

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 3 June, 1922

PSALM 17 v 5

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

Those of you who were present this morning will remember that I said we would take a two-fold view of the paths of the Lord. First, the paths which are peculiar to Himself - paths of sovereign grace, eternal love, infinite merit, and mercy. These paths, as I remarked, drop fatness. In them God visits sinners; in them He manifests His nature, His goodness, His pardons, His justification. In them He shows what sovereign grace can do. And the second remark I would make upon the paths in which God's people desire to be held up, is this - the paths in which He will have His people walk, paths which are peculiar to them. No fowl knows them, no vulture's eye hath seen them; they are spoken of in the singular. It is a way so plain as that the "wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein". To faith, it is a broad way. A way, so narrow to nature, as to give offence; to faith, broad, plain, and beautiful and blessed and desirable. They find heaven in it, who walk in it. They find a smiling God, a loving, lovely Saviour, the Holy Spirit. They find the Trinity in it. They find peace in it and mercy and goodness divine. So, whatever we may think about the paths of the Lord naturally, spiritually they are most beautiful and attractive; ways of pleasantness, paths of peace. And if the Lord will help me - O, that He would give unction - I will speak first of all of the path of faith, of a real God-given faith. You will never see the paths of the Lord if you have not faith. Faith in the bleeding Lamb, faith that, if I may so speak, is the guardian of God's interest in your heart, and of your soul's interest in Him. That is, it will look after, seek to know and embrace and be found in, the Lord Jesus. It is a great grace, this grace of faith. It is not natural; it is a new creation. It does not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. It acts in that power. It is a singularly bold spirit, a spirit of faith. It does that which no other grace, so to speak, can do. It really asks the blessed Trinity to come into the

heart of a sinner, and that is coming boldly to the throne of grace. It is a humble grace; it makes no pretensions; it takes the place that God designs it, and it has but one plea, and that is the Name of Christ, which includes everything. It is a very persistent grace; it will take no denial. It will wait when there are delays. It will ask and crave and beg; it will go on errands again and again, times without number, until it gets what it wants. It is a very honest grace; it will tell you in your hearts, if you have it, that you are nothing but the poorest, emptiest, vilest, weakest of all creatures, and yet it will say you are not to give up on that account, but press and urge and plead and wait and beg and go again and again and again to the God of all grace and mercy. O, what a grace is the grace of faith. O, what a view the grace of faith takes of the blessed God. Now this we have exemplified in certain Scriptures. Take the case of the Syrophenician woman. She goes with faith - a needy case, but a real faith - moving, worshipping, pleading, insisting, and not giving up, nor giving way, when there came what seemed to be such a rebuff as to all but strike the dying dead. When the Lord discouraged her, she said, Lord, the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. This was the power which God wrought in her heart. With one hand He seemed to put her away; with the other He drew her to Him, held her up, got hold of her in eternity, hold of her now in the exercise of His grace, and kept hold of it and really did exemplify this word in her: Hold me up; do keep Thy hold of me. She said: "Truth Lord". Well, if you have this blessed faith, that is just what you will do with your cases. It may be a case of your own soul: O, save me, cleanse me, sanctify me, bless me, enlarge me in the knowledge of Christ and assure my conscience of her part in the Redeemer's blood. It may be a case in providence when you need something, some guidance, some support, some supply, some special mercy in your house or in your business, or in your own person and true prayer wont let the Lord alone; it will go to Him, wait on Him. Your case will make many an errand to Him and to Him you will go. The Spirit of God will make you enter into that beautiful figure that Bunyan uses. He saw, he said, in the house, a fire and there was water poured upon it, yet the fire was not quenched, not put out. And the mystery was explained when, taken to the other side, he saw one pouring oil on it. This is just what you will find in your own case, that God will pour His Holy Spirit, His grace upon your soul, and that will be more than all the

temptations, all the waters, all the difficulties that may be poured upon your faith. Faith has to do with God. Faith, if I may speak so, takes a short cut and goes straight to God in Christ. Faith is opposed to reason; faith will not look at, and is not daunted by, adverse circumstances. The woman had enough to daunt and put her out altogether. She said, no; Lord, the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the master's table. Now if you have a little faith, even as a grain of mustard seed, this is what it will do for you, and you will say to the mountain depart and it will be so. Faith has one belief, only one, and that is expressed by Christ Himself. "If ye shall ask anything in My Name I will do it". Your name must go, your goodness be burnt up. You will be reprov'd and rebuked and your sin and your shortcoming and all things that are evil in you, these, these will be put off, put away, and faith will make mention of Christ and Christ alone. His beauty attracts faith, His fulness attracts faith, His promise strengthens faith, His goodness emboldens faith, His blessed Spirit draws out faith into exercise. O, the beauty of Christ; you cannot keep away from Him if you see Him; it is impossible. The beauty of Christ will make you say:

O come, thou much expected guest!
Lord Jesus, quickly come!
Enter the chamber of my breast;
Thyself prepare the room.

