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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 5 April 1936

PSALM 17 v 5

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

This is a notable Psalm; The Psalmist dares to make an appeal to God to do justice. He was accused falsely; he had enemies - many. He does not take up his own case with the men, the enemies; he takes the course which, if we, in trouble, are enabled to take, will find the good he found. "Hear the right"; hear justice. These enemies say such and such things about me, make accusations against me. I will not reply to them as they have spoken to, and of, me; I will bring my case to Thee. Hear me O Lord, an oppressed person, an afflicted sinner; I deserve it all, yet do undertake for me; "attend unto my cry". God promised, when Solomon's prayer was concluded, that His eye should be open and His ears attent unto the prayer that should be made to Him, and now, says this afflicted man, attend, give heed to my prayers; look at my case. I am weak, I am a sinner, I cannot plead absolute innocence in any case, but Thou knowest where the wrong is in this case. Probably no two sinners can have a difference and all the fault absolutely be on one side, yet when a false accusation is made against a person, a child of God, he has this great, this high, wonderful privilege and refuge; hear justice, do justice. "Give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips". Can you say that to God? Can you say, Lord, I am sincere in this petition? If you can, do thank Him for the mercy and the grace given to you to enable you so to speak to Him - "Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence". These enemies have sentenced me, they have accused me of evil; now Lord, do Thou pronounce sentence. Thy sentence must be right. Let Thy omniscient eyes behold the things that are right, that are equal. Take your case to Him. The comfort it has been to me in a course of years, that a case lies well with God, I can never express. If you can take your case to God and He accepts you, gives you a sense that His eyes are on you for good, that your case lies well with Him, you can walk among men; you will lift up your

face and not be ashamed. "Thou hast proved mine heart; Thou hast visited me in the night", searched me. Thou hast caused me to understand what is written later, but what now is true, by the Spirit of burning and the Spirit of judgment in my heart. I am proved, not to be an innocent man, except in this particular case; Thou hast proved mine heart to be upright; "Thou hast visited me in the night". Some people get trouble and get mercy in the night, literally or metaphorically when you are visited in the night of affliction. God visits His people, tells them to trust in Him, to commit their way to Him, to trust also in Him and He will bring it to pass. Thou hast tried me as gold and silver are tried; Thou hast put me into the furnace and purged away some dross and tin. Thou shalt find nothing in regard of present accusations against me. "I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress[^]. I am determined, by the grace of God, not to answer but just leave the case with Thee. Were it not well for some of you, if you have purposed not to speak unadvisedly, unwisely, and not to make accusations against others? Suppose a minister does not please you, what do you do? Suppose a friend does not please you, what do you do? Go to one whom you know to have an open ear to scandal and talk to him about it. Is that right? Let me ask you two things; first, is it right? Second, does it do your soul good? Does it bring you near to God? Does it leave your conscience clean? O, if we could live as if in the sight of God, and speak as in His sight. Well might you, well might I, always be praying that prayer: "Set a watch O Lord upon my mouth; keep the door of my lips". "Concerning the works of men, by the Word of Thy lips" - by Holy Scripture; by the influence of Holy Scripture on my heart - "I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer". A godly walk this; can you say that in any measure this has been your walk? That you have left the world, left your former self, denied that wicked self, turned away from it, loathed it, and so kept yourself from these ways; paths which lead to hell. The works of men are works of unbelief. The works of modernists are works of infidelity. Works of criticism of the Word of God are works of vileness. Do you keep from them? Then the text: "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not."

Here are some very important, infinitely important, points to notice. First, paths, movements, actions, providences, are ascribed to God. "Thy paths". Let us not slur this over but look a little

closely into it if we may, by the help of God. Then, the movements of the Psalmist in these paths, his goings, his actions, his life. Says Paul to the Galatians: "If we live in the Spirit let us also walk in the Spirit". Here the man's walk is before him, but he knows his weakness, his aptness to slide, backslide, slip away, turn aside, and that causes this petition. Lord, I am a weak man, I am apt to slip away from Thee. There is a constant and painful and strong tendency in my nature to depart from Thee; hold me up. "Hold up my goings", guide me with Thine eye, support me by Thy power.

