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Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham  
on Sunday morning, 2nd. January 1927

Text: Psalm 17 v. 5

"Hold up my goings in Thy paths,  
that my footsteps slip not."

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I suppose that there are various feelings in the minds of all of us this morning, and perhaps particularly with some, there may be two burdens. A burden of thankfulness, - certainly we owe thanks to God. His longsuffering, His forbearance, His mercies, the benefits with which He has loaded us in the year just expired; "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." If He had done so, we should not be here this morning. We owe Him thanks, all of us, for providential mercies. We have had bread to eat and raiment to put on; we have had, and have, many friends, indulgent, kind and patient; houses full of mercies, blessings in our families. What can parents say sufficient, to God, in a way of thanking Him if children have been kept in moral ways; kept from open atheism and kept with, more or less, attention to the Word of God and public worship? And we owe God thanks for His goodness to the nation. We are part of the nation, and He has been very merciful to us in so far as the avowed designs of wicked men have not been permitted to be carried into effect. This is of God's mercy and we ought, as part of this nation, to acknowledge thankfully and humbly, - for we deserve wrath to the uttermost, - the goodness of God in thwarting the designs of those wicked men who are avowed revolutionists. Let us, may God help us to, go on praying that they may not <sup>pre</sup>avail; though for the moment defeated, they still follow their object. Remember, the Apostle, by the Holy Ghost, said by Timothy, that he would that prayer should "be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." Do not forget our nation when you kneel before God; do not forget the exhortation that the Holy Ghost has addressed to the people of God, to pray for all men, for kings and for all that are in authority. The way of government, of God's government, in the world, is by means, - means used by Him. Authority, the powers that be, are of God, and may we be subject to those powers and pray that respectful authority may be maintained

in the land. It is a great mercy, that we are as we are, in the face of all the opposition to order and law, and purity. You may not be fully aware of things, or very much aware, but it is a truth that this wicked people design the overthrow of all order; their avowed intention is destruction of all religion. Another declaration is, they are to destroy all family life. These are not my imagination but the avowed and printed declaration of these revolutionists, therefore, may we, as a congregation, part of the nation, pray that God would, of His great mercy, preserve us from the hands of such men. You young people may live to see, what some of us who are older may not see, God only knows, but I do often tremble for you as I think of you; think of your youth, and I think that if you have not the fear of God, you may be carried away and swallowed up in the whirlpool, and if you fear Him you will have plenty of sorrow; better things are not coming till worse things are come. The revival of God's power and glory in the nation will follow the destruction of much that we value now, and especial evil will come, beginning at the church of God. Therefore, remember this and do try, my beloved friends, to remember your mercies. Ask the Lord, in the language of David when thanking God for His goodness to Israel, 'O Lord', he said, 'keep this in the memory of Thy people.' (Ps. 145 v. 7). Now do try to keep His goodness to you, in your memory, that you may be thankful. Well, that is the first thing; gratitude becomes us. And the other burden with some of us, in our hearts, is the burden of prayer. We do not know what is coming; we know not what a day may bring forth; what trouble may come to our persons; what afflictions may come on our families; what persecutions or troubles may come to the church; we do not know, nor is it needful that we should see. May we not try to pry into what God hides from us; to believe that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof; but this mercy, this privilege, we have as we may be led by the Holy Ghost, to call upon the name of the Lord. Call upon the name of the Lord, - "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Now this is given to us, to pray to God who hears prayer, to seek His face, and this burden upon the hearts of some of us may find expression in the text; it is personal and that is what all the people of God come to feel in the first place, a personal need, they need God for themselves. Yes, Noah saw destruction coming and was enabled by faith to fear the Lord and build an ark to the saving of his house; so you may find this personal part very much in your own soul, I hope you will.

"Hold up my goings in Thy paths." We shall, as Hart says, enter heaven by prayer. If we had more prayer, what a blessing it would be for us. Call upon the name of the Lord in all matters. Prayer is decreed, ordained; the Lord has ordered it so; He could give, if it were His will, everything we need, without our asking, but He has said in the covenant, "I will yet for this thing be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." David was in trouble; David when anointed king over Israel had Saul, the then king, his enemy, and the more God was with David, the more Saul persecuted him. He cries in this psalm, "Hear justice," as the marginal reading is, "hear justice O Lord." When you have a case, take it to God, whatever it is; the devil, as an enemy, take him to God, and say, "Hear justice Lord," - 'I do not fall in with all his vile temptations, but I am plagued, wounded, hindered, crippled, hurt by him' - "Hear the right, O Lord, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips." If you have got a real case for God, your cry will not be out of feigned lips. It is a mercy, that two things meet in the Lord's people: one is the throne of grace, and the other is their visits to it. Afflictions, make errands to God, and He says, 'Come to the mercy seat and there will I commune with thee.' Vital religion has this in it at times: the meeting of a sinner with God; God coming to the sinner. Ah, it is a great thing to know that; to get the Lord's presence, to get His ear; to find that He bows down His ear to hear you and gives you the privilege and the relief and the comfort of letting you know that He bows down His ear to hear you.