For should'st Thou stay till Thou canst meet
Reception worthy Thee,
With sinners Thou wouldst never sit -
At least I'm sure with me.

This is how faith goes. Do not you find it so? Put off, though you may be often, as to your feelings; stopped, it may be, as to your sense of praying and pleading; still this is the direction, the life, the motion of faith. It has one plea; it stands on one ground, only one, the merits of Christ. Other merit there is not. This exists, this exists to faith; yes, it exists to faith. Faith finds a substance here. It is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" It has one object and that is the salvation of the soul. "Say unto my soul I am thy salvation". Speak Lord to me. Bless my

soul, clothe me, cleanse me, fill my soul with goodness, satisfy me with favour, fill me with the blessing of the Lord. That is the great end to faith. It has an end beyond this; the glory of God. Well, now, dear friends, how many of you can hope that you are walking in this path? The woman, whose case I have mentioned, walked in this path. Now take the case of David in affliction. We find that, when driven from his throne and his home by his unnatural, wicked, son Absalom, his faith came out into a blessed, prevailing exercise. When they took the Ark of the Lord to him, took it out of its place to David, his faith would not have it so. Carry back the Ark into the city; let that be where God has placed it. If the Lord take pleasure in me, He will bring me again and I shall see both it and His habitation: but if He say, I have no pleasure in thee, behold here I am. His faith brought him to fall flat before God. Do you understand that? This was a path; sweet submission to the dispensation of God, painful as it was, was wrought in him and expressed by him in that word: "Here I am". Never would this have been, without faith. There might have been a sullenness, a silence, a sort of acceptance of what could not be avoided, but that would have been nothing more than natural feeling. But here was something different; it was one of the paths of the Lord. Do we know what that is, when trouble comes, when difficulties are about us, when some natural impossibility confronts us, to say: "The will of the Lord be done". It is expressed in that word: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven. Hold up my goings. One hour of submission is very sweet, though we need to be held up in it, else it will be succeeded by rebellion, by arraignment God at the bar of human reason. Therefore, we need the Lord to hold us up in this. This path of faith will be always in the child of God as to its nature, but sometimes not in sweet exercise, but you have it expressed in one Psalm: "My soul followeth hard after Thee". That is a great word for a man to say. You think of it. Here is self, here is sin, here is the world, here is the tempter, here are many things to hinder, turn aside, prevent, cast down, but in the midst of them all faith is strengthened to say "My soul followeth hard after God", as if the Psalmist should say, Lord, I cannot do without Thee. The world, if I had it, would not fill this empty place in my heart. I cannot do without Thyself. Can you say that? Can you, looking into your heart, examining your feelings, examining your desires, examining the ground on which you stand, the things you have, the effect of

blessings and the effect of troubles on your spirit, can you look up to Almighty God and say: Lord, these pleasures do not fill the empty place. Lord, these troubles do not draw me away from Thyself. My one want, my one aim, my one prayer is this: Come to me. Until it please Thee to come give me power to go on following after Thee. "My soul followeth hard after God". You have it in the epistle to Philippians where he, having spoken of his natural privileges, of his religion, of his blamelessness in the law, of his great acquirements, he comes to this: Doubtless, I count all things but dung and dross and loss, that I may win Christ and be found in Him. Is Christ before you in that way? In a different measure, but is He so before you as to transcend everything? as to make you feel neither birth, nor privilege, nor acquirement, nor attainment, can do you good, and that the one thing you want is union with the Son of God, and an apprehension of His great end in calling you by grace? This is a path, one of the Lord's paths. "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord." Some of you may say, we cannot help thinking this religion is a right one, but O, it is so difficult! Yes, old nature will never be satisfied with God's way, but it is faith that says, all is in Christ. All life, all loveliness, all beauty, all righteousness, all holiness, all safety, all bliss, Jesus Christ possesses. And, seeing that, your faith will say, O, that I could win Him, "that I might win Christ and be found in Him". O, that He were mine and I could say it for myself "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine". This is a path of the Lord, a way peculiar to the people of God. They walk in it; others know it not. It is different from notions about religion, different from true knowledge - that is a real knowledge of the Bible as being right; that may be, with death. 'Tis different from all things that you may attain to by nature. 'Tis a peculiar life, a perception, not to be fully expressed, of the greatness and beauty and loveliness of the Lord Jesus. Faith is a hearing, a soaring grace, as under the Spirit's power she flies heavenward and she says in the heart, there is a Man in heaven, there is a blessed One in heaven, and O, that I could reach Him. She says, He has all power; seek that to sustain you. She says, He is infinitely patient, call on Him to bear with you; He is infinitely full, ask Him to pour out of His fulness into your heart. Faith will speak well for God and talk well about Him in your heart. Ah, she will look to Him. I find this in my own case in a small measure, There is

no satisfaction out of Him; there is all in Him that we need, as the hymn has it and we sing, sometimes