First, the paths of the Lord. I will bring three paths of God before you. First, the goings - the same thing - of the Lord are said to be of old, from everlasting. Do not turn away from God's purposes. If you do they will remain. Opposition to them, denial of them, neglect concerning them, wont help you and certainly will do no harm to the purposes. God is of one mind and who can turn Him. It is said of Messiah - who comes from Bethlehem Ephratah, and makes the place of His birth remarkable - His goings are of old, from everlasting. In His divine Person Jesus Christ is one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, and with God in the Godhead was a council, a council concerning man. "Let us make man". A council of peace concerning some sinners of mankind; a covenant of grace, ordered in all things and sure; a covenant, wonderful covenant, cleansing things which, in themselves are unclean. You have this in the great sheet let down to Peter, knit at the four corners, showing its security, wherein were all manner of four footed beasts, creeping things and fowls of the air. The purposes of God. You may often by unbelief, though a child of God, contradict Him, but He is not offended in that; He corrects it. "What God hath cleansed that call not thou common". He cleansed His people in the eternal purpose of His heart when He gave grace to His Son to be incarnate for them; He gave grace to Christ for all of them. A great purpose; a purpose concerning all men.

Parents, native place and time
All appointed were by Him
"His decree" a child of God may sing and sometimes does sing

His decree who formed the earth
Fixed my first and second birth

Fixed your position in life, gave you ability and a disposition, ordered your steps when you knew Him not; guarded you when you knew Him not; and all, the fruit, the result, of His goings. The path of eternal love, wisdom, goodness, grace and salvation. The ungodly do not escape this eternal council of God - No, Cyrus was in it, the servant and shepherd (Isaiah 44 v 28) - but it is an awful thing, to be in a council that is not a council of peace for you. When you come to be judged according to what you have done, if it be bad, O what an awful thing. You who are living in sin, perhaps quite moral, perhaps very worthy among your fellows, but living in sin - the sin of unbelief being a prevalent one - and therefore living under condemnation, have yet to appear before God. That is the council of God, the way of God, that He has purposed. What men shall be, what men shall do, as creatures. That which He has not purposed, as regards active working in them, is sin; the rest is His Own. "In Him we live and move and have our being".

When you come to grace, then you have another consideration. The second path of God is said to "drop fatness". "Thy paths drop fatness". A path of grace, and this we must begin with Christ. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor that ye through His poverty might be rich". O, what a path was this. From His Father's bosom He came to the womb of the virgin, took on Him the nature formed there by the Holy Ghost for Him. "For the children, being partakers of flesh and blood, He also likewise took part of the same that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." If we had grace and wisdom and faith to follow Christ in this path of tribulation, of the imputation to Him of sin, making Him a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, and making Him the object of His Father's displeasure, what should we do to worship love divine? Humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God here, that the Person of the eternal Son of God should take on Him our frail nature, without sin, that therein He might obey the law absolutely for His people, that He might receive in due time the curse of the law, that He might thus be a burnt offering, a sacrifice, that His death should be vicarious, swallowing up hell, the hell His people deserved, bringing in for them an everlasting righteousness, and

redeeming them, the objects of God's love and mercy, in the way of efficacious grace. Follow Christ, if you can, in this, His path. It drops fatness on every soul that is blessed with grace and repentance, the fatness of forgiveness, of justification, of sanctification, of wisdom, and of redemption. Well, if you get some of this fatness you will be well; without it you must be poor and lean. The path of grace which God manifests in His dealings with each child of His, a path of wisdom, a path of tribulation, a path of rebuke, of reproof, of forgiveness, of restoration, a path of communion with Him, a path in which He manifests His great patience, longsuffering; in which also He fulfils that word "I, even I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions as a thick cloud and as a cloud thy sins."

A third path, a path of strange providences, mighty works. Thy way is in the sea, O God, and Thy path in the mighty waters and Thy footsteps are not known. Moving kings, setting up kings and thrones and casting them down. Reproving kings for the sake of His poor people; leading them in strange ways. If He will save them, He kills them. He wounds them to heal them. He sends a winter to nip them; He shines in the summer sun to make them fruitful.

