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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on 22 July 1918

PSALM 31 v 24

"Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen  
your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord"

There are difficulties; the path of life is strewn with them. The way to heaven is a path of tribulation - as the Lord Himself has said: "In the world ye shall have tribulation" - and he who would fain reach heaven must have in his heart divine courage. It is no little mercy to be in the way to heaven; to possess the smallest possible measure of divine grace is an infinite mercy and it will arouse the rage of nature and of the devil and bring much trouble to all who possess it. My dear friends, may the Lord give us power to lay to our hearts the truth, that the way to heaven is one of tribulation; and the difficulties are very many, and there are several kinds. There are internal; they are from our own nature. If you would climb Paul's hill, you must have Paul's God, Paul's grace. It is no little thing to forsake yourself, to renounce your own righteousness, to give up all your privileges and refuse to take notice of your attainments, but to be just a poor, sinful worm with an object before you. That object is, as the Apostle sets it forth, that you may attain unto the resurrection of Christ; to be found, not having your own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Ah it is a great thing to press to heaven. I view it so; it appears to me to be a miracle that any poor sinner should ever have his heart set on God in Christ, and should ever want the Lord to do what Moses prayed Him to do: "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory". That glory, to be bearable, must be in Jesus Christ. Who could bear the naked glory of God as it is written that the Lord dwelleth in the light that no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see. And yet that blessed God has discovered Himself in the Person of Christ, and as Paul says, so the saints are to know it. "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. Why, my friends, it will make your faces shine when that glory shines into your hearts. And Moses, when on the mount, got such a powerful reflection of the light of God upon his face, that Israel could not look upon his face till it was veiled. And although there is a mystery in that, and a type, yet we may say that when a sinner gets some sight of the glory of God shining into his heart, there is such a power in that, that it changes very much the child of God into the image. I do not mean literally, and yet his face must beam with happiness while that glory is upon him, and men who see it a little are drawn by the sight. It makes them labour to get it more fully in their hearts. It makes them labour, as Paul says, to enter into that rest which remains to the people of God. This glory is that that the Apostle Paul aimed at, which he pressed toward, forgetting those things which were behind and reaching forth unto those things which were before. He, as it were, knew no rest until that was in his heart that he longed for. And no doubt there are times when, even in some measure, there is that energy in people's souls in this pressing after the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and they say in their spirit to all hindrances, hinder me not. And so we may say, with regard to inward difficulties, and the sinking of mind which is at times experienced with respect to them - "Be of good courage and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord." And I would show, as helped, the ground of this exhortation - "Be of good courage" - and then in what respects we may look at this. What do we need courage for? What is the ground of the courage that we are exhorted to here? I take it that the ground is the glorious gospel of the blessed God as it is manifested in the Person of Jesus Christ. The blessed Person, the blood, the righteousness, the death, the resurrection and the ascension into heaven and His intercession there, of the Lord Jesus. This is the ground, and if we see it by faith, we shall see that it meets every possible discouragement; that there can be no discouragement arising in the heart from a sense of evil, of indwelling sin, and of sin committed, that this great, this mysterious, this glorious gospel does not meet. Let us look then, dear friends, at this. Surely there is nothing else worth our attention. Time, with its things, is an empty thing, vanishing, but for a moment, and our lusts and our eagerness after the world and the pride of life and the ungraciousness of our spirits; the prayerlessness of our hearts and the discouragements arising

from our lack in having attained to what we have, at times, pressed after, these things will come up. But what are they? One says, "Take courage soul" and we may say to our souls, take courage, God is good and His mercy endureth for ever.

Now if we look at the Person of Christ and by precious faith behold Him as Immanuel, as given for the Church, as giving Himself, as bearing the wrath of God, as bearing our sins in His Own body on the tree, shall we not see that in Him there is every reason for encouragement, every ground for encouragement. We are poor and miserable and empty and wretched and naked and blind in ourselves, and if the Lord had not revealed what He has revealed in Jesus Christ, we might well be cast down with shame and discouraged altogether. "But since", as one says

Since My Saviour stands between  
In garments dyed in blood  
Tis He instead of me is seen  
When I approach to God

