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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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PSALM 146 v 5

"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his
help, whose hope is in the Lord his God"

This gracious word is suitable for people who, taught of the Spirit their own helplessness, have no helper, no help in self, and who are afraid with amazement at times lest they should be left to lean on an arm of flesh. When your own strength is gone you will be fitted for this word. It may belong to you, it may have been given to you in Christ before the world began, but it will fit you when you are helpless, when you can say with Berridge

No help in self I find
And yet have sought it well

Every child of God is like the mariners in that ship that was to be broken to pieces. They cast out everything before the wheat. Last of all they cast out the wheat; they kept that as long as they could for that, so to speak, was their life. You will keep your own strength as long as you can. You will part with it reluctantly, except in those moments when you get the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ shining into your hearts. And then you will find that, when the Lord seeth that your strength is gone, that there is none shut up nor any left for you, He will pity your misery and helplessness and save you. Everyone taught of God knows that it is the wilderness and the solitary place that shall be glad to see the glory of the Lord. Everyone shall find, as God teaches and favours him, that he is like a drowning man; he must have someone to come to his rescue and deliver him. But that is easier said than learned; it is slowly learned, and through pride we are ready to forget it. Hence the Lord, as it were, is continually teaching us that we are helpless. And we have before us in this Psalm an exhortation to praise, an exhortation to one's self, to praise the Lord. "Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have

any being". A resolution that is found in every soul that gets a manifestation of God in Christ and some measure of assurance that it is well with him. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish". Therefore, put no trust in him. But, on the contrary, here is that great God who may be trusted and who is trusted by all who are taught by His good Spirit, and he is a happy man who is brought to trust in this God. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God". Now God has taken a good deal of pains with some of us to empty us and to fit us for this word. The nearer you are to self-despair, the welcomer to you will be this truth as it is spoken home, as it is opened and applied by the Spirit. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help".

We will look a little, first, as enabled by the Holy Ghost, at this great One who is called the God of Jacob. Jacob went from his home, a deceiver, a liar, and fled from the danger of his injured brother who was angry and determined to slay him. He laid himself down on the night, it would seem the first night, of his journey to Padan-aram, on the ground, and had for his pillow a stone. We have no intimation in the Scripture account of him that up to that time he feared God. Clearly if he did he came under the power of a terrible temptation and deceived his blind father and lied to him. But on that night - O what an eventful night it was to Jacob - God appeared to him, dealt remarkably with him, caused him to see a ladder whose top was in heaven, and whose bottom reached the earth, and there seems no stretch of imagination or fancy to say that the bottom came to where Jacob was. He then saw a means of communication, inter-communication; angels descending and ascending, and he, a poor wretched, miserable fugitive from his home, because of his sin, heard the voice of God, had a promise spoken on his heart, was told that this God, now speaking to him, would go with him in all places whithersoever he went, that He would not leave him nor forsake him until He had performed all that He was then saying to him. This is the God of Jacob; a God who promised a sinner to bless him, to guide him, to defend him, to help him. This is the God of Jacob; that is to say, a God of surprising grace, of surprising love, of love that came to a worthless sinner, love that came to one who knew it not previously, as

we may say. Love that was not baulked, turned aside, nor stumbled at the sin which had made a fugitive of this object of it - Jacob. Grace that was to superabound over the aboundings of sin. Mercy that came to him in his misery and made that ground probably the safest bed that ever Jacob reposed in, and that stone, for his pillow, as a downy pillow. O, it was wonderful. And this exhibits the goodness, the surprising love and mercy of a Covenant God, whom nothing can turn from His purpose to save a sinner; who saves His people from their sins, but who finds them in their sins. "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins". You will not live in sin after God has met with you, but you will never be met with in any other state than that of a sinner. The first coming finds a sinner dead. Subsequent visits find the people to whom God came as a quickening Spirit, still sinners; sinners in whom He may magnify His grace and love and blood. Sinners to whom He makes Himself known and welcome. God undertook for Jacob; pledged Himself to Jacob. Pledged His guiding hand, His protecting power, His providing goodness to Jacob. My dear friends, the goodness, the grace, the love and the condescension of God are here exhibited; may they come into our hearts. Jacob's God is a surprising God, a loving God, a Covenant God, a bountiful God, and God only wise. And as such a God He spoke to His servant Jacob.

