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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 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

This is the prayer of a good man who was standing, but who was conscious of his liability to slip and fall. He was aware of his wicked weakness, of his danger through ignorance, of the solemn truth that he might at any moment be overtaken by temptation. He had been and he no doubt remembered it. Broken bones some people have for a good many years. He would fain stand in God, and in the profession which He had made of God, and in the worship of God to which he was called. And, realising that such standing was impossible to him, without God, without divine power, he thus prays - "Hold Thou me up". Many of us make a profession; we profess to believe in God; we profess to believe in the inspired Scriptures, in the atonement of Christ, in the throne of God's heavenly grace, in the promises of the gospel. We profess that there is such a thing on the earth as the Church of Christ and there are visible Churches; to these Churches are given ordinances and rules. We are in an ungodly world; we have ungodliness in our nature. Exactly what is in the world openly is in our nature in all the seed and desire and aim, and if we really fear, we shall know that we are liable, any moment, to be tripped up either by some inward lust or some outward temptation or some alluring providence. And this realisation will cause many a cry to go up to God such as this of our text - "Hold Thou me up". If we are believers this morning, no thanks to us, and if we continue to be believers through the day, no thanks to us. Every believer has unbelief in him as an influence, a power. Everyone who has cast himself on the Lord by precious faith, has died to live, and lost himself to be found, and hated his life to love it, finds again and again rising corruption and pleasure, so called, claiming him. And how is he to stand? How are you to stand, my friends? How are you to withstand in the evil day and, having done all, to stand? Tried we must be, tested we must be,

according to Scripture. The answer of the Scripture and the answer of faith in your hearts and in my heart is this - Safety is of the Lord. "A horse is a vain thing for safety, neither shall he deliver any by his great strength. The Lord taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. He taketh pleasure in them that fear Him." The position of a child of God, as such, is this, he is born again, he has in him a divine principle called the life of God, called a new heart and a right spirit. He has some knowledge of sin and of the law that condemns him for sin. He has some knowledge of the throne of grace, of the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanseth from all sin. Now what is this poor person to do? He knows the way to heaven is by Christ, but he knows painfully that in his heart is a disposition to turn aside every moment, and that there are many ways that seem right to a man. Now then, sensible of all these evils, his cry is - "Hold Thou me up". What he is to be held up in? The Scriptures teach us. "Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering". "That which thou already hast, hold fast till I come". "Remember how thou hast received and heard and hold fast". "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him, rooted and built up in Him". These things we know, in some measure, we who have been under the teaching of the Holy Ghost. But when you sin - and who does not - when you sin, you bring guilt, you bring defilement on yourself. What then? The enemy takes advantage of this, and a tender conscience is afflicted by this. The enemy weakens us, sin weakens us, and how are we to stand? Suppose you begin to reason about things, suppose you say to yourself - well, but I got something from God and I am not going to give that up; I will keep it. You may, in the form, but your spirit will be unsavoury, untender. No honour to God, no benefit to yourself, can arise from that manner of holding. It is a good thing, not only to hold, but to be enabled to hold rightly. This prayer then, as I am speaking generally for the moment, is most necessary to every child of God and more or less it is felt to be so. If your feet are ready to slip, you will be praying - O hold me up. If you are in some perplexing circumstances, then you will begin to feel weak, and the cry, if you are tender, will go up - Hold me up. If you do not know which way to take, then your cry will be - "Show me the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul unto Thee". If you have been led, as you hope, to pray, then you will need - according to Paul's teaching in the Ephesians - you will need what he speaks of - "Praying always with all

prayer and supplication in the Spirit watching unto the same with all perseverance". How condemned some of us may be with the feeling that perhaps some prayers have gone from our spirits and then, as it were, an end. "Hold Thou me up".