"Pray, if thou canst or canst not speak;  
But pray with faith in Jesus' name."

Happy the man who can pray. Happy soul who is caused to approach unto God, as it is written in the psalms, "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee." Think of it..... A worm approaching the "I AM THAT I AM." To approach Him as He is, - incarnate. It is a wonderful mercy: to have prayer in your soul, and to feel that when you cry and shout, He does not shut out your prayer. Sometimes you feel that as Jeremiah did, "Also when I cry and shout, He shutteth out my prayer," but sometimes it is otherwise. He lets you know that His eye is open and His ear attent unto the prayer you make to Him, in and by Jesus Christ, His Son; and the man wanted the decision of his case to come from God, "Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence; let Thine eyes behold

the things that are equal," - or, just and right. When men decide their own cases, there is grave probability that the decision is unjust; when God decides the case for His children, the absolute truth is this: the justification is just. Then what a favour, if you get God's sentence in two places. Doubtless David got that sentence in two places. First in his soul, his conscience. Oh what a mercy to be straight with God in secret. What a mercy to be honest in the sight of God in your matters. You will have plenty of sin to confess, but in any particular matter, it is a great mercy to be straight, honest, in the sight of God; then when you get the sentence of God, it may be a smile, a sweet smile; may be a gracious word; may be a visit of love; an inshining of Christ's face. Whatever it is, the sentence will give you true happiness and contentment and patience to wait God's time.

The second place is your circumstances; when the Lord turns your captivity in some way, and in some way, as it were, says to you - 'This is pleasing to Me; I have seen your ways, I am pleased with you in this matter,' and He establishes you in His holy fear. Watch the operation of His hand. Men are destroyed who do not so. Watch the operation of His hand and you will have many an entertainment; many a sacred hour, and many a sweet feeling because the Lord is at your right hand and He will not let you be moved. David was tried; he was put to the test in things. "Thou hast proved mine heart; Thou hast visited me in the night." Sometimes His visits are very solemn, to convince us of our sins, and some sins in particular, but sometimes they are sweet, when He smiles, when He says in effect, "I love thee well My child." "Thou art all fair, --- there is no spot in Thee." If our ways be in Christ, we shall find a smile of God. Paul speaks of his ways which were in Christ. If you walk in Christ you will find God's smiles. If you walk in the Spirit, you will walk well, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God." And he was delivered from the works of men. "Concerning the works of men, by the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer." God's warning, anointing, leading, teaching him in his own soul, had kept him from the devious ways of men. Think of it, - the works of men were not allowed to prevail in him. All concerning these works he was enabled to keep clear and clean. That was not by his own power; not by his own goodness; not by his own integrity, but by the words of God. Scriptures, speaking to the people of God, do keep them;

the fear of the Lord is called into exercise, and men by that, are preserved. Concerning the works of men, we are kept from them by the words of God, and the paths of the destroyer we are preserved from walking in, and then comes the text: "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not."

Here are several points which call for attention, the first is: the Lord's paths, - what are they? And the second is: "Hold up my goings in Thy paths." David was walking in the paths allotted to him. And the third is: the effect, the desire which he had in this petition, "that my footsteps," - never safe, never steady in himself, - "slip not." 'Lord do keep me, hold me by my right hand. Keep my faltering steps from going astray; let me not slip and wander out of the way of understanding.' It would be a good beginning for us for this year if we, as a congregation, and those of our brethren who are absent through affliction, should be enabled to see, in the light of the Spirit, what these paths are. There are ways in the Scriptures spoken of as "not cast up," - the paths of the destroyer; ways of wickedness, ways of unbelief, of carnal reason, ways of men, walking as carnal men and these are on all hands like by-path meadow enticing pilgrims thus, - have something in them which is attractive to fallen human nature, - and between all these, there is a narrow way and yet, to all those in it, it is broad, for there is plenty of room; it is narrow in respect of our nature, our ignorance, our prejudice, our pride, our carnal reason, for these are all disallowed. It is very likely that some here, although they are not in that way, as they would confess, although they may see it to be a very straight and difficult way, and their enmity may come up sometimes against it, they may say, 'we believe it is right, there is something in this way that even one may admire, although at the same moment hate.' This is a good way. It is God's way, and everybody walking in it, is influenced in the fear of the Lord. It is a good way. Let us look at it. Here, it is spoken of as paths, because David had many changes; many difficulties and afflictions; these to him were so many paths, and he was in danger in every one of them, to his own sense. Now the first thing is this to notice, that the paths are God's paths. God's paths, not man's. There is a path that seemeth right unto a man. Yes, the way that appears to be quite right. Do what good you can; be an upright person; be moral, and that is alright, but, says the Word, - the end is death. The end is death. It is not God's way of salvation.

