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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
on Sunday morning 19 December 1920

Psalm 17 v 5

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

The circumstances of the Psalmist should be considered. It would appear that he was in affliction; that men, particularly Saul had risen up against him, had slandered him; his life was hunted and he was in a great strait. Whether the whole of Saul's persecution is taken up here, or whether any particular part of it, we must leave; it is unknown; but this afflicted, godly man was enabled to appeal to God as to his position and condition. It is an amazing blessing when, in affliction, you can appeal to God. One of the greatest weaknesses that can be experienced in an affliction by God's people is a sense of guilt which has procured it. One of the most penetrating questions God asks in the scriptures of his people is this "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself?" If God asks you that, O child of His, in affliction, it will pierce you. I have known the piercing of it, but if in any point, any point of your life, of your duty, in any matter, you are kept clean, and have been preserved from gross transgression, and then in respect of that, may be falsely accused, God wont accuse you of sin. He never falsely accuses anybody, and if conscience is clean, then in that particular - there may be thousands of particulars in which you feel otherwise - but in that particular you may say "Hear the right O Lord". "Hear", as the margin is "Hear justice". A just weight and balance are the Lord's delight. Be careful my friends about your walk. Happy is he who comes within the word of Christ - "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake." You may, in a sense, disregard the evil things that are said if that one word stands on your side "falsely". "Attend unto my cry". He was not satisfied with innocence; neither will you be if you are God's. The one thing that he could be satisfied with was, what he here seeks - Hear

the right. Attend unto my cry. Let me come to Thee and pour out my heart to Thee and make known my case to Thee. Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence. Attend unto my cry; give ear unto my prayer that goeth not out of lips of deceit. Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence. Let me not judge my own case, but submit it to Thee for judgment. Let Thine eyes behold the things that are equal. They always do, but now let it be known in some way that they do behold even this matter. Thou hast proved my heart by Thy providential dealings; Thou hast instructed me in the night; Thou hast tried me and shall find nothing of these things they say. Plenty of sin is found - O you wont strut about as somebody higher in goodness than others, better than others. You wont say - "Stand by thyself for I am holier than thou", but you will want this to be true - the thing that is said is false." Concerning the works of men, by the words of Thy lips, by Thy grace, by Thy power, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer. Are you upright? You owe that to God. Are you clean in a thing? It is to His great Name you must give the praise. His word keeps, as Christ said in that prayer in John, recorded in John's gospel - "Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is truth". That is, the word of His lips. Disappointments in life you may have, and must have, some bitter ones; some that will cause you to go bowing down your head; some that may make you a sorrowful person. But if God owns you, if He comes, and with His blessing makes up, and more than makes up, for your loss in disappointment, what a favoured person you will be. But with respect to the walk of a man it is good that he can appeal to God and say - concerning the works of men, their wicked works, works of duplicity, works of spreading nets for men's feet; works of infidelity; concerning such works "By the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer". Then we have the text, a prayer, "Hold up my goings in Thy paths that my footsteps slips not."

If you take these paths to be the ways which the Lord has cast up for His people to walk in, how suitable is the prayer "Let me not turn aside" If you take the paths to be God's particular dealings with His children in the Church, or with a

person, a child of God in some particular providences, providences which would seem likely, more to turn him aside than to keep him walking in them, how suitable then is the prayer - "Hold up my goings in Thy paths."

