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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 1 January 1928

"My times are in Thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies and from them that persecute me." Psalm 31 v 15

As we enter upon a New Year it will be well for us to listen to the exhortation which, in a sense, we have addressed to each other in the words we have just sung - to be thankful for what the Lord has done, and go and ask Him for more. Individually, we have good reason to acknowledge that goodness and mercy, even in divine providence, have followed us, and some have good reason to say that goodness and mercy in Christ shall follow them all the days of their life. Our life here is "a vapour which appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." If, by reason of strength, after we have attained to three-score years and ten, our years be four-score, yet their strength, according to Scripture, is labour and sorrow, and soon it flies away. There is none abiding. Our foundation is in the dust, and "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps". "Man's goings are of the LORD: how can a man then understand his own way?" Probably God's providence is but little observed comparatively, at least by most of us. We rise in the morning, and go to our businesses, eat our bread, and retire to rest at night, little perhaps thinking in whose hand our breath is, and from whom comes our well-being, as well as our being. In God we live, and move, and have our being. And surely it becomes us to say also that every good thing we have, every breath we draw without pain, and every meal we eat with relish - the appetite being given - we owe to God. And it is a sad thing when a rational creature is as a beast in respect of gratitude, not owning the hand that feeds him. May not we be as that creature. Think dear friends, upon God. Think upon His providence. This Psalm is a beautiful one. The man of God opens it with prayer. Every chapter, so to speak, of our life, should be opened with prayer. "In Thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in Thy righteousness." "Let me never be ashamed" must be understood with a very distinct reservation. You will, all who know God, enter into what I mean, instantly. You could not ask the Lord, when you look at your sins, and sinfulness, and failings, that you might never, in respect of them, be ashamed. You can ask Him to make you more ashamed of yourself, and of your sins, and of your sinnings. Happy the man who has sorrow every day of his life for his sins. Sorrow mingled again and again with the joy of the Lord which is his strength. Ah if any of you have a religion with no sorrow for sin in it, and no sorrow over Christ in it, the Lord take that religion from you, and give you a better. "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him.

And that will attend all the saints to the end of time. Very sweet, if perhaps rare, are the occasions when sinners do look on Christ whom they have pierced and mourn for Him. The Psalmist had enemies. Who has not? What child of God has not enemies? He asks that he may not be delivered unto them, but that God would redeem him from their hand. There is an element in this Psalm that to me is very beautiful, and that is, that while his enemies are before him, the Psalmist had also that which appears to have been much more to him than his enemies, namely his sins, and he asks the Lord not to remember them against him. Every child of God will enter into this. In another Psalm the Psalmist said - "My sin is ever before me". And while I live, and am able to speak to you, I will try, to keep your sins before you, and I am sure, as God favours you, He will keep them before you, but not to despair, but only to a wholesome shame, to your glorying eventually in the Lord Jesus.

He comes to the text. He sees himself a helpless person, ignorant of to-morrow, yea of the next hour. He sees by faith the Lord God. He realises that his life, his days, his circumstances, the vicissitudes that he has gone through, and may yet have to go through, are all in, not his own hands, but God's. That is a great thing, and a good thing. Independence is not belonging to men. We should like to have it, and we talk about it, but it does not belong to us. Every child of God knows that. May we have grace to depend. Pharaoh lives still, and he says in men's hearts - Who is the Lord that I should obey Him? Faith says in the heart of the Christian - "My times are in Thy hand", and I do not want them to be anywhere else, least of all in my own hand. This profession brings before us some particular points.

First of all, the sovereignty of God

Second, that this sovereignty in the Church is paternal, and

Thirdly, that it is the best place for a man's things to be in the hands of God, for - "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose".

Divine sovereignty, a deep unfathomable, and undisputed where faith is in exercise. An undisputed right in God, natural to Him. You may treat the sovereignty of God in two ways. You may treat it theologically, but very few of the Lord's people are capable of entering into that way of regarding divine sovereignty. It needs a large acquaintance with the Scriptures, and with histories, the histories of the church, and of the world, and so we may just dispose of that by saying, we are not capable of entering much into divine sovereignty theologically. But it may be entered into, and is entered into, experimentally by the feeblest child of God who has faith, faith in exercise on God. There is no child of God here who, in some measure, has not entered into this great deep in some experience. But it is a very pressing, and in some particulars, depressing thing, because it frequently comes athwart the path of the person who is to submit to it; comes right across his wishes. It does not allow the carnal mind that scope it wants, and seeks. It does not allow human reason that scope it has the ambition to attain. It just brings men to this, with Abraham - "Who am but dust and ashes". Were you ever brought there? "Who am but dust and ashes". Our foundation is in the dust. Ashes - so there has been a fire. Dust - we are to return to. Ashes, in experience, preceding beauty given. And the beauty of holiness consists in this point of experience, in an unfeigned, unreserved submission to the will of God.