Twenty years afterwards - not to speak of the intervening days of trouble, of consuming heat, of nipping frost, of deceitful dealings on the part of Laban; I say, not to speak of these days - twenty years later or so, the same God spake to Jacob again and told him to go home, go to his father's house, saying: I will be with thee. This gave Jacob another turn and another start. He started home. Rachel took her father's gods, and that brought Laban after Jacob, and you remember what happened there. Jacob went on his way and he sent messengers to pacify Esau to appraise him of his returning, and the messengers came back and said: Esau cometh to meet thee, and he has 400 men with him. And you would expect that memory, and enmity, and revenge in the heart of Esau made him arm these 400 men, and they went to meet Jacob. And Jacob, hearing this news, was greatly disturbed, greatly troubled. He looked at himself: O, conscience I expect became very lively and spoke very loudly to him. He remembered the past; he feared the present. He remembered what he had done; he

feared what Esau was coming to do. He put all his matters in order and when this was done then, being left alone, God came to him. The same God who had before spoken to him and pledged himself to be his God, that God came again to Jacob and began to wrestle with Jacob; that is the order of it. Then Jacob got hold of this God in human form, or the form of an angel, and they wrestled. A mighty wrestling that was; all the night it continued. When the day began to break, then the angel said "Let me go for the day breaketh". And Jacob had strength in his heart from the wrestling of the man with him, the angel, so that he said "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me", and God blessed him there. "And He blessed him there", it is said. This is the God of Jacob. Faithful to His Word, He was bringing him home. The God of Jacob had enriched him; "With my staff", said he, Jacob, "I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands". He professed, out of a feeling heart, his unworthiness. "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant". The mercy that came to him first when he was lying on the ground, so many years ago, and the truth that had continued with him in all these years of trouble and change. I am not worthy of the least of all of them, but Thou hast brought me thus far, and Thou has said to me: Return to thy father's house, and I will be with thee. Thou did'st say it; now Lord, deliver me from the hand of Esau, from the hand of my brother, for I am afraid of him, lest he should slay the mother and the little ones. And you know what Jacob's God did then. When Esau came with his 400 men, no sword glittered in the sun. Esau's face shined and smiled and beamed and Esau fell on Jacob's neck and kissed him. That was the God of Jacob. Jacob's God, once more with him in manifestation, speaking to him, changing his name from Jacob to Israel, changing his name in order to express that Jacob had become His prince, having power with God and with man and prevailing. What more shall I say? Go through all the history of Israel and see what God did. Sent Israel into Egypt; kept him there 430 years; brought him with a mighty hand and outstretched arm out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt. Brought him through the wilderness into the goodly land; established him there. There fought his battles, there delivered him, there chastised him, there lighted a fire around him to burn him for his sins; restored him again, brought him home after the 70 years captivity. Did all these things for him; said again and again "Fear not". Now this God is the God we

adore. This God is the God I would preach to you for a short time this evening, saying, with the text, "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God". Happy in his estate. No matter what tribulations he may experience, what changes he may go through, what trouble may rest on him, what chastening may come to him, he is happy in his estate, one with his God, loved by his God, led by his God, defended, protected, provided for, brought honourably through by his God. This is the God of Jacob. Is he not a happy man, no matter how sinful he feels, how wretched he may be in his circumstances, how troubled he may be by sin and tempted by Satan? Is not he happy who has this God for his God, in his estate? What can be compared, what can be better, what more blessed, what more secure than this estate, secured to the man by his God, kept for him by His God? "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help" in his feelings, his experience at times. There is an experience in the church of God. God does give His people blessings; He does visit sinners, reveal Himself to them and give them the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ, and then they can say, do say, "This God is our God for ever and ever, He will be our Guide even unto death".