I find this a great thing to me; with all my sins and the great discouragement that these, my sins, do give me, and the many, many sinkings I experience because of them, I find this is a great truth, a great solace, and source of encouragement, that He stands between. O, what could one do but for the Person of the Mediator? Sinner, He does stand between. God looks at Him, has received every satisfaction from Him. Nothing is lacking in the case, nothing at all. Christ magnified the law and made it honourable; made an end of sin and brought in everlasting righteousness; entered into heaven with His Own blood and ever lives to intercede. He is what the Church saw Him to be, the Shield. He is the Sun that she perceived Him to be. And her prayers were directed by her eye, if I may speak so. What she saw by faith she prayed about, and presented before the Lord - "Behold O God our shield and look upon the face of Thine anointed." We do well not to be too discouraged by the things which we perceive in ourselves. Sinners black as hell are welcome to the pure throne of God. Christ is there; Christ is that. Christ is all. He fills heaven, He fills the eye of faith and then He imparts courage to the sinking, discouraged soul. In the days of the Judges when Gideon was

raised up to fight the battles of the Lord, we read that they pursued their enemies. They pursued them though they were faint; faint yet they pursued. Do you understand it at all? Faint because of indwelling sin, as Paul was - "O wretched man that I am". Faint because these dreadful internal enemies seem to be perpetually rising again and again and gaining new strength, yet pursuing the thing that you know can do you good. You know that there is no good out of Christ and therefore faith says, let us go on, press on, press the case, urge the case; look to Christ, abandon self, renounce self-righteousness, self-fullness, self-strength, and everything of that kind and go on though it be uphill work, though it be full of difficulties. "Be of good courage", Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. Christ is the Friend of sinners. What you found Him once to be you will find Him to be always the same. "What thou findest Him at thy best, He's at thy worst the same." We shall never be able sufficiently to praise the Lord for what Jesus Christ is in His divine Person. Emmanuel, standing between God and man, drawing poor sinners to Himself, as His word is. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." And it is a great thing - lately I have been thinking of it in my own case - it is a great thing to get those motions, touches, drawings, helps, sustenances of the Spirit of Christ, whereby you are encouraged to go on; whereby you feel that you can listen, listen to the gospel. "Hearken My people" says the Lord. And a touch, a motion, an attraction of the Spirit of Christ will help you to listen - "Hear and your soul shall live" - and you can move after Him who speaks. "My soul with joy attend. 'Tis Jesus speaks the word." "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." And I do believe that a sight by faith of His death is like the voice of the Lord in the heart saying - Come to this dying One. A sight of His fountain by faith is like the same thing. It says, Come to the fountain for healing and cleansing. A sight of Him as the Bread of Life, as having the water of life, has the same effect. The sight says, O come hungry, come thirsty souls, come to the living waters, come to the living bread, come to this great God. Let not your hunger discourage you. Let not your fasting discourage you. Come to this blessed One who is there. He is all that the gospel declares Him to be, therefore be of good courage. It becomes us to be of good courage in the view of Christ, since He is more than self. We do not honour Him when we put self so high and have such discouraging

thoughts about our path and the issue, as viewing self. It is no honour to Christ, and no honour to the gospel that we do, when we so think as to sink in our spirit.

Raise thy downcast eyes and see (in heaven)  
Numbers do His throne surround,  
These were sinners once like thee,  
But have full salvation found

Who is able to dry our tears, but Christ? Who is it that shall swallow up death, but Christ? Who is it that shall bring life and light and liberty and peace and glory to us, but Christ? Self is nothing but a dunghill, a stench in God's nostrils, an offence to a gracious heart. Self is nothing but a load, a quag, a blindness, a death. O that we were more moved to hate this hateful thing; to say, with one,

Self in myself I hate  
Tis matter of my moan

Indeed, dear friends, there is nothing in self but that which is hateful as it is depraved; a depraved thing is this miserable, this bondaging, confusing self. Well then, in respect of internal discouragement, be of good courage.

Be of good courage respecting the blood of Christ. "The blood of Christ thy soul can cure". The blood of Christ is precious blood, precious to God. It cleanseth from all sin. It cries to heaven that peace shall come into these consciences that are sore for sin. It cries mightily to God that the poor, the coming, the stumbling, the fearing, the doubting, the defiled creature, who thinks often that he must cease trying to come, it cries mightily that such a person should be helped and that he should be brought on the wings of the Spirit's grace and borne to that blessed fountain where he will find cleansing and healing. Be of good courage then in respect of the blood of Christ. It satisfied God, it will satisfy conscience. It removed sin from God's account. It will remove it from your conscience. It made an end of it for ever, and ever. It will make an end of its dominion and of its filth and of its guilt in every child of God. O what a precious blood it is. The touch of it brings sweet

hope, the application of it brings divine peace, and cleansing. Therefore, though you be feeling very defiled, be of good courage; struggle on till you reach this fountain; climb as well as you can on your knees till you reach this blessed fountain. Look to Him who says: "Come unto Me." Let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet, though they be red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow.