"My times" my times in providence. We speak about creatures of circumstances. We are nothing of the sort. We are creatures of God, and circumstances come. They have a birth, a life, a death, as God wills. A great truth, abhorrent to a proud heart, acceptable to a broken heart. Say Christian, would you have your own things in your own hands? With past experience agreeing with the Scripture, past experience of your foolishness, and weakness, and ignorance, would you have your things in your own hands? If God were to say, you might have, would you not refer all back to Him, and say, let me, let my things, my times, my business, my family, my health, or my weakness, and sickness, let all be in Thy hands. Faith does want to be here in providence. And sometimes you may say with respect to your case, your own matters, there is nothing so bad but that it might be - and if you were dealt with as you deserve to be, would be - immeasurably worse. You may feel a broken business, or broken leg, a broken circumstance, even a broken friendship, better than a broken conscience, better than a broken soul, broken in eternal misery. The hand of the Lord has a cup in it. A mixture is in that cup, and the wicked shall drink the dregs of it. No single circumstance is alone. There are connections,

links, subsidiary matters, each working according to the disposal of God; a wheel within a wheel. Why is this? says one, and why did God permit that? If you have grace, and faith to wait, you will see one day - if you do not see it for a long time, you will see it one day - that the whole was ordered in all things and sure, and wrought, and guided, and sustained, and brought to the issue designed by the only wise God. Times of providence. Times in a family, when the business fails, when work is short, when difficulties confront, when liabilities come, and it may seem there is no probability, and even - unbelief may say - there is no possibility of meeting them.

Now when God gives faith to a tried person to lay hold of His strength, and to believe in His wisdom, and to answer that question, and truly believe that "There is nothing too hard for the Lord", then there is a quietness which accords with the text - "My times are in Thy hand". Feeding five thousand beside women and children may be a matter of support to your faith. A few loaves and fishes in the hands of omnipotence are enough for all the world. Jesus, healing a man that was above forty years, that may be a strength, and an argument to your faith when some apparent impossibility stands before you. Judge not of God by your own case. Judge not of His possibilities by your impossibilities. Do not think because you see no way, that there is no way of escape. Do not suppose that because you cannot support yourself, God is unable to support you. He is able to do all things.

"My times", my body, my soul, my family, my circumstances, my wants, my supplies, these are all in Thy hands. Blessed hand, expressing power and authority. Dear friends, look to this hand, fall into it, look to its fullness, remember that it holds the winds, and the waters, and men's hearts, and the hearts of kings, and all things, this gracious - in respect of the church, this gracious - hand in providence. There is a particular providence in respect of the people of God. Says David - "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines", away from my dangers. "There is but a step between me and death" You do not read that he ever took that step. You never will. God was with him. And this sovereignty works in various ways, and by various means always with respect to the Church. There is God's centre in this world, and the world to come. There is His heart. And so, when David's case required it, another providence happened connected with David. The enemy invaded Israel, and Saul, whose hand was, as it were, on David's shoulder arresting him; Saul, is now occupied in another minute and was called away to defend his throne. Do not judge God's ways, and purposes by one providence. Your things - not one thing, but your things - all things - and, says the Apostle Paul, gathering up everything for the encouragement of the people of God - "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present" - troubling you - "or things to come" - which you may fear - "all are yours; and ye are Christ's" if you belong to Him will He not take care of you - "and Christ is God's," the grand end of all. My brethren - "Be careful for nothing" says God "but in all things by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God". What shall I eat? What shall I drink? Wherewithal shall I be clothed? What am I to do to-morrow? Says Christ - "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" Commit matters to Him. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all the things you need shall be added unto you. "For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things".

What a book of remembrance the year just expired may have been to some of us. Take it up, read it, let your memory, as you may be enabled, furnish you with various matters; this circumstance, that trial, the other want, the difficulty, the perplexity, the pain, the opposition; look at all these things.