Let us take the second first - take the ways of God with His people, His dealings with them. First, His inward dealings, and second His providential dealings. His inward dealings, what are these? Very solemn; solemn dealings of conviction, of reproof, whereby they are made to see in themselves nothing but sin, shortcomings, failures; led to see that. As He looks upon their hearts, as He sheds light upon them, they are discovered to themselves to be nothing more than a mass of corruption. But they can say, in answer to the question - Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots, so may ye learn to do well, who are accustomed to do evil - that is exactly my case. I have a nature that is as bent to evil as it can be, and I can no more, in this my fallen nature, do well, than the Ethiopian can change his black skin into white, or a leopard change his spots, and this is apparently very discouraging, very weakening. It will make you sympathise with Hart in those words - "Did the blind receive their sight, nothing but dismal things to see" It will make you feel, as it may be opened to you, the beautiful compassion of God when He says "I will not chide for ever, lest the soul should fail before Me, and the spirit which I have made." God wont always be at this fault finding. James Bourne says "I find much of God's work with me to be finding fault with me". But He wont always be finding fault with you nor is it bondage when He tells you of a fault. It is for two purposes. First to correct you and then to give you prayer to Himself that He would save you from living in it. If you see a fault in the light of God you will find yourself very sinking at times, but you will also find that He will give you prayer about it. Now to be held up in this path of inward teaching, teaching the nature of sin, the power of sin, the persistence of sin, the daring of sin; I say to be held up in this, is not a little thing. We need God to keep us close to His reproofs. Remember my brethren what Solomon says - "The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise". "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten

be zealous therefore and repent". Do not be surprised if you get a good deal of this in your pilgrimage. Says Hart, to quote him again

Know, whom the Saviour favours much,  
Their faults He oft reproves;  
He takes peculiar care of such,  
And chastens whom He loves.

And that is the reason why the Lord's people, as they get older get, in their feelings, worse and worse and grow worse and worse and why, sometimes, they say to themselves and to each other - instead of growing in grace, I seem to grow in sin. Bless God, they may continue, not in outward sin, but in what I perceive in myself, sins unsuspected years ago by me now stand before me. Some things are outstanding; certain propensities, pride of life, lust of the eye, ambition, something that you have been reaching after and which God has not allowed you perhaps at present to attain to, and you may never attain to it. And you say "Why" to yourself, "Why this, why do I so constantly see myself to be a wretch? That you may prize Jesus Christ. Hold on here. Rather pray to be held up here. Shrink not from it or, if you do, pray to be kept from running away from it. God will hold the mirror to your eye and as He does, may you be enabled to hold your eye on the mirror and look at self; bad self; wicked, depraved, deceitful, proud, hypocritical, lustful self. I would put my foot on this self in the pulpit, as in secret, with regard to my own case, if I could. I do sympathise with Rutherford's expression when he exclaims - "O that I had not a myself". Myself will be a burden as long as you live, O people of God. The Lord hold you up. David must often have felt discouraged when hunted here and there by Saul and you know he did run away, he did run away. And you think, with Berridge, the Master seems to find so much fault you are ready to leave His school. "Hold Thou me up". "Hold up my goings in Thy paths".

The path of conviction. It is a path of mercy; it is indeed my brethren. I have lived unto a good many years. I

have shut my eyes sometimes to the awful sight of a wicked heart, but I have lived to prove it is a path of mercy. "As many as I love I rebuke" says the Lord Jesus. He loves His children too well to let them be blind to their faults. He loves them too well to let them go on in self-delusion as to their own cases, but this is not all. Ephraim is not left always to be a cake unturned. You wont be burnt to a cinder on this side and left to be dough on another side. God's dealings are proportionate; they are wonderful. If he often reproves you He will often comfort you. If, by this reproof, you get so weakened and so disheartened and so put out as it were with the way that you are ready to say, surely I shall fail one day, He will drop some kind word into your heart; He will let some sweet smile down into your soul; He will draw you up to the Lord Jesus; He will give you to see what a Saviour He is. That word, that great word, O, it was like a little heaven to me more than 50 years ago, the Priesthood of Christ. Says Paul, He must be able to have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way; the Lord Jesus. When you are discouraged, and when you are confused, when there is a tumult in your heart and you know not what to do, nor know which way to walk, here comes this merciful High Priest and He is able to have compassion on you and to put you in the right way. What way? The way of prayer, the way of faith; the way of a daring faith.