Be of good courage in respect of Christ's righteousness. It was a wonderful righteousness to the Apostle Paul, and the Lord Jesus said in the days of His flesh on earth "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom", and everyone taught of God comes, sooner or later, to Paul's position respecting his own righteousness. He says, I count it but loss, dung and dross, that I may win Christ and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. And it so shines in the eye of faith as to draw the sinner after <sup>in Him</sup> in whom faith is. O that I may reach it. O that I may be clothed with it. O that I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead by having on me this righteousness, because all who wear it are to enter where a living Saviour is, who rose from the dead. Nothing that defileth can enter there, but he has no defilement on whom this righteousness is.

Be of good courage in respect of Christ's grace. Christ's grace can turn everything to a good account, and you see this in the case of Paul who had the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, "lest", said he, "I should be exalted above measure." That thorn in the flesh men disputed about a great deal, and let them dispute; it is enough for us to know that it was something that pierced and wounded and weakened and pained him exceedingly. So much, that he had no rest respecting it until he got the word of Christ. He three times went to seek the Lord; that may be put for an indefinite number of times. However, he went to seek the Lord again and again for the removal of that thorn. Probably he thought what many of us have thought since, that his thorn so provoked his nature as that he could not serve the Lord in quietness with it. You may often have thought about your troubles, I cannot, with all this on me, this irritating,

provoking thing; it makes all the crookedness of my nature so manifest. How can I serve the Lord? How can I fear Him when my temper is so provoked? How can I walk before Him when I am so distressed and distracted? And then he got something that encouraged him mightily. "My grace is sufficient for thee". So though he was cast down he was not without means of help and comfort, and such was the power of that word in him, he said "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmity that the power of Christ might rest upon me." O my friends, there is no devil in our nature, there is no thorn pricking and piercing us, there is nothing to pain, grieve, and distract us, that this precious grace of Jesus Christ is not sufficient for, and more than sufficient for. It can turn the pain, and the thorn itself that produces the pain, into matter of praise and glory. And the grace of Christ is such that it can make a sinner say, now I would rather keep it than lose it. I would rather have it than be rid of it because by this I am so weakened that the grace of Christ is necessary, and now I have that grace I can bear this infirmity, I can carry this cross, I can sustain this pain; as in another place, Paul says, "I can do all things (though) Christ which strengtheneth me." Be of good courage, my friends; here is the grace of Jesus Christ and all that is needed is that He should speak it into your hearts and then you will say, now I can go on. Now I have got another start. It is like a resurrection in my soul. It is like beginning again. I am sorry and ashamed of myself for my weakness, and my fretting and fuming. Now I have got another start. Purged is my conscience, happy is my soul, strong am I in the grace of Christ. What amazing mercy. A little of this will teach us a great lesson. A little of this will teach us to depend on Christ alone, and teach us to know that it is not ease in circumstances that makes men happy, but the grace of Christ, and that grace can make the most distressing experience matter for thankfulness.

And be of good courage in respect of the promise of Christ. Has He promised you anything? O blessed and rich is that sinner who has had any word made his by Christ. Christ's most sweet lips speaking a promise into the heart of a sinner, makes that sinner very rich. Any word dropping from Him will enrich your soul, enrich you in experience, and it may be said to be like a cheque, a blank cheque signed by Christ. Whenever you present it, there will be some payment. It will be made good in some measure. O how many

fulfilments is a promise capable of. Once fulfilled, you have not done with it. It will come again and be fulfilled again and help you again. Therefore, though new troubles tread upon reliefs, and though griefs run an endless round, be of good courage. Faithful is He who has called you. Faithful is He who has spoken to you. Faithful is He to His own word. He is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent.

