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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 19 February 1936

PSALM 27 v 9

"Hide not Thy face far from me; put not Thy servant
away in anger; Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither
forsake me, O God of my salvation."

The people of God are likened to trees which have their seasons; changes many. One great change is from summer to winter, and when the soul is in winter things are very dark and cold. But there is one reason, above all other reasons, for the changes to which the people of God are liable, namely sin. If we are rightly taught, if the Holy Ghost is in us, if He convinces us of our sins, and sinnings, we shall often trace the solemn dealings of God, the hidings of His face, to that awful thing, sin. He said to the church of old: "Your sins have separated between you and your God" and there is no sorrow that the people of God have, or can have, so keen, so bitter, so burdensome, so distressing as that. The jealousy of God is only known in this life by the people of God. He says, His Name is Jealous. Where true love is there is jealousy. When there is no occasion for it, then it is not manifested, but when there is an occasion for it, it shows itself. Now when a saint walks uprightly, when the clean fear of God is in exercise, when he is afraid of displeasing his best friend, his gracious God and Saviour, when his prayer continually is: "Hold Thou me up", "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not", and when the Lord fulfils in that soul, in a way of gracious answer that word: "He keepeth the feet of His saints and none of their steps shall slide", then there is no occasion for this jealousy. But when, on the contrary, one walks carelessly, neglects the throne of grace, indulges, it may be, some pride, or lives under the influence of some proud lust in his nature, then this jealousy comes out. I planted a vineyard, said the Lord. I gathered out the stones, I fenced it round about. What more could I do to My vineyard than I have done? When I looked for fruit, when I came to grape gathering, there was none. I planted thee wholly a right vine. How art thou turned unto Me a degenerate vine, the vine of Sodom. Jealousy comes, and the more life

there is in the soul, the more convinced and pained is that soul when the Spirit returns, that he should have behaved as he has behaved; that he should have brought on him what he has brought on him, the hidings of God's face. This is a different thing from the general religion that many possess, among, I mean, our own people. Quite an easy kind of religion is coming among us here and there, but when the Holy Ghost comes near to a sinner and says, when that sinner is complaining of darkness and confusion, and barrenness: "Hast thou not procured this to thyself?" and when some trouble is laid on, the same question is asked: Have not your sins brought this on you? this, when opened by the Holy Ghost to a child of God, then he says, I have brought all on myself. And very solemn it is. A man of God who has said: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear", for that man to have to say in substance as Jeremiah said: "When I cry and shout He shutteth out my prayer". For the church, planted wholly a right vine, to have become a degenerate vine, a strange plant. For one who has walked with God, to have that word said to him: "Your sins have separated between you and your God", that is very solemn. Then, unless the Lord ^{upholds} (beholds) that soul, he gets very dejected, depressed, and is almost ready to give up. "What should I wait for the Lord any longer?" He cries and shouts in his pain, and his affliction, and his darkness, and the Lord does not seem to hear him. Then he is in trouble and yet he is brought to this: "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after". When the Lord said, Seek ye My face, then my heart said Thy face, LORD, will I seek. There is that in a child of God that springs up into a lively exercise in a gracious response of faith, when the Lord says, seek My face, you have turned away from Me. I have not turned from you; you have gone away from Me. "My people have forgotten Me days without number." Have not some of you covered your faces and felt them full of shame for your ways before God? Have you not felt that if the Lord should never give you another smile this side of heaven you could justify Him, for the blackness of your nature, the horrible thoughts you have had, the sins, the coldness. Now comes this, a real feeling after God, and then the cry: "Hide not Thy face far from me." Lord, I am in darkness; do not continue this darkness; do not cover the face of Thy throne against me; do not leave me in this condition. Shine. It was part of the blessing that the priest was to bless Israel with: "The LORD lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace" and

