

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

PSALM 17 v 5

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

Who can fully express the infinite mercy that is showed to a sinner who can truly sing, and say to the Holy Ghost, - "His Godhead and influence, still the same, we own because we feel (715). It is beyond all expression wonderful to feel the Godhead, the influence, the teaching of the Holy Ghost. It was that, that caused Josiah in his sixteenth year to begin to seek the Lord God of his father David; that moved him, a little later on, to begin to purge the country of idolatry, to cast down altars and idols and cut down groves. If we have the same Holy Ghost in our hearts, we shall have plenty of work in the reformation, in the conversion of our spirits, and in the work of searching out leaven wherever it may be hidden; plenty of work. And there will be the rending of garments and coming to the Lord and confessing sin and seeking to enter into the covenant of grace, and asking grace to stand in it. I wish the Lord may make use of that chapter which I read just now. The objection of some might be that that belonged to the old dispensation, but everyone taught of the Holy Ghost will find that there is some spiritual instruction to be derived from it and it will be written on his heart, and he will see, how, in numberless ways, he has set up idols, had groves, and secret things and secret places and sins which, brought to light by the truth as opened by the Spirit, will cause a rending of the caul of the heart before God, and sending to Him for instruction and for a message; and then, silence on God's part, would be one of the bitterest troubles. It is a great thing to have a religion that brings you into contact with God in His Word, in His teaching, in His providence, and makes you feel that less than Himself in His mercy in Christ will never save, never satisfy, never comfort you, never make you happy. We have in this Psalm, a prayer of a good man who, in his condition in providence had been much injured. Saul had hunted David; enemies had again and again troubled him. Now he was not for self-justification;

though he had integrity in his spirit in the matter, it was not for self-justification. Mind that, my friends, he who justifies himself without God's sentence in his conscience, stands on perilous ground. He who, whatever his conscious integrity may be, feels that only one sentence can do him good, and that is God's, is on safe ground. "Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence. Let Thine eyes behold the things that are equal". Decide Lord, come Lord, and bless me, and speak to me, and stand Thou at my right-hand that I may stand in the evil day. When God draws near to judge a sinner who finds himself a very poor, empty, crooked creature, nobody can prop him up then. When Josiah heard the words of God, he perceived that there was great wrath against sin. You will always come to that, when God speaks to you by the word and the Spirit, and deals with you; you will find plenty of sin in yourself. That is my own experience at least. That closes my mouth, that covers me with shame, fills me with trouble. O sinner, how do you stand before God? Does He speak to you: Does He send some message to you? Does He open some Scripture to you that bears immediately on your case, that tells you there is wrath against this sin, against that sin; that opens the mystery of idolatry, that lets you see that idolatry is not confined to bowing the knee to a stock of wood and stone, but that it lies, first of all, in the affections of the heart, in the attention of the mind, in the devotion of the spirit? Ah, there is wrath against sin, and when it is found in a saint, that saint finds that he is in a poor case. And so he rends the caul of his heart, and comes before God. Now this leads him to say: 'Thou hast proved mine heart". God puts His people to tests, that He may make them know what is in their hearts, whether they will keep His commandments or no. And what is the result? Always, No. O, the shame, the pain, of this. Always, No. But what a mercy to be proved, to be tested; yet the things that prove and test are very painful, and wrong in themselves, many of them. As, for instance, the Lord repeatedly said that He would not drive out all the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, but He would leave them. What for? To prove His people, whether they could stand to the covenant, or whether they would give their daughters to the sons of the idolators, whether they would take their daughters for their sons, and so become assimilated, and become idolators. He allows many times false teachers to rise, and Moses tells Israel why. To prove you, whether you will follow the Lord or no, for if a false prophet arises and you follow him, then you do not

stand the test. You are caught away, you are deceived, you are injured, and, if a child of God, O, what you have to lose, what you have to give up. These things are a test. And the Lord came to David and proved his heart, visited him in the night season, talked to him, dealt with him, spoke to him. Ah, it is a solemn thing for God to speak to men. "Thou hast tried me and shall find nothing". How can this be when you are full of sin, when many of your ways are found to be wrong? How can it be that the Lord should find nothing? There is only one answer. Thou hast cast all their sins behind Thy back into the depths of the sea. The blood of Christ answers the question; nothing else will. Have you any hope but in that precious blood? or can you protest to the Lord and say, with all your backslidings and all your death and all the corruptions of your nature, there is one thing you feel you have got, and that is a hope in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ? That makes room for the atonement which, when you receive, will bring the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and here you will stand to this, as God the Holy Ghost reveals it and makes you feel its efficacy.