Here's all a God can give
Here would I constantly abide
And every moment live

This faith then is one of those paths cast up by the Lord for His people to walk in. Now let me mention one or two particulars on this point. I have already said it in substance, but I will say one word more and that is, faith is very particular in honouring Jesus Christ, and so she does the will of God. This is the will of God that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. Is the Father Almighty God? Yes, says faith; so is Christ. Is the Father omnipotent? Yes, answers faith; so is Christ. Is the Father full of love? Yes, and faith says, Christ is love; and she honours Christ, honours Him as Almighty God. And she honours Him too in the infinite merit of His life and death. Casting all the undying interests of the soul upon Him, as dying, she honours Him in His death. No death but that can be life to another. Faith says, that death is life. O, that it might be life in me. She honours Christ in His resurrection. She says, there is no religion worth having that has not the resurrection of Christ in it. If Christ be not risen ye are yet in your sins, your faith is vain; preaching is a lie, that preaches it. Faith honours Christ in His resurrection. She honours Him in all the manifestation which He gave of His resurrection to His disciples. She honours Him in His ascension into heaven and in His intercession there. In His Word, in His promises, in everything, she honours Him. Can you go with this? Can you say, this is the very path my soul wants to walk in? This is the way the saints have gone before, the way the prophets have gone, and the way I fain would go. "Hold up my goings in Thy paths".

Now if I say, in the next place, one of the paths of the Lord is prayer, you will say, well, you have anticipated all this. Yes, yet let me for a moment particularise. Prayer is the soul's word Godward, the soul's attitude, the expression of its wants, its confessions, its entreaties. It is the soul's coming to Christ according to His invitation: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden".

It is the soul's unburdening of itself, casting its burdens and cares and anxieties and wishes for today and tomorrow and all time we have to live. Do you know what this is, to walk in this difficult path when, on the one hand, the devil says, and presumption says, God has decreed everything, you can alter nothing; therefore, do not pray; why should you?; if you do not pray, things will just come to pass as if you did; and, on the other hand, there is this difficulty; you, pray! You, an inconsistent, unthankful, worldly, hard-hearted, fretful creature, you pray! How many can follow me? And with these, - and O, how many difficulties come along with them - many, many things come along with these, to hinder you. And how many can say, notwithstanding, now in the face of all these, my soul is after God, and I beg Him to bless me. I ask him to be with me. I tell him, as well as I can, that I am not worthy of His notice, and yet nothing else will do me good. Not worthy of His visits, yet nothing less will satisfy me. I want His hand, I want His help, I want His presence, and I go and tell Him all I have of care here, and I get relief in telling Him about it. I have a want there and my soul gets relief in pressing this upon His notice. I need cleansing and I ask Him to cleanse me. I need sustaining and beg of Him to sustain me. Prayer! O what a blessing it is. It is not dependent on any time, on any form, on any words. It just is a life in the soul, a want in the feelings, a request, sent out of a feeling heart, to the God of all mercy. You may pray the best when you are not on your knees, and that is no excuse for neglecting to kneel before the Lord. But prayer is not dependent on any position or anything of that kind. It is the soul's language, without a word, the soul's expression, without any word at all, to the God of heaven. "Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer." And sometimes you may be so drawn out in prayer as to say, "I am prayer". David said "I give myself unto prayer" Rutherford translates that, thus: "I am prayer". That is my breath, that is my soul's condition, that is my soul's attitude. "I am prayer". When God will bless a sinner He will give him prayer. When God will enlarge you, you will not only feel your bondage, but you will have strong cries for liberty. When the Lord will sanctify you to Himself and the praise of the glory of His grace, you may very likely feel more corrupt than at any other moment. This is the way, this is the path - prayer, prayer, prayer. God has ordained it, the Spirit works it, the soul expresses it in sighs and tears and groans which cannot be uttered.