it is the gospel as Paul teaches it in the Corinthians: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". When that face has been seen by faith, the soul has no rest away from it really. You cannot be happy away from it. Nothing can be a substitute for that. Nothing can make up for the loss of that. "Hide not Thy face". He does sometimes for wise, gracious purposes of discipline and of instruction, that we may not be fools, but be wise unto salvation, and wise in the ways of God. He may hide His face by some solemn providence and for the time you cannot submit and feel very distressed and dejected in your spirit, and have given you, as a divine favour, a spirit of confession and you are brought to see this, that if God would be with you, you could be content with any circumstance; be full of all emptiness in the world; even though the fig tree should not blossom, though the fruit in the vine should fail; though there be no herd in the stall, desolation, emptiness, yet will I rejoice in the Lord, but when He hides His face you cannot rejoice. That religion that knows no change is from beneath, not from above. That religion which leaves the person willing to go on without any communications from heaven is not the religion of God. That religion that He gives is sensitive to pain and to peace, and when pain comes, then this cry comes: "Hide not Thy face far from me." Do not let me walk in darkness, for if I walk in darkness I do not know where I am going. There are all kinds of stumbling when we are in the dark. We stumble by unbelief; we stumble by misjudging God; we stumble by saying that things are crooked altogether when it is not so. And in the light we see God, and we see everything in a right way.

"Put not Thy servant away in anger". Can you, O believing friends, imagine or conceive or think or see anything that, to you, would be so solemn, awful, as being put away from the Lord God? Can you think of anything more horrible than to spend an eternity without God? I feel as if I can say, that to me there is nothing, in my judgement, in my feeling, so awful as that, to think of spending an eternity apart from God, cast out from His presence. I believe I may say this, that feeling evidences spiritual perception, evidences a judgement that is right of God, evidences a spiritual realisation that the whole of creation is empty without God, and that lacking God

is the greatest punishment, the greatest sorrow. "Put not Thy servant away in anger". He may seem to do it in several ways. He may seem to do it when He shuts out your prayer seemingly. "When I cry and shout He shutteth out my prayer." When your groans seem not to enter into His presence; when the enemy is permitted to terrify you, when you are praying or trying to pray; when your sins are set before you; when temptation comes, even while you are seeking God; when circumstances of a depressing, dejecting nature are set before you; then it seems as if God has put you away from Himself. No sweet access such as you hope you have had; just darkness and no comfortable sense of the presence of God. He may seem to put you away when circumstances appear to be sent on purpose to drive you away from God. Circumstances which distract you, confuse and make you feel, well there is no way for me to walk in; crookedness everywhere; crooked things, crooked feelings, crooked temptations, and crooked providence; everything crooked, and that seems to you as if God is putting you away from Himself. He may seem to be putting you away from Himself in anger when He permits temptation to be very strong and apparently prevailing in you. I need not enter much into that; some of you may know painfully the weakness, the shame, the staggering unsteadiness, the fear, the horror, at the temptations that are hurled into your minds, that have a lodgment in your thoughts. I am glad that no man, no minister, is obliged to utter the nature of the blasphemies and the boilings of rage that a child of God may be subjected to at times. Then it looks as if God has put him away, has no care for him; as if the Lord says to the enemy, do what you will with him; to providence, do what you will with him. "Put not Thy servant away in anger". Many things look like anger in God when He is dealing with His people for their waywardness.

But the Psalmist revives, so to speak, in this moment, and a past mercy comes to him: "Thou hast been my help". This is a beautiful thing in experience, that the Holy Spirit may be graciously near to you when you have not thought Him to be there, and may bring into your memory and into your heart some particular helps which you have had. A help in prayer, liberty, union, sweet access to the Father through Christ by the Spirit, when you could pour out your heart before the Lord, when you could lay your case before Him, and urge and plead and argue and wrestle, and you were not reprov'd for it. The Lord did not