"I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress". So Asaph was. He said he had been doing evil, he had been trying what was impossible, even to straighten God's character, and understand God's mysteries. Then, when convinced that he was as a beast before the Lord, he comes to feel the hand of God had, all through, been with him, and now his mouth did not transgress. He openly spoke, he sincerely confessed, and he said before the Lord: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" Himself, as a beast; himself, as nothing but corruption; he comes to this: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee". "Concerning the works of men" - their practices which are evil, their unbelief, their idolatries, concerning all these works, internal and external - "by the word of Thy lips" - by the instruction of the Scriptures, by their influence on the heart through the Holy Ghost - "I have kept me" - I have been preserved this way and this way only - "from the paths of the destroyer". "I have said"; as if he should say "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; mine honour be not thou united to their assemblies". There is a power in God's word; when the Spirit takes and uses it, there is an influence, a wonderful influence. It tells you what is wrong, it gives you power to eschew it; it tells you what

is right, it gives you power to follow it; it tells you what a fool you are in yourself and turns you to Christ for wisdom. It tells you that you are nothing but weakness and reveals to you that blessed One who alone is strong, the Strength of Israel. See this, dear friends; do the Scriptures speak to you? Do they influence you? Do they mould your mind at times, control your affections, order your ways, bring you before the Lord? How happy you are if that is so. Your religion is a vain thing without this. The destroyer will catch you without this. You will never keep yourselves from the paths of the destroyer but by the Word of God. "Let", says Paul, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, redeeming the time because the days are evil". "In malice, be children; in understanding, men."

Buckle on thy heavenly armour
Patch up no inglorious peace

May the Lord help us.

Then comes the text: "Hold up my goings in Thy paths that my footsteps slip not". Now in speaking of these paths of the Lord, by His help, I shall take them in two particular ways. First, as they are the paths in which the Lord Himself walks. Secondly, the paths which He has laid down for His people to walk in, and this distinction may be helpful to us, may be useful to us. The Lord grant it may be so.

First, "Hold up my goings in Thy paths", the paths which the Lord Himself walks in, the paths wherein He is found by His people. It is written in a Psalm a little further on than this Psalm: "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth". My brethren that will do; that is a path in which the blessed Trinity is walking. "He delighteth in mercy". With Him is plenteous mercy and redemption. This is the path of sovereign grace, the doctrines of sovereign grace, the purposes of a God of love to save sinners, the purposes of the blessed Trinity to reveal Himself to sinners, to tabernacle with sinners, to save them, teach them, guide them, forgive them. O, what paths are these. Here, men taught of God, convinced of the Spirit of their sins, find that all their accounts - and O what accounts there are against them - are

settled by the blood of Christ. Here it is seen how all controversies can be, and are, finished in the blood of Christ; that all quarrels are ended by the mercy of God in Christ. Here it is seen that a sinner is wrapped up in the righteousness of Christ, sustained by the grace of Christ, guided by the wisdom of Christ; that his footsteps are ordered by the sweet teaching of the eternal Spirit, that the eye of faith is turned to Christ; where God the Father is, where God the Son is, where God the Holy Ghost is. This is a wonderful thing - the paths of the Lord in grace. If we look a little at it particularly by the help of the Lord, we shall see the will of God as expressed by Paul in the Ephesians, that God works all things after the counsel of His own will. This is the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush. The good will of God to save a wretch, to guide a blind sinner, to snatch a burning brand out of the fire, to give a change of raiment to one whose filthy garments shame and condemn him, to bring Christ and form Him in the heart the hope of glory, to sanctify the soul - "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification". God walks in these paths; they are His own, they are peculiar to Him. Who can forgive sins, but God only? Who can save a sinner, but the Saviour? Who can guide the blind, but wisdom and light itself? Who can clothe the naked but that blessed One of whom it is written: "This is the Name wherewith He shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness". I say, brethren, these paths are the Lord's own. They drop fatness upon a sinner; they drop the fatness of eternal love and the full, blessed gospel of Christ upon the sinner's heart. Wonderful they are. And what is it to be held up in these paths? One would say - many a seeker, perhaps some here might even now be mentally saying - if only I were brought into these paths, I would never get out of them. If only I were blessed, I should hold it fast. Perhaps there is not a spirit of a just man made perfect in heaven who had not something of that in himself when seeking the Lord; some here can say they felt like it. O, but we are corrected; time and experience corrected many false thoughts and foolish things in the saints of God. When we are children we think and we speak as children and so, with regard to this. Now what is it to be held up in the paths of the Lord, these paths of sovereign grace, but to be kept sensible of your weakness, wickedness, liability to fall; sensible of your absolute and continual dependence on the God of all grace, sensible of that that Paul uses concerning himself and the ministry, sensible of how it may be