Let us look a little at the help that is here spoken of. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help", to help him. It is a great thing to be needing help, such help as only God can afford. In these particulars which follow, God does help His people. First, He helps them to believe. "Lord, I believe" said one poor creature, "help Thou mine unbelief". He does help them to believe. Faith is fixed in heaven; faith receives mysteries incomprehensible to nature. Faith looks to that infinite One who is incarnate, wearing our own nature. Faith looks here, and when doubts come, they do; when the devil tempts, and he does; when it seems hopeless because you are truly helpless; when it seems as if you must say - "What, should I wait for the Lord any longer? The Comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me" - then, that God you will find to have been watching over you and to be near you to help you. Or, as Hezekiah found and expressed it, "The Lord was ready to save me". He helps you to believe, to credit contradictions, talk with Him you never see with your bodily eye; to depend on His fulness, to look to Him for the fulfilment of His promise. Helps you sometimes to put Him in

remembrance, as He says. "Put Me in remembrance". Helps you to remind Him of what He said to you, as Jacob did - Thou did'st say. Thou did'st tell me to go to my father's house, and did'st promise to be with me. Lord, there comes now a grievous intervention, an intervening trouble, an imminent danger, what seems to me inevitable destruction, but do remember Thy holy promise. Do you know what this is? If you escape trouble, you will escape this need of help, but if you are in trouble, you will need this promised, this blessed help. "I will help thee" saith He, and He will help you to believe; to believe when there appears to be nothing to believe; to believe when providence shall seem to contradict everything that you have experienced, and every hope you have felt; to believe when God hides Himself and when there is no sensible support in your heart, when your faith seems to have nothing in the whole of creation on which it can depend for a minute. When the devil roars perhaps in your heart, saying - There is no help in God for him. When sins rise, when memory goes back to innumerable and dreadful sins that you have done, then, then to credit God; then, then to cleave to Christ; then to believe that He will bring you through; not to give up, not to yield, not to flee, not to leave the field of battle; then to hold fast to a crucified Saviour. To do this, you need what Paul speaks of, the faith that stands, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. And, O, how happy is he that gets this help, so that his faith, though battered, is not daunted. So that this faith shall be strengthened, like, as in Bunyan you have it, when Apollyon was about to overcome and slay poor pilgrim. Suddenly the pilgrim had strength given to him to stretch forth his hand and take again his sword which had been knocked out of his hand. Or, when he was in Doubting Castle, he suddenly remembered that he had in his very bosom that that would unlock any door of any Doubting Castle. This was the help faith got, and we have had it, some of us. Blessed be God He has given it to us at times. It is many years since I, in a low condition of health and a low state of mind, threw myself, one day, on a couch, and said "I shall rise no more", when God spoke this to me and sent it as the arrow of His deliverance into my soul - "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help", and the word in the conclusion of the 6th verse was especially sweet and powerful - "Which keepeth truth for ever". And when the Lord strengthens your faith, you will perceive yourself remembering the truth God has spoken to you, the promises He has

applied to you, the views He has given to you of Himself, of His glories, of His atonement, of His mercy to you. And remembering these things, you will say to Him - Lord, Thou wilt keep this for me, and this, and this and this. Thou wilt keep this promise for me and fulfil it in me. O happy man whose faith is sustained by his God, the God of Jacob. Happy he who, though his faith fail as to its acting for the moment, has a dear Saviour to pray for him that his faith fail not.

Now beloved friends, see if you get this help, help to your faith, a prop to your faith, a new impulse in your faith by some view of Christ, or some touch of love, or some gracious word spoken, repeated in your heart by the Holy Spirit, so that you can look nature in the face and say, I am above you. You can look trouble in the face and say, you will not overcome me. You can look sin in the face and say, I shall be made an overcomer. You can face Satan and resist him and he will flee from you. Happy is the man who gets this faith of his so strengthened by the God who created it in him, by the God who is the proper object and end of it, by the God who has spoken to him, and He will never let it fail. "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not".

Following this, in the second place, we may say: "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help" in the great, the important, the vital, blessed matter of prayer. You may get something to pull you to pieces and nature will say, I will bear it as well as I can. A proud heart begins to philosophise and say, other people have trouble, why should not I have trouble. You may begin to feel your nature stiffening itself - I won't give way here - but, as you belong to God He will take that spirit away from you. He will let you see that it is despising His chastening. But if, on the other hand, you say, I shall never rise, never come out of this, He will teach you that that is fainting when you are rebuked of Him. Then His good Spirit will come and breathe upon you, and influence you, and waft you on His own heavenly wings of grace to the throne of grace, and open your heart, if not your mouth, and make groanings within you that you cannot utter, but you will find a sacred and strangely sweet liberty in your trouble at the throne of God's grace. Find yourself pouring it out there and you are not repelled, not shut up. The most patient friend

might soon begin to weary as you continue telling out your woes into his ear, but this God of Jacob comes and He says: "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it". "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me".