Take one of them singly; you will say, I did not know how I should get through that. Put them all together; and today perhaps you may say with gratitude and worship in your spirit, He ordered my ways, He watched o'er my path, He circumvented my enemy. He brought good out of intended ill. He has been a good God, and I will trust Him. You will say, looking at that book, Why He heard my prayer. And then say also - "I love the Lord because He hath heard my prayer and my supplication", and take courage, saying - again in the same Psalm - "Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live". We read in the second book of Chronicles of David and the times that went over him. The times that went over David were the times beginning, so to speak, beginning with him when he was a youth keeping his father's sheep, and the lion, and the bear came. From that day to the day when he ascended the throne, to which he had been anointed long before he ascended it, O what times passed over him. Persecution, near to death again and again, God's interferences, deliverances, giving him wisdom, and prowess, and renown. The times that went over him. You are not David, I am not David, but we have our things, and times have gone over us of trouble, affliction. Times of mercy, and of health, and of deliverance. May we praise and thank God that our times are in His hand. And I say again, that no child of God will wish to take them out of God's hands, and have them in his own. A dependent creature man is. A depending sinner is a child of God.

"My times" spiritually "are in Thy hand". There is a time to be born spiritually, as well as naturally, and this is a time mentioned by the Lord. "Thy time was the time of love". Not when thou wast a living creature, and lovable, but loathsome and dead. That is what all of us are by the fall. "Thy time was the time of love". And I passed by thee, and I spread My skirt over thee, and I distinguished thee. I said unto thee, Live, and I made a covenant with thee, and thou becamest Mine. That is a time. It was in God's hand. What child of God could ever go before the divine Majesty and say to Him, I wanted Thee in the first place? No. Every one says - An Amorite was my father; an Hittite was my mother. I was loathsome, dead in trespasses, and sins. I did not want God but He wanted me. That is what is said sooner or later. He would have me. Rutherford said it. "I did not love Him" said he, "but He would love me, and I do wonder that He should love such a black sinner." Everyone will join with Rutherford in that who is born again, and called with an effectual calling. I did not want Him and did not love Him, but He would have me, and love me. Ah it is great if you can go back, not perhaps to the day when, nor the means by which, you were called, but you can say I know this, "that whereas I was blind now I see". I see God, and in that light I see myself. I see eternity through which I must live. I see hell which I deserve. I see heaven that I deserve not, to reach which is my great ambition, but I am afraid I shall miss it. "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind", blind to my state, blind to God, blind to His nature, to His claims on me as a creature, blind to the law that binds me, and binds sin on me, blind to Christ the Saviour of sinners, "now I see". Well it is a great thing to see God. To see God kills our natural flippancy, and presumption. It makes praying a very serious business; makes His character very great, and very dear. Such a time as this, when you truly view His majesty is a time in the hand of God. There came a time when Christ would not be alone in the world; He would have friends. Not many, but He would have friends. Nobody knew Him, but He went to one and said - "Follow Me" to another - "Follow Me". To Zebedee's sons - "Follow Me" - and they left their father, and their ships. One left his seat of custom. They followed Him. That was a time when Christ would have company. Did He ever seek your company? You will never seek His otherwise. Did He ever seek your society, that He might open His heart to you, and cause you to open your mouth in prayer, and faith to Him? What a great thing it is, a time of grace, a time of love,

a time of goodness to be known and felt. A time of repentance, sweet repentance, not remorse though there may be remorse mixed with it often. Dear friends, born again, you will want eternity to thank Him for that time. But here, while you live, praise Him for regeneration. Bless Him for an effectual word in your heart, turning you from idols to Himself, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, even Jesus who delivered you from the wrath to come. What shall I say of this? This grows; according to Scripture - "Grow in grace". It grows in the desire of the soul. It grows in faith, faith which, having been exercised on God in the law, wherein His great and glorious character was seen so as to kill you to self, and self-confidence, that faith grows, and is turned, by the Spirit, to the Lord Jesus. O, what a Person; this inspired Book is full of Him. What a great thing it is for a man to desire to know Him, whose Father commends Him so wondrously in the Scriptures - "This is My beloved Son" "Let all the angels of God worship Him." Let them crown Him, let them obey Him. "This is My beloved Son". Have you had faith, have you got faith, in Christ? The life of Christ is destined to run like a river into the sea. You will always be running to Him if you have faith. There is that in a new born person that will never be content away from Christ. The needle is never at rest when away from its natural point, and the soul with the life of Christ in it is never at rest apart from Christ. It will always distinguish the church when she is in a good state, that she wants the Lord if she has Him not. She arose, crying out in the fervour of her faith - Tell me where Thou dwellest. O, said two disciples of John, "Master where dwellest Thou?" And your faith will say to the Lord, Where doest Thou dwell? Let me see Thee, let me hear Thee. Come to me, cause me to embrace Thee. Faith in Christ is a great gift. It acts two ways Bunyan says; listen - It walks as long as it can and when it can walk no longer it cries - "Lord save or I perish". Bunyan generally gives a nugget when He speaks about Christ. Look and see if you have got faith acting in those two ways - walking as well as you can, and as long as you can, sustained by the Holy Spirit, and when you begin to sink into trouble, and into fear, and into difficulties, then see if your faith acts that way - "Lord save or I perish" This time, this time of wanting Christ. Faith in Him that will not let Him alone. O, but an enemy may say, you will trouble Him. Ah you will never trouble Christ by going too often to Him. You may grieve Him by not going for a time, but you will never trouble Him by going too often. "Pray without ceasing" is His direction by Paul. "Pray without ceasing" which means, go on believing and asking, and laying a bad case before Him. Go on asking for His presence, and His mercy, and His salvation.