applied to yourself - "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God". Lord, keep me near the fountain, keep me near Christ, keep me to the truth; hold me up here. Let the cross be my rest; let its power be my salvation; let its brightness be my glory; let the truth of it be my support, my girdle, my light, my all. Surely, no-one would go from the cross once they got there by the Spirit. Indeed - O, that experience would confirm such an expression of some minds - has not it power to hold? Yes, it has, but God leaves His people to try them sometimes, that they may know what is in their hearts. As He would not drive out all the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, that they might try the people who came to succeed them, even Israel, so He leaves corruptions in the saints to try them. A saint may sometimes say of himself, I hear two voices in my heart. One is, let me have ease, let me have the world, let me have this lust gratified, let me walk in this way of my own choosing and design. Do you know that voice? It is the voice of a traitor, the voice of the devil, the voice of your own depravity. There is another voice says in me, Lord do bless me, do keep me; bring me to Thy footstool, keep me there. May I love the Lord Jesus; may I love holiness; may I be preserved from sinning. Keep me from sinning wilfully. Keep me from apostacy; keep me from having my own way. Do you know that voice? It is a blessed voice; it is a sweet voice. Sweet to whom? Why, to the Lord. "Let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice". The voice of prayer is sweet to Christ. When He sees a sinner praying He sees of the travail of His soul. He sees one at His footstool for whom He laboured and groaned and sweat blood and sighed and cried. "Hold up my goings". Keep me near the fountain, keep me near the throne of grace. This is one of the paths of the Lord in which we need to be held up. And the man who is made and kept tender will be the man who will be praying thus, for he will know that in himself there is much sin deserving wrath. He will know it. I believe that a child of God will often be very severely exercised by what is discovered to him as being in his own heart and looking on his foolish ways and his inveterate unbelief and his natural and strong tendency to sin, and looking on sins which he has committed, he will say, great is the wrath of the Lord against this. Then he will need holding up in the path of sovereign grace and free forgiveness, and cry to God: "Hide Thy face from my sins and blot out mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." He will

get honourably through. He hangs on the cross, who comes near, in the exercise of faith, to the fountain of the Saviour's merit and he alone. So then, my friends, this is a great thing, one of the paths of the Lord, the path of sovereign grace abounding over sin. If you have ever walked in it, you do love it. You loved it then and you will never cease to love it. Though the love may decay at times and you may be found wandering in some forbidden path, yet you will never really cease to love this beautiful path of the Lord, for here is His glory in Christ Jesus. Here He discovers His nature; here He shows His purpose; here He has love to melt, mercy to humble, grace to forgive, blood to cleanse, righteousness to justify. Here He has patience with the wayward. Here He has power to draw poor, backward, shame-faced sinners again and again to Himself. Here He has fulness to supply and to fill empty souls out of. What is there not in this beautiful, glorious, wonderful, mysterious path of the Lord. May the Lord hold us in it. We are disposed by nature against it. "Hold up my goings", hold them up "in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not". O, the disposition in us to go astray; the solemn bent to backsliding that is in our nature.

The paths of the Lord in providence; ways and dealings peculiar to Himself. He has ways and dealings with His children; purposes, great purposes, mysterious manners, many changes, not of heart, but of dealing, of circumstances. Today, a smile; to-morrow, a frown. Now a victory, then a defeat; now a fulness, then a lack. The ways of the Lord are right, and the humble shall walk in them, but the wicked shall fall. O, may we be held up in these paths. You say you cannot see them. No, because His way is in the sea and His path in the mighty waters, and His footsteps are not known. Yet, in these very paths, He comes and shows Himself. The poor disciples were toiling and rowing all the night; they could not make any headway. They saw, in the morning One coming to them, walking on the water, and they were afraid. We may be afraid of God when we see Him in some mysterious providences, and only His voice can allay the fear and remove the suspicion that still further trouble and evil is coming. O, when Christ let his disciples, those great men of God, be cast into the burning, fiery furnace, was it not a path? was it not a strange providence? But they were held up in it; it was God's way. And so they said to the king, "God is able to deliver us", and the Lord, who