And in the next place be of good courage in regard to external things. He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in Him. Be of good courage. There are two views that the child of God takes of trouble, according to his state of mind. When in one state of mind, he looks at his trouble, and he is very disposed to regard it as a sword to cut him down and cut him off; to destroy his hopes altogether; to regard it as something that God has sent to him to make him manifest, and he questions the words he has hoped upon. He very much wonders about his state and standing before the Lord. He looks upon it as Jacob looked upon his trouble. O he said, "All these things are against me". Jacob, who had the word of God in his heart, and had had the promise that the Lord would not leave him nor forsake him till He had performed all things that He had spoken to him of. And now he comes into trouble and he says, now all these things are against me. It was an unwise thing but there have been as many unwise children of God since that day, as there have been children who have lived to be exercised. But now look at this friends, there is another state of mind into which we are brought sometimes and in that different state we look at the trouble very differently, as if we had new eyes, and it is, through new light, fresh instruction and encouragement. And what is it? "I will bear the indignation of the Lord" Why? "Because I have sinned against Him". Till when. "Until He plead my cause." O what a change you know. I need not tell you of the humility, the tenderness, the brokenness, the confession, the shame, the life, the encouragement, the comfort that you feel instead. A gracious instruction. "I will bear the indignation of the Lord." And do you think He will arise? O yes; till He shall come, till He shall arise and judge my case and my cause. He will do it. Yes, there is a confidence that He will. He will turn again and leave a blessing behind Him. He will turn again and restore to me the years that the palmer worm, and the caterpillar and the canker worm and the locust



have eaten. Why, you may have had these devourers for a long time on you. They have devoured your comfort and your peace and you have thought the Lord has sent them to devour you in externals as well, but now you can say, He will arise; I have sinned but He has put it away. He has put away my guilt and I will bear it. And I need not tell you this, either, how that you can submit to your trouble. Ah, it is one thing to be in a bad state and say I wish this were gone; I wish I could get out of it; I would run away from it or cast it from me if I could; it is one thing to be there, and a sore thing to be there, bringing leanness of soul and frowns in the conscience, but it is another thing to say, the Lord has sent it; my sins have called for it. The Lord is good; I am wicked. And then you begin to confess and entreat Him to put away the sin of your murmuring and fretting, and ask Him now you do to bless you with submission to His holy will. And it may be you are led to remember that word that Paul speaks from Solomon (Proverbs 3 v 11) "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son despise not the chastening of the Lord, and Hebrews 12 v 5, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him, and you say, Lord I have forgotten it. Now you remember it and now you can accept what He does; accept, as He speaks, the punishment of your sins with a sweet hope that He will not deal with you after your sins nor reward you according to all your iniquities. It had some sweetness to me this morning, that word in the Psalms: Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions. Remember me according to Thy mercies, O Lord, Thy tender mercies. That is what we want dear friends, and this gives us encouragement.

Be of good courage. Look at yourselves and O what can you do but sink. When I look at myself, my life, my inconsistency, the wickedness of my nature, I cannot lift my face up. O the baseness. But then you find the church here - Remember not against us former iniquities. O deal not with me after my sins. "If Thou Lord shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord who should stand?" What poor creature could live in the sight of God, if God were strictly to mark his sins. But now this blessed change comes; everything is different. The trouble remains yet it is different. Faith is in exercise. You understand it, some of you; you can put the case into His hands, beg of His interference; ask Him to give you what you need, to supply all your needs of every sort and kind, according to

His riches in glory by Christ Jesus, and He lets you come near to Him. O the sweetness of faith, Oh the sweetness of praying, when you can pray in the Holy Ghost, when you can lay your case by precious faith - little faith though it may be - before the Lord. Be of good courage; Christ has blessings to impart; Christ has providential good to impart; Christ is full of goodness and He delights to be good. He will delight in thee. The Lord thy God will delight in thee. He delighteth in mercy. O blessed be His Name. Now my afflicted friends this is the thing that will enable you to regard this text: "Be of good courage". Take your case as it is to this great God. You hope in His mercy; be of good courage because He wont deny His mercy to you. He shall strengthen your heart by some touch of His love; by letting you know that whom He loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth; by showing you the sweetness of submission to His holy will; by taking hold of your will, not to destroy it, but to give it such a bend and turn, as to bring it into unison with His will. I have thought sometimes that it is a great deal better then having no will at all, to have a stubborn will turned. Not twisted, as it were violently, but as it were taken hold of by the Lord and just mercifully and graciously and gently brought right to be straight with His will, and you can say, His will is now my choice. My will lies straight with His as His will is revealed at this time to me in my circumstances. Does He will that you should be weak? How willing you are to be weak. Has He willed mortification to you in your circumstances? How willing you feel to be mortified. Does He will something to you that brings out the very worst <sup>of</sup> ~~if~~ your nature? You can submit to that dealing and pray now that your will may be so subdued and kept subdued, as that you may say from your heart, "Thy will be done".