frown on you while you were thus engaged. When you could say: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercy and the truth Thou hast shown me." You could not get low enough then; a poor creature, a vagrant soul, without home, without rest; a poor distracted soul, and now the Spirit comes and you get that powerful help. There is real relief in it, true relief here. Thou hast been my help in prayer. If that be your experience, try to hold it, plead it, urge it before the Lord. He is a faithful God and He said in His word: "Put Me in remembrance" Remember, and put Me in remembrance of the time when I helped thee in prayer. Hold it my friends when you have got it; endeavour to hold it fast. He has been your help; He has granted some fresh manifestations of Himself to you when you have seen Him by faith and your faith has stretched out its hand to lay hold of Him. When that word in Isaiah had a place in you, even if you did not know the word: "Let him take hold of My strength and make peace with Me and he shall make peace with Me." When you get a sight by faith of the well-pleased face of God in Christ. When God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined into your heart and gave you the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and your soul rose up and lived unto Him and stretched out her hands to Him and looked by faith upon Him and said, "He is the chiefest among ten thousand; He is altogether lovely." That was a help. O it may have been thus in reading the Scripture; some Psalm, some verses of a Psalm may have dropped into your heart, reproved you and encouraged you, instructed you and strengthened you. That word further on in the Psalms: "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God:..... which keepeth truth for ever". What a word, and it may have dropped into your heart like a ray of light, a heavenly speech, a sweetness, honey and the honeycomb, intimating to you that you had a friend in heaven. "Thou hast been my help". He may have been your help in regard of some person or people. You may have had to do with somebody who has discouraged you, troubled you, and you have been for some little time much cast down, greatly afflicted in that particular, and the Lord has appeared and given you favour, even with the people who have discouraged you, and you have looked on like Manoah and his wife, while the Angel of the Lord has done wondrously, and you have said: This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in my eyes." So you can, perhaps, in a dark hour, with this brought to your memory, say to the Lord: "Thou hast been my help". It may have been


that without your reading the Scripture, while in prayer, some Scripture has fallen upon your heart. O the sweetness of that experience, when the Lord has, as it were, spoken to you, comforted you, said to you that He was your heavenly Father. Or, while you were feeling your sinfulness greatly, and your many backslidings, He may have said: "Wilt thou not from this time say, Thou art my Father, the Guide of my youth", and you have been enabled to say: This God is my God for ever and ever; He will be my Guide even unto death. "Thou hast been my help". O, try to keep hold of a promise, try to keep hold of any word that has ever fallen on your hearts, and been a speaking word to you. It may have been this; you have had a clear deliverance when the Lord has spoken peace by forgiveness of your sins, and you have felt that He redeemed you, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ. What a difference! Law, terror, sin, guilt, devil, burden, gone, removed; your sins cast into the depths of the sea. You may have said, I could die on this. God's faithful word before your heart, and before faith, you may have said, I could die on that testimony. On the atonement, as your eye has been fixed, you have said I could die on that. Yes, and you can live on it. You can live by faith on a word like that. You can bless and praise a holy God for such a word as that. So when you come into this text you may say, the Lord has been my help. If He brings merciful helps to you, hold them fast and take them before the Lord and say: Whose is this word? Who gave me this word? Who wrought in my soul by it? Who wrought faith and hope and love? Who gave me a foretaste of heaven? Who made the Saviour sweeter than honey or the honeycomb? Who made His Name great in my heart? God wont dishonour that; He wont disown it. If you can take His word to you, His work in you, the operations of His Spirit in you, and put them before Him, you will find He will not disown them, and you may find a wonderful peace flowing into your heart as you are enabled thus to plead before Him. "Thou hast been my help". And when you can say that, you can go on with Paul: "Who hath delivered, who doth deliver, in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us." Sweet is that confidence, humble is that confidence, broken is that spirit, happy is that soul, peaceful is that conscience, where this experience is: "Thou hast been my help".

After this profession another prayer is uttered; two prayers. "Hide not Thy face far from me; put not Thy servant away in anger"; then the profession, the sweet remembrance of help given; then again prayer: "Leave me not". This intimates what every one blessed with divine help, feels: Lord, keep it for me. Hold me up. We are not to be trusted, nor will any saint of God of any standing in experience trust himself. He is a fool who leans on his own understanding. Grace, grace, free and sovereign grace, brings people to this, they have no strength, no stability, no confidence, no humility, but what God gives them. So, with a blessing in remembrance, this prayer comes in well, "Leave me not." How would you put it? How would I put it? I put it this way. Leave me not to my own fallen nature. Are you afraid of that? I am of my nature. I never was so afraid of it in my life as I am nowadays. "Leave me not". What is in this nature of ours? A heart which is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. The thought of being left to that heart; for that heart to be allowed to do what it is capable of doing, is a dreadful and painful thought. O Lord dont leave me. If any of you have half the trouble with your heart that I have with my heart, you will certainly beg of God not to leave you to it. "Leave me not". "Give me not over to the will of my enemies", and a man's enemies are all in his own household, in his own heart. "Leave me not". Leave me not to vain and foolish thoughts. Turn away mine eyes from vanity. Leave me not to covetousness. Leave me not to any lust of my fallen nature; pride, unbelief, wickedness. Can you go with that? Leave me not to my nature. Nature will go with you. When you kneel down, will come with you here; will attend you when you read the Scripture, when you are thinking of God, when you are hearing a sermon; nature will be with you all the time, and if God left you to that nature what would become of you? This prayer then is very important: "Leave me not".