held them up in that path, came to them. If He holds you up, He will come to you. "The form of the fourth was like unto the Son of God". The path of providence is very solemn; God walks in it. He walked in a strange path with Abraham, causing him to believe a son would be given him, helping him to wait many years for that son, then commanding him to sacrifice that son, and Abraham was held up in it, followed the Lord fully. God has peculiar providences to try His children. He will leave some corruption in you, a corruption, perhaps a peculiar one, which, when your sins were forgiven, you might have thought to be dead, perhaps thought that you would see that Egyptian gone, drowned in mercy. You felt your sins to be removed in the mercy of God, you thought your enemies were destroyed. God has left that corruption; to your surprise and amazement you found it living, you found it to be subtle. You have experienced it to be powerful; you were overcome by it. This is a strange way. You ask the Lord that you might grow in faith and prayer and every grace, little thinking that the very path that leads to the border of despair would be His way of answering. So you proved it. Now who can stand in the ways of providence, can resist evil and stand fast to the teaching and leading of God in providence, except he be held up by the Lord? God left one of old, even good king Hezekiah, that he might know all that was in his heart. God has left many a child of His in that same way, that he might know all that was in his heart. Now to be held up in the ways of God's solemn, trying providences, is to be brought to attend to His Word. "My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him, for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." That is a great thing when you are held fast, and say, in your spirit, whatever trouble comes, God helping me, I will cleave to Him, and follow Him in it, and wait till He shall open a door of escape for me. That is a great thing. "Hold Thou me up". Demas was not held up. Providence was too much for him. Providence, as it were, let the world dazzle him, perhaps some gold mine attracted him, and away he went. "Demas hath forsaken me having loved this present world". Ah, we do not know what we shall see to-morrow. We do not know what the Lord may let come to us to-morrow to test us. We may say, today, O, we are poor, weak, creatures; may the Lord hold us up. But if He let that prayer die down to-morrow, and something is dangled before our eyes and dazzles us, then we are in grave danger. We have need to cry to God, hold us up every moment,

and to fulfil in us that Scripture: "I will water it every moment. I will keep it night and day lest any hurt it". We do not know what damage we may get to our soul by heedlessness in some providence. Therefore, this prayer is suitable: "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe".

There may be a path in which the Lord walks to a person, a child of His, as in the case of Job; a good man, and a man who, at the time when the sons of God met together and Satan came amongst them, was walking without any backsliding or declining in his mind. According to God's testimony he was an upright man, feared God and eschewed evil; yet God's way with him was very mysterious. A child of God may not be in a bad state, yet come into trouble. A winter comes to nip him, to try the root; a sharp winter comes to a child of God. He won't be able perhaps in the trial to distinguish between a backsliding state and a winter state. There is a distinction to be made between them, but it was with Job at times, he could not distinguish things. Matters were so wrathful looking, so adverse, so bitter to him as that the one thing he wanted was that God would let loose His hand and kill him, take him out of the way, out of trouble. O, but still there was in his heart this: "His way have I held and not declined". "He knoweth the way that I take". Though my friends irritate me, though they charge me so foolishly and falsely that I get angry with them, He knows the way that I take, and I believe I am as gold put into the furnace, and when He, the Refiner, sitting now, sees the work done, He will bring me forth. If you are held on as Job was, you may get his bad temper, you may say some of his petulant things, you may wish yourself out of trouble and out of life even, but God does not take notice of some speeches of His children, which are as wind. He sees that, that He commends - His blessed fear, and his eschewing of evil. "Hold up my goings" in the hour of trouble, in the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell therein. In the hour when trouble shall come to the professing church, when wrath to the uttermost shall be poured out upon a godless nation, when Christ shall try the church's heart and reins and search Jerusalem with candles. Hold Thou me up then in this path of solemn tribulation. These are God's paths, and we need to be kept in them. The world wanders after the beast; the Church is held on to Christ. May we be held on, held fast by the mighty power of sovereign grace. We shall

be safe then. "Hold up my goings in Thy paths", and in another Psalm "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe". In the paths of sovereign grace, in the blessed paths where God discovers His glory - paths peculiar to Himself - and in the paths of trying, painful providence, Lord do keep me, leave me not. Hold Thou me up in these paths, that I may be for the praise of the glory of Thy grace.

AMEN.