Now I would, as enabled, speak of the manner and the great ground and reason of our being held up, and that you will find to be in God. You will find that to be in God; the ground and reason of your being held up. The need of being held up is in yourself; the ground and reason of that is in Himself. The reason in us is weakness. Felt weakness brings a feeling of danger. Now I would - O I wish I might be able - I would honour God by setting before you the ground and reason of our being held up in anything. In doctrine, in grace, in faith, in movement, in temptation, in danger, the sole reason for our not failing, our not coming short, you will find - O the mercy of finding it in your own soul - to be in God. Now take, in the first place, faith, that cardinal grace that keeps the soul secured, but makes it not secure. Take that; whence does this grace come? Who is the Author of it? Jesus. And He is said to be the Finisher of it. So, if we have this grace in our souls, it is a creature - God has created it in us, given it to us. Now a creature is dependent; a creature must have nourishment. As our bodies are dependent on nourishment, so is faith dependent on God and the nourishment of this is what Christ sets forth - His flesh and His blood. Manifestations of God, applications of truth, the inshining of Christ's countenance - these things do, as they are given, nourish faith. David must have had a gracious communication on one occasion when his discouraged, ~~disheartened~~ men, looking on Ziklag in ashes, wept till they had no more power to weep, and they spake of stoning him. And what was his state then? This - "And David encouraged himself in the Lord". O the motions of the Spirit of Christ in that man's heart at that time, lifting his eyes above a smoking city; taking them away from those who had done all the damage; looking away, for the moment, from his lost wives and the wives of all his discouraged men; above devils, above fire, above loss, great loss, everything, and this held him up. His faith was nourished. And you will always find, unless you get some communication from God, when new troubles come, that your faith languishes and is ready to die. Look then, dear friends, for communications from God which are to faith what food is to the body,

nourishing, sustaining, strengthening. They said of old - "Lord increase our faith". Sometimes God's dealings with some of His people bring them into grievous perplexity, and they say - We know not what to do. An army against a little one, and the little one says, I know not what to do. But this he was taught to do - and the same His people are taught to do in their grievous perplexity - "Our eyes are up unto Thee". Who gives the power to do that? Who gives the power in the midst of perplexities and difficulties and discouragements to cast a believing look on the Lord? Why, the Lord Himself, who says - "Look unto Me all ye ends of the earth and be ye saved"; and Who, in the same prophet, Isaiah, says to Jacob - when Jacob had spoken foolishly, saying "My way is hid from the Lord and my judgment is passed over from my God" - "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, hath it not been told thee, that God, the everlasting God fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of His understanding." Look at the stars; these roll along, these shine, not one of them fails. Why? Because that God who is infinite in understanding and power holds them up.

He holds the weak believer up
In the distressing hour

He gives fresh grace or encouragement to faith. His people go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth before God; they dig pools. Troubles come and they stand, and they dig pools and they offer prayer, and wait on God, and then the rain comes down and fills the pools. They are nourished, they are strengthened. Faith does wonders when held up. "Hold Thou me up" Thou Author and Finisher of faith. When faith is strengthened by Christ it gets hold of Christ, and says "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me". "The dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table". You notice what comes to your souls, my believing friends, and you will find that every communication you receive from the Lord Jesus is a strengthening of your faith and a warming of your love, and a brightening of your hope. Well that is one thing. Hold me up in faith; hold me a believer. Make me a believer and keep me a believer. I wonder how many of you Christian people could say this, that you really believe all you believe; that you really have got hold of everything you profess. Probably when you are tried in a way you have

not perhaps been tried, you will say, with Job - "I have uttered that which I understood not". I professed a good deal more than I knew. I talked about a great many things I had no experience of, and now I will hold my peace, and I will put my hand on my mouth; I am vile. O but to have a little faith, to have a little faith, and for that little faith to be strengthened from time to time to look to, lay hold of, Jesus Christ, to walk before God in the new and living way, to cleave to His righteousness, to abide fast by His fountain of infinite merit, this indeed is a great wonder. Well then, may we pray this - "Hold Thou me up"; keep me in the way of faith. Keep me in that good way of faith that will enable me to say to a mountain "Be thou removed and cast into the sea". I do not expect there are many miracle workers here - I wish there were one; "Be thou removed O mountain. Well, but what are you to say? "Who art thou O great mountain, before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain". "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit saith the Lord." Jesus is the Author and Finisher of faith.

Hold Thou me up in the way of prayer and supplication with perseverance, watching unto the same. A very striking word that, in the Ephesians - "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, with all perseverance". Think of it - "With all perseverance". My friends, when you get no answers, what then? When the more you pray the worse the case gets for a time, what then? When you say also - "He shutteth out my prayer, and the Comforter which should relieve my soul is far from me" - what then? And when the Lord seems to put you away from Him instead of attracting you, drawing you, what then? Why, several voices begin to speak in you, and every one of them and all of them together, you will find tending to discouragement. One great man said - "What, should I wait for the Lord any longer?" The discouragement is very great. Of his affliction, Job said - "It increaseth". He got worse and worse, as some of you may feel to do. "It increaseth". And the enemy may say, you had better not go on asking for this, and guilt may say, you cannot expect the Lord to hear you while you are in this condition. Hold Thou me up in prayiny. Keep me at it, Lord; keep me at it.