A time of temptation is in His hand. "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee that he may sift thee as wheat" It is a serious thing to be tempted ah tempted of the devil. And very solemn it was for Peter to exemplify in his fall that word of the devil which he uttered to the Lord concerning Job - "Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life". Peter was a very strong believer, as he thought himself to be, a very strong man. His brother disciples might be weak, they might deny their Lord, but Peter, never. He will go to prison with his Master, and he will die for Him. And when the wind blew, when the wind blew, these feet, that seemed so strongly planted on the rock, tottered and away the poor man went. It was a solemn thing. You may have a time of temptation; tempted of the devil, tempted to disbelieve everything, tempted to give up the Scriptures, tempted to deny their inspiration, tempted to deny the eternal Deity and Sonship of the Lord Jesus, tempted to curse God and die because some providential trouble has befallen you. And as you are rightly exercised I know you won't say, I will never give in, but you will cry - "Hold up my goings in Thy paths that my footsteps slip not." "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe" We are safe in those hands and, being there, the time of temptation is managed. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is

common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able: but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" See the provision of strength that the Lord has provided for His tempted people. Said Paul, thrice over, Lord take away this thorn. Not one of our thorns on our rose trees, which will just prick the skin, but a great thorn of the East that will pierce it, and stick in it, and get right into the flesh. Lord, take it away. Perhaps you have said sometimes, Lord, I cannot live to Thy glory in this trouble. You follow your own reasoning; you make a bad judgement. Probably Paul had such feeling. So provoked was he by the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, he probably said, I cannot live to God's honour in this. But when the Lord said to him - "My grace is sufficient for thee" - that opened his eyes, that instructed him, and constrained him to say - "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me". Weak in himself, he was glad to be so, that Christ's strength might be in him. Christ manages temptations, and He manages the tempter. You cannot. No, He does not intend you to. Resist him and he will flee from you, but the Lord will manage him saying - "The Lord rebuke thee O Satan: even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee" That is enough.

"My times". The times of a church are in the hands of the Lord. Churches grow; they decay, and die. Evil comes, errors seek an entrance; sometimes they get one. Erroneous men come in unawares here and there and they scatter the flock. Good times in the church are in the hands of Christ. Times of communication of divine mercy. Times when restoration is granted, when consciences are purged again from dead works, when a living ministry is given for a season, when the people find the power of it, when there are increases of grace and increases in numbers, in members. All these times and things are in the hands of the Lord Jesus. Ministers are in His hands. He holds the seven stars in His right hand. We are in His hands. As an old friend and your minister for a good many years, I would say to you this morning now what I have said for you in secret, namely that I do wish that you may have - we ordinarily say, A Happy New Year - but I would rather say now I wish you may have a good New Year. One wished, the other day, speaking to me, that I might have joy, and if I had a moment to speak, I would rather have said, I would rather have grace. If the Holy Ghost gives you real grace - not a counterfeit; He does not give that - real grace, you will find the joy of the Lord will come again and again, and be your strength. Now hold together; endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. I hope there will be a good deal of contention among you - this, that you will contend who shall be the least; seeing who is the greatest sinner; who shall have the lowest place. That will make you love each other, pray for each other, bear one with another. "Endeavouring" is a word that intimates difficulty. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit" -which you have not made; which He has made - "in the bond of peace". We are one body; as many of us as are true Christians are baptised into one body. The baptism of the blessed Holy Ghost unites the people each one to the Head, the Lord Jesus. Ask great things at God's hand. Ask for an increase of grace, of knowledge of Himself, of assurance of interest in Him. Ask that you may be careful for His glory, careful in your speech. "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that it may minister grace unto the hearers". Ask that you may be enabled to walk unto all pleasing, walking before, and with, the Lord. Ask that you may be joints and bands in the body, each ministering something to the body that it may edify itself in love. Pray for the deacons, that they may have wisdom, that wisdom which is from above, that they may use the office of a deacon well, and so purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. Give them all the honour that the office deserves. May the Lord take us into His keeping, watch over us and be with us. Amen.