Thou art coming to a King

one beautifully writes

Large petitions with thee bring,
For His grace and power are such
None can ever ask too much

O, when we pray like that, the thing is done, and the day is coming when each person, so praying, will say "Blessed be the Lord which hath not turned away my prayer nor His mercy from me". Mark this, dear friends, you who pray in the Spirit, mark the influence that comes to you, the direction that that influence takes you in, the God it moves you to, the opening of your mind in prayer, the enlargement of your desires, the growth, to your own astonishment, of your petitions, the boldness that comes into your mind, enabling you to answer to that - "Come boldly to the throne of grace". O, the beauty of this throne. Who is this blessed throne, but that blessed One, of whom we read, "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our Sanctuary". This blessed One, who is our Sanctuary, the temple, the true Tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man. Well, it is a great thing to be helped in prayer, when any trouble, so to speak, daunts you, when you can commit your case and your way to Him, when every sorrow is poured out before Him, and all humble requests are, with some confidence, laid before Him, preferred by faith. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help" in prayer.

"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help" with respect to an unfeigned submission to the will of God. When things go well with us, submission is not required. That is to say, when we have what we want, or when there is no pressing sorrow, submission is not called for. But, when the contrary is the case, when God shuts out, apparently, your prayer, or sends you some pressing, all but crushing, burden, some piercing sorrow, some exceeding keen grief,

and when you cannot get rid of that which He has sent, though you often would naturally, O, what a mercy it is to say - "Thy will be done". We know the rebellion; that is natural. Do we know the submission? We know the sin of rebellion, that it is as the sin of witchcraft. Do we know the blessed power that enables us to give up the will that we have so strongly working in us, and to say "Not as I will but as Thou wilt". O, this takes away the fierceness of the flame, the greatest part of the weight of the burden. It is great to submit to God. I think that I can say from some little experience, that it is one of the most cheering graces of the Spirit that you can have in tribulation, when you feel, not destitute of a will, but feel that the strong will you have is powerfully bent, subdued. Not broken, but just powerfully subdued by grace, so that you can make a covenant with the Lord by sacrifice, and the sacrifice that you have to make before Him is that of your will; your own will given up and His will made your choice, your delight even. This does not come by chance. It is not the work of nature; it is the effect of the mighty operation of the Holy Ghost. O, the blessedness of choosing God's will, to sit, like Mary, at the feet of the dear Redeemer, and to be, in your own feelings, like a piece of plastic clay in the hand of a wise potter. He will never break the vessel on the wheel; He will never let it be marred in His hand; but He will graciously carry on the good work, working that holy submission to His will which is pleasing in His sight. In these things the Lord shows Himself very gracious and very mighty and very wonderful.

"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help" in the hour of temptation. We do need God to rebuke the tempter my friends. "The Lord shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly". In Isaiah, you have a lofty city trodden down, brought to the ground, even to the dust. And then you have the foot of the poor, the steps of the needy, treading down that lofty city. What a wonder! The Lord Jesus said "I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven". He saw the enemy overcome, the prince of the power of the air spoiled. He saw him now as a captive, and that very Saviour who overcame and destroyed death and him that had the power of death, that is the devil, that same Saviour has given to worms that victory which He obtained for them.

Christ who conquered for us once
Shall in us conquer too

And here a worm stands and resists the devil and the devil flees from him. Here a vile sinner, who naturally would close in with every vile temptation of the devil, resists and hates these suggestions that come to his mind, those blasphemies. O, dear friends, what a great thing it is to be helped in the hour of temptation; to be preserved from becoming a prey to that roaring lion who seeks whom he may devour. Happy he who overcomes by the blood of the Lamb and by the Word of His testimony; by God darting into his soul a strengthening word, so that he "withstands in the evil day, and having done all, to stand"; gives the sinner the whole armour of God, the armour of righteousness to fortify him, the armour of light to instruct and surround him, and the sword of the Spirit which he may wield and the weapon of all prayer so that, as it is written, he may "withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand."