Another path is hope. David walked in it; you have walked in it who fear and know the Lord. David said to his soul: "Hope thou in God"; walk this way, look for His mercy, expect His promise, look for the fulfilment of what He has said to you. The devil says, there is no ground for hope. Reason says, hope is impossible because things naturally are so with you, that you cannot enter into the things that you have expected. Faith says: "Hope thou in God". He is good, He is almighty. He sitteth upon the flood; He sitteth King for ever. Is there anything too hard for the Lord? Now look at Abraham in his case. It is written "and God tempted Abraham". He said: Take thy son, thy only son Isaac, in whom all the promises are, take him and offer him up. O, what a trial. Now what did faith say? what did hope say? in Abraham's heart in reply to Isaac. Here is the fire, here is the wood, but where is the lamb? O, said Abraham, "God will provide Himself a lamb". He expected it; his faith looked for it; his hope stretched out her neck of expectation for it. This is a path. "Hope thou in God". Natural hope dies with circumstances which die. Spiritual hope thrives when natural impossibilities appear the greatest. Hope goes just the contrary of nature. "Hold up my goings in Thy paths". One word more

There is a path of love. This abides when faith and hope shall no longer be, and Christ expresses it thus. "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me". On one occasion, after He had been teaching His disciples, He said this word: "Let these sayings sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men". What a solemn, what a striking, word. Let these, my teachings, sink into your ears; you will need them, for I, your Redeemer, your Saviour, your teacher, your friend, shall be delivered into the hands of men. The day is coming when it will seem as if I can do nothing for you. It will seem to you that you have made a mistake, that you will say really, we verily thought it had been He which should have delivered Israel. Let these instructions sink into your ears. What has the Lord said to you, dear friends? What teaching have you received from Him? What promises, what influences have you been under? What attractions have you felt? What professions have you made? What have you said to Him in secret? Have you called Him Lord? Have you owned Him to be Master? Have you put

your cases into His hands? Yes, you say, we think, we believe, we have. Let what He said to you sink into your ears because the day is coming when He will not appear to you for a season, when His power, as it were, will be hidden, and you will look in vain for a support. But He is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever". And now comes love, and she says, He is good. She wont hear a word against Him. He is the best still. Do you know that, that feeling that it would grieve you - the suggestion has grieved you - that Christ was not altogether lovely, not all and in all. Has it not wounded you in your tenderest feelings when the enemy has spoken something against Him? This is a right path. May the Lord help us to walk in it.

Now a word or two upon the petition. "Hold up my goings" It means, take and keep hold of me Lord. Keep hold of me. Do you know what it means? As if you can say, Lord, I see slippery places, I feel too weak to stand, I do not know how to behave myself in this circumstance, or in that particular thing. Do keep hold of my soul. Keep hold of my faith, keep hold of my hope, keep hold of my love. Keep me Lord. King Hezekiah was left; God left him, let go, as it were, as to all Hezekiah's experience and feelings, let go the hold He had had of him, for Hezekiah and God had been together. Hezekiah had got hold of the Lord; he had brought, as Hart expresses it, the recanting prophet back, and turned the mind of God. And now these flattering ambassadors from Babylon filled Hezekiah with pride, and in that matter, in that business, as the word is, the Lord left him that he might know all that was in his heart. If the Lord should leave us for a minute, what would become of us? "Hold up my goings in Thy paths"; keep me a poor, believing, hanging, dependent sinner. Keep me a praying soul; keep me hoping in Thy mercy; keep me loving Thy Name, Thy Person. Make Thyself the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely; lest my footsteps slip. "That my footsteps slip not". There are plenty of slippery places for us, my friends, plenty of things of which old nature would take advantage if allowed. If you are easy for a little time, O, how pleased is silly nature. If you are offended in God's providence, O, how ready is nature to take offence and back up every bad feeling you have had, and say you are right to be angry even as Jonah said. "That my footsteps slip not". Do not let me slip out of the way of sovereign grace. Do not leave me to fall away in my experience from these wonderful paths of Thine in

salvation's plan, in the covenant of grace. Do not leave me to walk in a foolish way, forgetting Thy mercy, lest my footsteps slip. Dear friends, we are dependants; we are poor creatures; and some have fallen, that they might know all that was in their hearts and, having fallen, and having been restored, they are afraid of falling again; so this cry suits them. Perhaps it suits some of you. "Hold up my goings in Thy paths" Let my goings be right. Let me, by the words of Thy mouth, save my soul from this untoward generation. Let me not walk in the way of the ungodly nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful. May the Lord bless us. May His good hand be on us for good, and His Spirit dwell in us, that we may fear His great Name and be kept from falling.

AMEN.