What when prayer meets no regard

Well, Hart says

Still repeat it often

Not an easy thing to go on and on when there appears to be no hearing and no gracious God smiling, but here we have this prayer, and it is suitable. Hold Thou me up in this path of labouring prayer, praying against wind and tide, against all the voices of discouragement in your own hearts, and all the temptations of the devil. To continue praying is a great thing, but how can this be? What means does the Lord use? What ground is there for us to expect Him to regard us when we are in this condition? Well, He says - "Praying in the Holy Ghost". That meets everything - "Praying in the Holy Ghost". When I was a young man that did trouble me; such a great word, such an infinite word. But what is it to pray in the Holy Ghost? If I rightly understand it, it is this, to be prompted to secret prayer, to be led to lay your case before the Lord, to go as a leper, a bankrupt, a beggar, a destitute person, tempted, troubled, plagued every morning by sin and the devil. To go when you do not get the answers you need and ask for. To go in the face of every discouragement; to go, notwithstanding the long lapse of time at which you have been at this business, seeking for this particular thing; to go, in that case, "Praying in the Holy Ghost". Laying a case bad, with all its implications and complications. "Praying in the Holy Ghost". And this is spoken of by the Apostle Paul in the Romans. Jude says - "Praying in the Holy Ghost". Paul says - "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for the saints with groanings which cannot be uttered". O but we do need this upholding; the Spirit of grace must come from Christ. The unction flows from the Holy One, and we need it. Look at it dear friends, look at it. Do you find you can persevere in prayer? Have you prayed for yourself about a thing and have not yet got it? Prayed for forgiveness, and yet carry your burden of guilt? For a broken heart and yet feel a hard heart? For a revelation of Christ and yet have not received one? Is this the condition? Well, may the Lord hold you up in it. "Hold Thou me up". Hold me up in this great business of praying.

There is another thing that I would name to you, that is hope,

that beautiful, that buoyant grace, that always is aspiring, looking out and expecting. But there are many discouragements. You will find the Psalmist in an early Psalm expostulating with his own soul. He was discouraged; he had gone very frequently with the multitude of his fellow countrymen into the courts of the Lord, but now he was in a discouraged condition. He said - "O God my soul is cast down within me". An honest confession - "My soul is cast down within me". He must have had some gracious communication at that moment, from heaven. He must have received some intimation, some touch of the Lord's gracious power, for he says - "Why art thou cast down O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me. Hope thou in God". Plenty of reasons in himself he could have found for this discouraged condition of mind, but his faith, by the Spirit's power, directed him to the Lord - "Hope thou in God". The reason for hope was there; the great object of hope was in the God of hope. So, thus lead, he expostulated with his soul, as if he would say - Oh silly soul, Oh silly dove without heart, why cast down? "Hope thou in God". Look to Him, to a full Christ, to a perfect atonement for a perfectly lost sinner. Look to the power of the Lord, look to the blood of Christ; hope in Him. And so he was held up and his faith said - "I shall yet praise the Lord". He got a victory, a real, blessed victory - "I shall yet praise Him". He got it in the hand of his faith. It was not at present enjoyed, but he looked for it, he expected it - "I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance and my God". He was held up. Keep, as God may help you - and may He help me to keep it before you - keep before you the great ground and reason of every good thing - God Himself.

And now one more word on this point. Hold Thou me up in my love. Love in the soul for God is the first fruit of God's love for the soul. Love from Him begets love to Him, and very sweet it is to feel it, but you will find this, the more you love the Lord, the greater will be some of the difficulties that will come in the way of continuing in it - "Continue ye in my love" says the Lord; continue in it. Well, but if you get put into prison? Said Christ - Satan shall put some of you into prison; you shall have tribulation. John was cast into prison and apparently he got no message from the Lord for a time; he had no bright inshining for a time; he was left in the hand of his enemy, Herod. And at last he could stand it no longer; it was too much for

him, this silence, this absence of his Lord. So he sent two of his disciples to the Lord Jesus, and you know the account you have there and the answer the Lord Jesus sent to John - Go tell him what things you have seen and heard, and then say this - and this is what I have before me at the moment - "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me". Prison is an offence, the cross is an offence, troubles are an offence - in themselves, not only discouraging, but offending - and they turn to an offence against the Lord, and the testimony is very solemn, as if it should be said in the heart - Why He cares nothing about you. As they said to Him on another occasion, His disciples, - "Master carest Thou not that we perish?" Your prison may say, He does not care for you. Chains may say, He does not care for you. Storms may say it. Now, said the Lord, he is a blessed man who can stand all this, live through the storm, live through the offence, cleave to Me when everything is to the contrary. How can this be? "Hold Thou me up". And the way, the means of being held up, is by the love of God being shed abroad by new visits, by gracious communications; something fresh from heaven, a new life, as it were, poured upon your languid soul; a new light let into your dark mind; a new love flowing in, so that the offence leaves you and you say

I love the Lord with mind and heart

This is being held up.