"Be of good courage". O but I am so wicked. Yes, and He knows it. He knew it before He began to deal with you at all, before ever He gave you a new heart. He knew your nature and what you would be and what you would do. He knew it all. There is a Scripture in Isaiah that is very beautiful. It is this. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged". You think of it, how discouraged you are, how discouraged I am. It does not require much to weaken us and put us out of heart, does it? It does not require much to make us feel we shall never get through. Here is the Lord, who bears with us, takes notice

of us, kindly assists us, and is not put out, is not discouraged. He shall not fail to do His work. He shall not be discouraged in doing it. The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; His hands shall also finish it. Think of it my friends. He willed it, therefore "Be of good courage and He shall strengthen thine heart" - strengthen thine heart to hope, strengthen thy heart to look to Him, strengthen thy heart to wait on Him until it please Him to come, until the appointed time for His coming shall arrive - "All ye that hope in the Lord".

And in the last place be of good courage with regard to all appearances. Judge not according to appearances. We are so apt to do it, and ~~is~~ is therefore, that we are elated when appearances are good and depressed when appearances are gloomy. We are poor creatures, creatures very much tossed about by circumstances, and the tempter using circumstances, and touching unbelief. There are appearances often that are very gloomy. Where does God dwell? In the thick darkness. Then we are very apt to say, we shall never see Him. Darkness is round about Him. He hides the face of His throne by dark clouds, and then our hearts say, and the tempter says with them, you will never see God again. He wont appear. He hides Himself behind dark circumstances. The clouds are the dust of His feet and He hides the view that you might have had of Him in days past. The sea is roaring sometimes and the waves lift themselves up. The sea is not a place where you look for a definite path, a solid path, and when the waves lift themselves up and roar, you are afraid of God's tokens. All who are afar off upon the seas are afraid of His tokens; tokens of His great power, tokens of His awful sovereignty, the tokens of His thunder and the wind, His stormy wind that lifts the waves of the sea. But now my friends, if any of you are in such circumstances, the Scripture says, "Be of good courage". O but there is no reason for it, one says, I see nothing but discouragement, dark clouds and thick waters; everything gloomy. The war, the trouble, the bereavement, the loss, the cross, the appearances, the threatening future. O there is nothing but discouragement naturally, nothing but discouragement. Yet the Lord says, "Be of good courage". He said to His disciples concerning the death of Lazarus, "I was glad that I was not there for your sakes". "I am glad I was not there". I let him die for your sakes. All things are for your sakes, all things; even the

death of Lazarus was for the sake of His children then. "I was glad that I was not there for your sakes". Now you shall see My goodness; now you shall perceive that I am God. Now you shall understand that My voice is more than death, above death, can command death. "Be of good courage". Wait on this God; wait on Him. I wish I knew how to encourage poor sinners. He is so good, so gracious, and so long-suffering, and He is not put off His purpose. Though we are so unwise and so unbelieving, He says, "Be of good courage", I will come. And the prophet Hosea says: "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord. His going forth is prepared as the morning and He shall come unto you as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth". Go on asking - be not discouraged - praying, waiting, looking. "He shall strengthen thine heart". A sight of His faithfulness and of His omnipotence will strengthen your heart, dear friends. Delays try faith, but they prove God to be faithful and wise in coming at the right moment. Therefore, whatever your circumstances may be, whatever the appearances about you may be, whatever dark clouds and thick waters, roaring waves there may be, whatever appearances of impossibility there may be, be of good courage. Abraham's faith was a wonderful faith. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; he reckoned not the death that was about him, within him; he believed in God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. That seems to be amazing faith that lives on a living God, and is not affected by dead circumstances. Dead circumstances do try poor people, but the living God says, hope, hope poor sinner. Be of good courage, I will strengthen your heart. I am God and beside Me there is no Saviour. With Me is no death; with Me are no difficulties, no contingencies, nothing of a kind to discourage Me. I shall not be discouraged. I shall not fail. May the Lord give us grace to press on after the knowledge of Himself. Do you feel too weak to stand? Fall down as well as you can and beg Him to support you. Do you feel too weak to pray? That will be the place He will come into and give you His Holy Spirit. Better feel too weak and yet long to pray, than live under the power of an aversion against prayer. I wish I did not know that dreadful aversion.

"Be of good courage and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord." All ye who have been made to know the powerful blood of Christ and enabled to plead it before the throne of God's

heavenly grace. May the Lord help us to regard this text; speak it home to us and cause that we may pray, and labour and labour and pray until He does for us what we need.

AMEN.