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense"

Can you judge Him when His path is in the mighty waters? The best thing a child of God can do, and is enabled by the Holy Ghost to do, when mighty waters beat against him, is to sing: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear". Not fear when the earth is being moved; not fear when the waves are dashing against your hope, washing away many things which you thought good, but now prove not to have been good. Not fear then? No. Why? "God is our refuge and strength". Faith lays hold of things; faith's conclusion sometimes is just the very opposite of the conclusion of natural reason. Judge Him not before the time. These three paths of the Almighty express His goings, His dealings with men. As Jehovah, He has no paths, so to put it, but as the God of creation, the God of law and of justice, as the God of love and mercy, as being determined to save His people, whatever they may think and do, He has these paths. They are all mercy and truth. "The paths of

the Lord are mercy and truth to such as keep His covenant and His commandments to do them".

Now, with these before us, let us look, as enabled, at the petition of the Psalmist: "Hold up my goings in Thy paths that my footsteps slip not". The people of God do move; you move if you are the people of God; there are certain movements in your hearts, in your judgments, in your understandings, in your souls, which, being right - and you know them to be right sometimes - but, feeling weak, an aptness, a painful, wicked aptness, in you to slide and slip away from God, you cry with the Psalmist: "Hold up my goings". These goings are, first, the movements of faith in the soul. "We walk by faith and not by sight". Faith, as a grain of mustard seed, will keep you to God. One of the most fruitful movements of faith in the soul is keeping to God. The greatest sin you can commit, and the first sin in backsliding, is departing from God, and the most blessed movement of a soul by faith is keeping to God. O, said Luther, Lord keep me from an absolute God, from a God out of Christ. But, said the same man, Lord, I will not detach myself from Thee. And if you have faith you will know what he meant. Sin says, you have got no interest; sin committed by you in thought, in word, in some act, and you will be ready to come to a conclusion about yourself, being made honest, but faith will meet the case; faith will say: I believe God to be, and I believe Him to be a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. Therefore I, the worst of men, the guiltiest child that God ever had, the most wayward, troublesome child He ever adopted into His family, I will call upon Him. "Hear my voice in my prayer" said the Psalmist. You may have a prayer, some part - the external part perhaps - of which, you cannot look on with pleasure, and yet you may say there was a prayer in it. My sigh went up to Him, I groaned before Him. Now faith is that movement in the soul that will not, wherever it is in exercise, let you depart from God. When trouble comes, one of the first things you think of perhaps is, how am I to get out of it, but faith says, wait on God. Will this faith never, never be shifted? Will it never be weak? Will it never be tried? Is it not an object of the devil's enmity? Does he not try to sift a person who has faith, as wheat is sifted? Yes, wherever there is faith there is trouble. Wherever there is faith there is unbelief. And the stronger your faith, the stronger your trouble, because nature cannot bear

that a sinner should believe in God. Why not? Because the carnal mind is enmity against God. We shall get rid of unbelief one day, those of us who have faith. O, it is sweet to me occasionally to look to the end, when faith will not be required, dying happily in open vision. But meantime, this faith is needed, and the more you need it the stronger God will make it; yet the stronger also will be the opposition to it. "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee that he may sift thee as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not". Nor did it fail as to its root. "Hold up my goings"; Lord, keep me a believer. Did you ever ask that, keep me a believer. He has made you one then, and if He has made you one you do need keeping in that particular regard. O keep me from unbelief. The inveterate sin that we have is unbelief; a most fruitful root of all other sins is unbelief; it is the most daring sin. If you have a friend, in whose truthfulness and constancy of friendship you believe, any whisper against him would pain you. We have a Friend in heaven; He will never leave us; He will never forsake us; He loves us too well to let us destroy ourselves, and therefore He rebukes us. But this is the point, you have a whisper in your heart against Him - unbelief. It maligns His character, it contradicts His word, it criticises His providence. Lord, keep us believers. Grant that faith may be strengthened. Dear, believing brethren, hold fast to this, the grain of faith in your heart. But you say, I am weak; then this is the cry: "Hold up my goings"; keep faith in me, keep it in activity, keep it looking to Thyself, believing all good things of Thee. One thing faith does not like, contradictions of God. I have got such contradictions, in my nature, of God, that I am obliged to cry, and often earnestly beseech Him to grant me that I may not listen to these contradictions. It is a horrible sin to contradict God, and yet where is the man who has not in his nature a disposition to contradict Him.