War in weakness, dare in doubt

Covered with sin; look to the blood of Christ. Weakened by reproof; look to the grace of Christ. Shocked at your rags; look to the righteousness of Christ. And the Priest will do all this for you. O it is great to be held up in a way of prayer when you are reproved. Said one, Habakkuk, I will get me to my tower, the place of defence, and "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." What will you say? Nothing but "guilty". What will you say? You will say nothing but for Christ's sake forgive me, sanctify me, clothe me in His righteousness. Clothe me with the garment of humility;

clothe me with all that grace and mercy I so much need. "Hold up my goings in Thy paths"; mercy's paths; mercy's ways. Love's ways; the ways of justification and of sanctification.

Take God's ways now in providence. They may be strange to you. He may throw down some of the best things in your judgment, the best things you had. He may balk you in some of the ways you desire to walk in. He may block a particular way, and say you are not to walk in it, and what will you do. He may take out of your hand some substance; He may bring to you much trouble. He may lay affliction on your loins, and what then? You will find a good deal of old nature come out. Affliction brings out two things to the saints - the badness of their nature, and the goodness of God. The badness of their nature expresses itself in fretfulness. Why am I put into this path? Why must I walk in this trouble? How can I be upright when this comes to irritate me and nothing else? Some of you will know for yourselves what I speak. What then? "O" says the Holy Spirit in your heart, "confess your sin; wait on God; look to the blood of Christ." He may teach you to believe this, tis better to be held back from presumption than to have unsanctified prosperity. He may teach you to believe that God intends good to you by the evil you are suffering, and this will bring you to your knees; yes it will bring you to your knees. You will cry hard for mercy and that God will sanctify to you what you are passing through. It may make you sober. It may give you a view of things in thy life which is needful for you. It may bring out the truth that one expresses thus - "Ill that He blesses is good, and unblessed good is ill; and all is right that seems most wrong; if it be His sweet will". "Ah", you say, "I cannot say it is a sweet will". Wait on God. Hold up my goings in the path of trouble. The path of physical suffering; the path of relative suffering; the path of suffering in your circumstances, whatever that may be; hold up thy goings by this prayer given to us "Hold up my goings in Thy paths". Let me not turn aside; let me not be discouraged overmuch.

Take, in the next place, the paths to mean the ways that God

would have us walk in. "I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment; That I may cause those that love Me to inherit substance" Now there are certain paths that God will have His children walk in. The first that I would name to you is faith. We walk by faith; that is, the path God will have us walk in is a path of believing. And here, how we need a start, and then we need to be held up, for all men have not faith. There are more unbelievers than believers in the world, and as a solemn and awful fact, everybody must say this - all men have not faith. Why have you? How came you to possess that which comparatively few possess? How is it that you, as blind, ignorant and dead as any creature of God out of hell, should be blessed with eyes to see, that is, with eyes to believe by seeing God, with faith to believe in Christ. Why? The answer is this, because God gives it to you. He did not owe it to you any more than to a reprobate, but He gave it to you. O the riches of the goodness of God; O the depths of the riches of the goodness of God to give any poor creature real faith. Not a notion, not an idea of God, but a heart belief that there is a God; that there is the Trinity in unity; that this God has been offended with us; that He has given a remedy, revealed it, brought it to light; that there is a way to God even in the Lord Jesus. This faith is great. It is called "the faith of the operation of God", because it is by His distinct operation on the heart that any person possesses it. It is called "the faith of God's elect" because it is confined to them. All men have not faith. We ought, every one of us blessed with faith, to fall down before God and bless His Name for the gift of faith. We do owe gratitude and everlasting praises to God for giving us faith. It is that which will distinguish men and put a difference between them. It is that that makes out what true religion is. Vital faith; without it you cannot please God, "for he that cometh to God must believe that He is". You must have this faith before you can please God. And is there nothing to oppose it? Is there nothing to make it needful that one blessed with it should now cry "Hold me up in the way of believing?" O yes, reason, sense, infidelity in the heart, many strange things occurring, many strange voices speaking against God and against believing in Him