Now the happiness consists of these things. First, the sinner's interest in God. He has an interest in God, a real, an abiding, an intimate interest. He has obtained, in his dear Redeemer and Saviour, an inheritance. "In whom we have obtained an inheritance" Is not that happy? The worldly man may count his thousands, and if he is a naturally wise man he will say, I must leave them; then he may blaspheme. He knows naturally that there is a full-stop to be put to his life, and then also to the enjoyment of all he possesses, and to the possession itself; he knows that. But the Christian says sometimes

No fatal shipwreck shall I fear
But all my treasures with me bear

His treasure is here in his heart; his treasure is in heaven; the same treasure - "Christ in you the hope of glory". Christ in heaven watching over you, interested in you, caring for you, providing for you, sustaining you, guiding you, protecting you, and doing you good with all His heart and all His soul. The sinner has an interest in God; it is unloseable, inalienable. Durable riches and righteousness are Christs and He says He will fill the treasures of His people therewith. He is happy then, having an interest in God; that is his good estate. He is happy in the next place as possessing eternal life. "I give unto My sheep eternal life and they shall never

perish". He breathes this life into their souls by the Spirit of regeneration and it never dies out. It is languishing sometimes, apparently very low, but Christ pours new life upon it; the sinner revives. "Thou renewest the face of the earth". When you get reviving then you know a little more of this life. When some word is spoken home to you and abides with you, then you know a little more of this life, and you begin to believe and hope that it is eternal life, and you believe on Him that you may have life. They are happy in this, that on occasions the Lord visits them. He visits them; He does not leave them alone always and altogether. "I will see you again". If you can read, as being your own experience, that word "again", how happy you are. It means that He has already seen you. It means that His next coming won't be the first. O, to think that the Lord should come and visit sinners, vile sinners who experience the power of sin, then experience the power of Christ's goodness and love. "I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice". It is part of our experience here to have sorrow, but also it is a part of our experience to have the joy. Look for Him; O, look for Him. Did you ever see Him, by faith, on the cross? What a sight. Did you ever feel Him by faith in your heart? What a feeling. Did you ever perceive His holy and mysterious approach to you, creating sensations, expectations, drawing your eyes toward heaven, from whence He is to come with new tokens and evidences and blessings to your soul? How happy you have been; how happy you are.

He is happy also in the occasional victories he gets. One victory is this

Begone unbelief, my Saviour is near
And for my relief will surely appear

O, it is a victory, when you can say

With Christ in the vessel
I smile at the storm

When you can say to Satan, I shall not perish by you. When you can say to Satan "I will bear the indignation of the Lord for I have sinned against Him", and, though your accusations are true, I have an

Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. And O, how happy, when some day you see Satan fall as lightning from heaven, fall from your own spirit and his influence dies; he leaves you for a season as he left your once tempted Master and Lord.

And he is a happy man who has the God of Jacob for his help in his prospect sometimes. Why, some of us have had a good prospect, a bright prospect set before us and though we may lose sight of it again and again, and do, yet He who gave it will renew it. I have had a bright prospect before me sometimes, O, such a prospect. When you get on Pisgah's Mount and see the goodly land, what a prospect. The Trinity in love, the Trinity uniting to save you, the Trinity blessing you, the Scriptures speaking friendly to you, the Holy Ghost touching you, the Lord Jesus smiling on you, the Father receiving you. I do not say it is all in a moment, or at one time, but here I put these things together as being the wondrous prospect which now and again the Holy Ghost gives to a sinner. And is not he happy? O, he does not want to live always when this is his experience. He has a good prospect.

Lastly, and briefly, "Whose hope is in the Lord his God". Ah a good many people write their hopes on the sand, the sea-shore, and the next incoming tide washes all out and they are left. Despair and hell swallow up many people, swallow up many peoples. But not so the Lord's people; they have an Object for their hope - the eternal God - and they have a hope in their souls which is a subjective hope, a sweet hope in that great Object, a sweet grace moving to that good God, and they say to all enemies, hinder me not, I shall get through you all. God won't leave one whose hope is fixed on Himself. Death, despair, fear, which hath torment, and a threatened hell cannot at the moment discourage, for faith says, all is well, and hope says, I build on Him who created heaven and earth; I build on Him who is incarnate in my own nature, on Him who shed His precious blood and poured out His soul unto death. On Him who came to me when I did not want Him, and quickened me when I was dead; has taught me my ruin and teaches me continually; on Him who has passed over His word of promise to me to help me and bless me and bring me through. The Trinity is the God of Jacob; the Trinity is the God of some people here, and O, how happy are such, as having this God for their help in

times of trouble, their help in every hour of need, and their hope until they reach eternity and shall no longer need hope. The Lord give us to know and experience this.

AMEN.