Next, hold up my goings in prayer in Thy paths; in the path of God's willingness to hear and answer and save. Said Hezekiah: "The Lord was ready to save me". The Psalmist asked some questions. "Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore?" He found that was His infirmity; he would go on praying. There are encouragements to pray in two places. First in Holy Scripture. O what encouragement God does give to His people to go on praying. Night and

day they are to pray; they do. "Shall not God avenge His own elect which cry day and night unto Him though He bear long with them?" "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." "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass". "Men ought always to pray and not to faint". "Pray without ceasing". Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching unto the same". This Book is full of encouragements to pray. Notice these encouragements. And the other place is in the experience of a child of God, of every child of God who has attained to any degree of experience of God answering prayer. Cannot some of you - do not some of you - occasionally, at any rate, go back and see certain places of trouble, necessity, pressure, temptation, the uprising of corruptions in your hearts, and you have been led and enabled to seek God and He has answered you in the secret place of thunder, answered you from off the Mercy Seat, answered you in providence? And, remembering these answers, you may say with the Psalmist: "I love the Lord because He hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live." There is an encouragement then in your experience; use it; God help you to use it, to remember His word and to remember what He has done in you and for you. Hold up my goings in prayer in Thy paths. He has ordained prayer. A path He will have you to walk in is: "Call upon Me". Make known your requests unto Me. Happy is that man whom the Lord chooseth and causeth to approach unto Him; that man who is led to pray: "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Happy the man who can present, as it were, his heart to God, and say, Lord, let Thy kingdom come here. I know it means the destruction of my own kingdom, but let Thy kingdom come; let Thy will be done. We are weak creatures; God help us by holding us up in prayer.

Another path that God will have us walk in is submission to His holy will. There is a Scripture which you may have looked at, which may have looked at you, sometimes. "O LORD our God, other lords beside Thee have had dominion over us: They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise." I can make the first part of the confession fully. O Lord, other lords beside

They have had dominion over me. Some of you can do the same, cannot you? The lord of covetousness, the lord of worldliness, the lord of carnality, the lord of foolish reasoning, the lord of unbelief; these lords have had dominion over me. Who can say that he has never had these lords over him? What child of God could rise and say, I am innocent in that particular? Now when you come to the second part - They are dead, they shall not rise, you have got something to do. You may say, well sometimes I do believe that God has said to me in spirit metaphorically, "Come and put your foot on the neck of these kings" and you have done it for an hour perhaps, or else more. O happy the man who has, at any time, heard the Captain of his salvation, who trod Satan down and all other kings on the cross, say in the heart, "Come, my child, come, poor, weak, cowardly soldier though you are, and put your foot on the necks of these lords. One may say, I have never heard it yet. If you are a child of God this shall take place in you, "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" Look for it; submission to His holy will, when your will - not smashed, not destroyed, but touched, supplanted, and tenderly dealt with by the Lord - lies straight with the will of God, when you can say, Lord, here's my heart, here's my will, and though I do not wish to be without a will, I do wish that my will may be so dealt with, so kindly touched and handled and guided, as that it may lie straight with Thy will. This is one of God's paths; submit yourselves. "It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure". But O here, in conclusion, I say, how weak we are. You rise in the morning, you present yourself and your case to God in prayer, and thanksgiving; you get, perhaps, sweet access before you go downstairs, and when you go down you open your correspondence - something in that correspondence irritates you - and O how weak you are. You may read a false accusation; how weak you are. Something that says, you must make haste in this matter; how weak you are. You need keeping, holding up. "Hold up my goings". Let me go on in the right way in the face of opposition, in the face of all difficulties, in the face of temptation. Brethren, do not expect an easy way to heaven. If you do, you won't get it. Christ's word is: "In the world ye shall have tribulation", but this is connected with it: "In Me, ye shall have peace". "Be of good cheer", this world in which you have trouble, I have conquered, and you in Me shall conquer. Now this prayer then may suit some of us. "Hold up my goings", a weak believer and a poor, foolish child of Thine, giving endless trouble.

Let not sin prevail; let not any iniquity have dominion over me.
Lead me not into temptation, but when temptation comes hold me up.
Give me power to keep the word of Thy patience, to hold fast the form
of sound words and make me more than conqueror through Him who loved
me, as my hope is.

AMEN.