"This is the way, walk ye in it." What way? Why, first of all, faith in Jesus Christ; that is the way. First of all, faith in Jesus Christ. This is the cast up way, and whoever walks in this way, is walking to heaven. Difficulties will arise, dangers will surround, fears will trouble and perplex, but the way is straight; straight from earth to heaven; straight from sin to holiness; straight from emptiness to fulness; straight to God. Mind this, - look at the way you are walking in. Does it lead you to God? Does it lead you to desire justification, to desire sanctification, to desire the presence of God in your soul? If so, then this is one of the paths you are to walk in, whatever nature, devil, circumstances and enticing men may say and suggest to the contrary. Do, as God helps you, cleave to this way. This is the way of God, the way of faith. - I am come a Light unto the world, that whosoever believeth in Me, should not walk in darkness but have the light of life. This Light is Christ. - "I am the Light of the world." This light is from heaven. No man lighteth it. As the fire on the altar was kindled from heaven, - typical of divine justice seizing upon the victim, - so the Light that Jesus Christ is, is from heaven, and it will show you the way to heaven. If you see Him, you will see the way to heaven. The walk of faith is a straight walk and it walks straight to God. Mind that, my friends, and do we not need holding up in this path? Whoever has faith, is troubled with unbelief; whoever has God in his view will have an old man trying to bewitch him and turn his eyes another way. Whoever believes in the Lord Jesus, will have a tempting devil saying that there should at least be something mixed with Him, as the Judaising teachers told the Galatians; no direct opposition to Christ, but unite something with Him, add something to Him; and this is a danger. A legal heart will unite with that kind of temptation very readily. Remember, God said that the Jew was not to wear a garment of wool and linen; it was to be one only. He was not to sow his field with diverse seeds, and all this was typical. You are not to mix God's things and your own. If the spirit in a man tempts him, then God will take care that the man shall know it sooner or later.

This is God's way - hold up my goings in faith. You may say, 'Lord increase my faith.' "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." It is not easy when you see a life of sin and a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, to believe that the blood

of Christ is more than all that you see and feel in yourself, therefore this devil who tempts to legality and mixing, has to be opposed and overcome by God. The cry is then: 'Hold me up as a poor weak believer; keep me clinging by faith, to the Lord Jesus; teach me to plead His blood alone; to hope in His mercy alone, and to look for salvation in and through Him alone.' Now, dear friends, God only knows what tomorrow will bring forth, but this is the thing for us to observe, as He may give us grace to walk by faith. Says the Apostle in the Corinthians, " We walk by faith, not by sight." If I walk by the sight of my sinfulness, I should soon be in black despair and so would some of you, but if you have faith in the bleeding Lamb, O what a straight way that will make for you. How it will show you that there is nothing to plead but this; nothing pleadable but this, nothing to hope in but this; nothing to look for, for good, but here. Faith will tell you that. Yes, faith will bare witness in your heart that this is the path. But then you will say, 'I am so weak, I cannot continue in it.' Well, there is one word that suits me and will suit some of you, "I will water it every moment." It is another figure, but the same truth. 'I keep the poor person who looks to Me, who believes in Me. I keep him every moment. I will give him grace, every moment, though he may be worn out sometimes in his feelings, I will replenish him; though he may be ready to faint, I will pour new life and new strength upon him.' So you will find, this will do. You will find that this will do:

"Faith in the bleeding Lamb,  
O what a gift is this!"

Now no religion but this will take you to heaven; no religion will take you to heaven but this, and here let me say, no sin confessed and in heart forsaken, will land you in hell, if you are enabled by precious faith to look to the Lord Jesus. A negative, you may say, but a wonderfully good negative. Shall not sin undo me? Cannot sin ruin me? Not if there is faith in the Lord Jesus. Think of it, - think of the greatness of it. Here is a man full of sin, covered with pollution, deep in guilt and debt, and yet, - little faith. Faith as a grain of mustard seed going out of a broken spirit to this Lord Jesus will say, - 'Thy faith hath saved me. Hold up my goings then, as a poor weak believer in Thyself!' Were you not glad sometimes, that God is not a respecter of persons; neither high nor low, nor rich nor poor, but, 'Whosoever calls on