will make it needful to you, and you will find it so, to cry "Hold me up; hold my faith up; hold my faith to Thyself; hold Thyself to my faith. Let me not lose sight of God." You will go wrong without this. There is nothing to keep you if you have no faith. But if you have faith this will hold you. It will make the soul secure, but it wont give it a false security. It will keep you to God; it will keep God before you. Let thine eyes look right on and thine eye-lids straight before thee. When you can say in your heart solemnly - there is a God and I believe in Him, you can say one of the greatest sentences that can ever escape the lip of man. It is great to say you believe in God. "Hold up my goings". Doubts come, and the transgression of the wicked may be in your heart saying "There is no God" and this transgression will often impinge on providence and say -if He were what you say He is, would this be? Could He allow that? Could He do that? Then you will say - keep me believing. Do not try to reason the matter out; nothing more contrary than true religion to human nature, nothing. Therefore this is one way in which God will have His people walk. It is put in another way in the Scripture. Some said to Him - Tell us what the work of God is. What is the work that we should do to please God? "What works shall we work that we may have eternal life?" Says the Lord, in answer, "This is the work of God that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent, that is God's work." It is another way of speaking of the path, this path of believing. If you have no faith, you have no convictions, you have no prayer, you have no uprightness before God. If you have no faith, the very doctrines that you believe will be meaningless to you, empty phrases. The Name of Jesus will be empty to you, and much that God does, much that He says, will be enigmatical to you, so that you wont be able to understand anything. But if you have faith you wont try to understand some things. Rather you will beg of God to make you as He says, convert you, and be as a little child, that you may receive His kingdom. "Except ye be converted and be as little children ye cannot enter into the kingdom." Take that then as one path. Are you in it? Happy man who believes in God. Things will be put right for him. God will explain things to him one day. Happy man who believes that God cannot be wrong



whatever falls out. O happy man whose faith goes from time things, disappointments, losses, crosses, even as the Apostle Paul speaks, and finds a home in God; whose faith is a blessed faith.

This will lead to another path that the Lord will have His children walk in, namely, the path of prayer. Jesus had faith and gave to His God. He said in the mouth of Isaiah - "I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth Me". (Isaiah 50 v 7 and 8). And in the chapter which I read the Lord you know speaks to Him and said to Him "I will uphold Him". Jesus prayed; He walked in the path of prayer, and sometimes spoke to Him thus - "O Thou that hearest prayer".

The path of prayer Thyself hast trod  
Lord teach us how to pray

We do need it; we have plenty to pray about, and plenty to pray for if we have prayer. Can you pray? Do you pray? In your sorrows do you turn to God? Perhaps you turn from men; a sort of feeling is in your heart - they cannot help me. Even their sympathy might be like singing songs to a heavy heart. But can you turn, are you led to turn to the Lord. Lord help me; help me to bear this; sanctify this to me. Lord look on my emptiness and fill it; on my weakness and strengthen me; on my shameful defeats and give me victory. Look upon me in my difficult path and guide me. And if you have this God-given prayer, do you need to be held up in it? Yes. Christ upholds all creation by the word of His power. All creatures are sustained by Him. Prayer, if one may so speak of it, is a creature, created, given. He who gives it, creates it Himself, sustains it. Prayer that ascends to heaven, first descends from heaven. As it is written - "I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications." That is how you pray if you really pray, and only people blessed with prayer of this sort can understand the relief it is, the comfort it becomes, to have prayed. If you have got a chill and every pore of your skin is shut up, you may sit by the biggest fire they may

make in your house, and wrap yourself in blankets, but you will shiver; it is not an external thing. But when you get some inward vitality in that particular moving again and, as it were, from within opening the pores, then you say, I am better; I am warm. And so, when one is shut up to all outward means and things, when we feel now there is no relief, we are no better for this and we cannot be; when the Holy Spirit comes and says in your heart "Call upon Me. Call upon the Lord. Cast your burden on Him. Make known your requests to Him. Open wide your mouth, I will fill it", you are better; you have got relief. You need to be held up in prayer.

