reach you to satisfy and please you. And it has pleased God in His gracious Word to manifest this. He has set up a relation between conscience and the atonement and it is clear from Scripture that no living conscience can ever be relieved of a load of dead works but by the blood of Christ. "How much more shall the blood of Christ who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living God." Now may that relation, set out in this Book, be known by you and by me, a

beautiful relation. Here then is satisfaction, here is peace, here God and man can meet and never sunder, here is happiness divine. May the Lord make it yours. "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe and I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually".

AMEN.