Now take our profession, our profession of God. It is a great thing to profess Him. We profess the Trinity. I trust that we are true Trinitarians, that by faith some of us have seen the Lord the Father, the Lord the Son, the Lord the Holy Ghost, and by faith have worshipped this Three One God. And we believe in and profess the incarnation of the Eternal Son of God. We believe in and profess the blessed atonement, the perfect death that Jesus died voluntarily, and we believe in and profess His resurrection and ascension into heaven. Well, but suppose these great doctrines have, for a time, no power, no life in our souls. We say we hold these things but we feel no life from them in our souls. We can enter then into the prayer of one who said

Dry doctrine cannot save us,
Blind zeal or false devotion

How are you to hold it fast? Suppose one comes against you and argues against the doctrines of grace, this prayer then becomes the prayer of a soul thus tried - Lord do not let me give up these things. As I have, I trust, felt their power, help me to hold fast to them. Do not let me give them up as mere opinions, but hold them as true doctrines, as being revealed by the Spirit in the Scriptures and by the same Spirit in my soul. They will never be fashionable, they will never be beloved in this world. God only knows whether we are rapidly approaching a solemn day of trial when to hold fast our profession to the end without wavering will be a wonderful thing. The Psalmist may have said, well, I have so often been up to the sanctuary, I have gone with a hard heart, and I have gone home with a hard heart. I believe the Lord has commanded these sacrifices but I get no efficacy from them. I get no view of that glorious Lord who is promised and prophesied and typified in them, and then the enemy says, well give them up. And some of you may say, here we are, we come week after week, service after service. We approve, as we think, what we hear, but get no power, no life, no influence. And that discourages you; and as I know that some of you are in that state and have been in that state, I am discouraged often when I think of you, and the old enemy may say, well you better give it all up, preach no more, hear no more. "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me" but hold fast that doctrine of salvation, without which no human being can be saved from the wrath to come. Hold fast the doctrine of Christ, of His death, of His resurrection, for without Him, without that death, without that resurrection there can be no salvation. But I am weak - here is a prayer for a weak man. "Hold Thou me up". Lord, do not let me give these truths up; keep me holding them; may I remember what is written. "That which thou already hast, hold fast". This blessed Book - all that it reveals is true - hold fast.

Hold me on the way and in the way till I reach heaven. My friends heaven is before us - I believe some of us must go to heaven - but the difficulties are very many. I do beg of God to keep me, to keep me from falling foully before men, lest I bring a disgrace upon the doctrines I preach, the profession I make. I remember reading, when I was a young man and had just commenced speaking in God's Name, a sermon by Abraham Booth, preached at the end of the eighteenth century, and in the sermon he said, though I have known something of

the Lord for over 40 years and have borne the burden and heat of the ministry for over 25 years, I fear that if I were left, I could do that in one hour which should blast my character and make my friends ashamed that they had ever known me. Now I believe him. It is more than 50 years since I read that and I have never forgotten it entirely. We need to be held up in the profession we make, in the distinction there is between us and the world. Lord hold me up. May He hold us up as professing the gospel of the grace of God.

Then he said, "I shall be safe". Safety is of the Lord. You will get through if God holds you up. Safety on earth - safety, the safety of faith, hope, love, prayer, perseverance to the end - all, all this safety is of the Lord. Here is a man disposed to fall, tempted to fall, with a falling nature. Here is the devil tempting him, setting snares for his feet, and here is a careless heart, again and again gadding after some vanity. What is to keep him? Only the power of God, as Peter says - "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time". Now I hope and believe that this prayer suits a number of you, and may we be enabled to go on praying it, laying our cases in all their helplessness before the Lord that we, though feeble, as feeble as sin can make us, as perplexed as the devil can make us sometimes, may hold on to the end and at the end cry - "Victory through the blood of the Lamb".

AMEN.