Prayer was appointed to convey  
The blessings God designs to give  
Long as they live should Christians pray  
For only while they pray they live

But one says - I am too guilty. No, you are not. I am too discouraged. That may be, but you cannot be too guilty. Why? The blood of Jesus Christ speaketh better things than that of Abel. That opens the way; that says "Open your mouth wide"; that says no guilt, but this can remove; no trouble, but this can sanctify; no need, but this shall bring a supply. O it is great to eye the blood of Christ. It is great to see what that can do. Hold Thou me up in prayer. Hold Thou me up in a spirit of waiting. There are two waiting ones with respect to the Church and deliverances. One of them is God. He waits. Yes, He has waited from Eternity for you. He waited in all the days of your unregeneracy and carelessness for you. Jesus waits, having bought His children with His blood. He is expecting to see the travail of His soul that He may be satisfied and, says the Lord by Isaiah - "Therefore will the Lord wait that He may be gracious and therefore will He be exalted that He may have mercy upon you". And who is the other waiting one? Why, a sinner, the Church. "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage and He shall strengthen your heart, wait I say on the Lord." O, but says nature, "Where is the promise of His coming, for since the

fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were" You may say, I have waited all this time and I have not got it; and so you believe perhaps because you have not got it, you never will get it. But that is a false deduction; you have no right to deduce a denial from a delay. If God has given it, He has not broken the promise. If He says in you by His teaching, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble", then follows - even if your faith has not grasped it - "I will deliver you". And remember God cannot deny Himself. He is faithful. Lord hold me up. Poor David never lost the anointing oil, but he lost his courage. And once he said "There is nothing better for me than to escape. As the Lord liveth there is but a step between me and death. So away he runs and gets into trouble. That is what you will do; if you run away from waiting, you will get into more trouble. Wait on God. O but I cannot. May you pray this - Hold up my goings in a path of waiting, that my footsteps slip not, slip into running away.

Hold me up in labour. "Let us" says Paul, "labour to enter into that rest lest any of you should seem to come short of it." There is a rest to a sinner in Jesus Christ. A rest for the conscience in the atonement; a rest to the soul in justification; a rest to the affections in the Person of Christ; of rest for the intellect in all the greatness of God in Christ; a rest for the mind where it can find sufficient. There is a rest. Jesus is the rest. Jesus is the rest and there is no rest but in Him. Sin has brought unrest to nature, to all creation; and God, in His infinite grace has given rest in His dear Son. Says the Apostle "Labour to enter into it" Says Christ "Labour not for the bread that perisheth but for that meat which shall endure unto everlasting life which God giveth you". O but we get discouraged. Some here perhaps can say, we have waited for years for that and still wait. What are a few years to Eternity? You will get what you want and when you get to heaven, O the waiting will be as nothing. Toplady says "One moment's intercourse with Him thy griefs will overpay" and that is true. It is written in the prophet Isaiah - In that day, in the day when the Lord shall swallow up death in victory on the mountains of the house of the

Lord, in that day they shall say, "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him. This is the Lord, we have waited for Him." And then they sing the blessed song "O Lord I will praise Thee, though thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away and Thou comfortest me." And this shall be the case.

Hold up my goings in the way of obedience. Hold up my goings in the way of the precepts of the Holy gospel, these precepts which do set before us a right walk. Hold up my goings in the way of obedience to the ordinances of the house of God. Hold up my goings in obedience to the holy precepts and the forbiddings and the holy commandments of the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and then it will be well with us.

Now beloved friends, one door is set before us. "I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it" - a door to Himself. "I am the door". "I am the way". This is the door, the way. All others are excluded. Be it given to us then to enter by that door, that way, into God's gracious presence. May He bless you and help you and help me, with you, to continue this petition. "Hold up my goings in Thy paths that my footsteps slip not."

AMEN.