Me; whosoever comes to Me' in this one appointed way, is welcome and shall be saved. "If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." Think, what work have you for God to judge? The work of faith. Does He regard that? Yes! God is not unjust to forget your work of faith and labour of love. Why does He look on faith with such approbation? For two reasons. First, because the faith itself is His gift, and second, because the work of faith is toward and upon the Lord Jesus, and it struggles to get at Him, being of a divine origin. It goes up to its source, this faith, and looks to the Lord, - 'Hold me up.' How many have started out, professing Jesus Christ. Many a Demas, O many a Demas has there been in the church, professing church. Many a man has had another heart, like Saul, but not a new heart. It is the new heart, the new nature, the believing heart, made a believing heart by the Holy Ghost, and the man with this heart, with this faith, walks in a path that is pleasing to God and so then he says, 'Lord, I am too weak to stand,' and the Lord meets him and says, God is able to make you stand. How can He make me stand? By fresh supplies of grace; by the visits of His love; by touches of His Spirit He is able to make you stand, - stand fast, and withstand in the evil day and having done all, to make you stand in Jesus Christ.

Now, if we are spared to go through this year, if I am able to preach, I hope that what I have been preaching among you for a good many years, will still be my theme, and that you will have circumcised ears and hearts to receive this simple preaching. The apostle Paul's position was a good one and I would like it to be mine. He said, "I determined not to know any thing among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified", and if you are exercised day by day with, and about sin and ignorance, and weakness in yourselves, you won't want your ears tickling with some fancies. You won't want stones to be offered you for bread. What you will want, will be something that will meet, take up your case, and what will that be? Just what you pray for in secret when you say, 'For Christ's sake bless me, for Christ's sake be with me; cause me to walk with Thee, to live near to Thee; to follow Thee fully with all my heart and soul. Hold up my goings in the hour of temptation.' David was tempted to turn aside when God put Saul, his enemy, within David's reach, and one said to him, - Now let me cut off his head. David's godly spirit, strengthened by the Holy Ghost came up. Now he said, touch not the



Lord's anointed. Let not my hand be on him, (1 Samuel Chap. 24, v. 4 to 6) and you may be tempted in some way respecting this simple plain walk of faith, and nature and your heart will be very strong, but faith will say, let the Lord deal graciously with me and hold up my goings in His path of waiting on Him. You will always find this, as God is with you in your troubles and your difficulties: if there be offers of deliverance by nature, if there be arguments against your waiting, faith will say, now I must go to God. "Lord," said David on another occasion, "will Saul come down" to me here? "He will," said the Lord. He was held up in that path. He was held up in the path of waiting on God, through Jesus Christ. His faith looked to the promised Messiah. Our faith goes backward to Him who on the cross said, "It is finished," and bowed His head and gave up the ghost. "Hold up my goings," and this is a very personal thing. It will be something for yourself; something for your own soul; something that will be between you and God, and you will feel as if He takes you according to His own word in Isaiah; takes you by your right hand and holds you up. "I ---- will hold thy right hand", and then He will say, "Fear not." 'O but my enemies'.... They are not God! "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man" - "whose breath is in his nostrils" - "and forgettest the Lord thy Maker." We perhaps do not realise when turning aside, how that we do it because we forget Him. - "Forgettest the Lord thy Maker." May the Lord help us in this one particular and hold us up in this one thing: looking singly and alone to the Lord Jesus.

"Then with a single eye  
I look to Christ alone;  
And on His righteousness rely,  
Though I myself have none."

And that will do. When you come to a dying bed, that will do. I hope when I come to mine, I shall be able to say, by God's mercy: now the things I professed, the Christ I have talked about, the doctrines I have initiated from this pulpit, they all stand by me, and that I shall find the virtue and the sweetness and the efficacy of them in my soul. - "Hold up my goings in Thy paths." Keep me a believer. One may say, 'Once a believer, always a believer.' Plenty of movements against this in our hearts, therefore this is a needful prayer - 'Hold Thou me up, keep me on my knees, keep me praying, praying the prayer of faith that shall save the sick. Keep me

bringing every difficulty to Thyself, every enemy of every sort and kind. Keep me bringing all of them, then I shall be safe.'

Now may the Lord help us to look at this; it will be a good start for the year if this is brought before our minds and kept before them by the Lord the Holy Ghost. There is no way to standing fast; no way of getting honourably through; no way of living to the glory of God; no way of being established in our own souls, but as God holds us up in the way of faith, - "faith in the bleeding Lamb," - faith that is more than notion or whim, that is the work of God's Spirit. May the Lord bless us thus, and bless you who are young. I do feel for you and try to pray for you, for the days we are living in are dreadful days. Now if you have a living desire; if you have real faith in your hearts, wrought by God, this will be a great blessing for you. It will bring you to the Lord daily; bring you to your knees often, I would say, hourly, - 'Lord help me, teach me, guide me, hold me up.' God grant this mercy.

Amen.

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