Leave me not to wrong judgements of God. You may easily judge Him wrongly, very easily. When trouble comes, when dejecting circumstances come, when gloom comes over your spirit, you are apt then, very apt to misjudge God. I know you are if you are at all like myself. And when you misjudge God you get into the utmost confusion. You do not know where you are, or where you are moving to or what will become of you. You are just ready to faint, and cannot say you are pursuing. To misjudge God is to be under the power of unbelief. You

may misjudge circumstances and people. We are not to be trusted in anything and the Lord wont let us trust in anything but Himself. In the Psalm I read, the prayer was very suitable to me: "In Thee O Lord do I put my trust; let me not be put to confusion." Confusion is a very serious thing. When you come to confusion of your mind and judgement you do not know where you are. You look here and there and understand a little of Job's experience. When I go forward He is not there. Of course not, God does not let you look into the future. Or backward, I cannot behold Him. He did not say He was not there for He was there, God was in all the works that He has done. If I go to the right hand or to the left, He hideth Himself. He was just confused, could make nothing straight, and that is how a child of God is in his heart when he misjudges God and misjudges circumstances and misjudges the mind and the will of God, and he may say, O if I had but the mind of Christ, I should be well. If I could but believe, all would be well with me, but, he says, I cannot, I do not believe. Leave me not to be a prey to the devil who walketh about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. We do need divine protection, we need to be in the pavilion of the Lord as it is here: "In the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion". We need it; we need to be hid by the Lord Himself in the Lord. "Pray", said Christ, "that ye enter not into temptation". But we do enter into temptation. We need protection from the tempter and from the temptation.

"Neither forsake me". "Cast me not away from Thy presence and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me". What could be more dreadful, what is more terrible to think of, than God forsaking you. He may forsake you in your circumstances and just leave you to be tossed about. He may leave you in your spirit, and forsake you there, and not teach you, nor help you, nor guide you, and leave you just to be the prey of your own thoughts. But he makes this profession, and this gives a point to his prayer: "O God of my salvation". O, if we can but hang here, if we were but enabled to lay hold of this - the God of my salvation. What does that mean? It means that God wont leave you, that He wont forsake you. Faithfulness is God's alone. He will not forsake the work of His own hands. Creation is nothing, comparatively speaking, when put by the side of a living soul, a new creature, "created in Christ Jesus unto good works". Will God forsake that? Who upholds the worlds? Christ by the word of His



power upholds the worlds which He has made, and He upholds the new creature, and that new creature living, and again and again having faith in exercise, can say: "O God of my salvation". It is a good exercise for a child of God when, he is enabled to do it, to go back to the beginning of his confidence, to the testimonies God has given to him, to the helps he has received, the comforts of the Holy Ghost, the comforts of love and the fellowship of the Spirit; the times that there has been a sweetness in prayer, and times when answers to prayer have been given. It is a good exercise. You will be able to say, perhaps, at the close of an exercise for an hour or two, I can lean on these; God gave them to me. "I have taken Thy testimonies unto me as a heritage for ever." And you may take the testimonies which God has given to you in your souls, the power of which you felt, the sweetness of which you realised, and the comfort that you were wrapped up in for the time, and say, God gave me these, I will try to hold them: "Hold that fast which thou already hast", and you are enabled to do it.

"Hide not Thy face far from me; put not Thy servant away in anger; Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation."

AMEN.