

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 9 March 1919

PSALM 73 V 23/24/25

Nevertheless I am continually with Thee: Thou hast
holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with
Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.

Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is
none upon earth that I desire beside Thee"

In the previous parts of this Psalm the Psalmist relates his experience in a particular case. He had viewed God's providence; he had watched the end of God upon men; he had seen striking and perplexing inequalities in the divine dealings with the righteous and with the wicked, and, meditating upon these inequalities, he became perplexed and he was so sottish, beast-like, senseless, kicking against God in these, to him, inexplicable dealings with men, as to be, for the time, vilely estranged. How God could bless His enemies, and give them more than heart could wish; could tolerate their fatness and the moving of their tongues against heaven; could bless them in all their ways, and at the same time, the same God could afflict His children and give them waters of a full cup of misery, was more than the Psalmist could understand. Of course it was. And if you take a view of providence in the same blindness of heart, in the same dim light of perverted reason, you, though you may be a child of God, will find your heart in precisely the same condition in which the Psalmist found his heart. Reason will never understand God, as it is perverted, and never be able to reconcile certain providences which befall the children of men by the line of this perverted reason. If we view God in our own way of thinking we misunderstand Him. But there came a change in the Psalmist's experience because there came a change in his position, and in place of his darkness, God put light. The change in his position was this, God took him out of the world, out of himself, into the sanctuary. God dwelt there and still dwells there. He dwells between the cherubims. Light comes from Him, life flows from Him, teaching comes from Him, and so, when the Psalmist got into the sanctuary, a great change came over his eyes. His vision was

cleansed; the astigmatism was removed; he saw light in God's light; he saw the men as God sees them; he saw their different states, and how that those states were confirmed by the dealings of God with them in those states. He saw the wicked prospered, but saw them like men set in slippery places, no foothold, no standing, therefore no certainty. He saw them sliding down that slippery path and, so to speak, gaining momentum by every step that they took, till at last, suddenly, ere they were aware, ere they could think of where they were going, they were suddenly, as in a moment, cast down into destruction. You who want prosperity and do not ask God to bless it, do you really want to be set in a slippery place? You who pant for ease, ease that would make you content to be here, do you ever think of what an easy path might lead to, that it might be a slippery path? O woe, woe to the unchecked heart. Woe to the unsanctified prosperity of the world. Woe to the man whom God never stops, never deals with, even in his providence. My dear friends, my young friends, young men and young women looking perhaps, as you may be, for some good thing, and wishing there might be no curb to stop and no stumblingblocks in your way, may the Lord give you to see what it might lead to. How are they suddenly cast down as in a moment. If prosperity is not sanctified it is an awful curse. Many a saint has found prosperity to be a block to prayer, a hindrance in his way to heaven, and many a saint has found his course made plain, and his steps heartened and his spirit chastened and his God made precious to him by adversity sanctified. O, beware of unsanctified prosperity. No bands are in those who fear not God. And this teaching that the Psalmist got in the sanctuary opened to him another thing. How attractive had been the image of prosperity as stamped upon men, but he saw that when God should awake, that is when He would begin to take judgment on these people, that He would despise that image; that the image which had attracted the Psalmist's envious heart was an image which God would despise. Perhaps you have looked on the outsides of people, on their estates, on the appearance of ease and comfort, and it was a beautiful image to you perhaps. O if you had but been born to that, or if you could but attain to it, what would you not give. Said the Psalmist - "As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when Thou awakest, when Thou beginnest to deal with these people, Thou wilt despise their image; turn away from it; no Christ there; no faith there; no prayer, no exercise there. An image of self-sufficiency, of

fatness, of self-satisfaction, and God despises that. May none of you ever wear an image which God will despise. He tells us how this had grieved him, this attempt to understand God's dealings, and failing, the rebellion that had filled his mind. "Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant:" - in these my thoughts - "I was as a beast before Thee", like a senseless beast, like a great Behemoth. What a confession for a good man to make that he, who was now in the sanctuary of God and under the teaching and merciful influence of God, should have behaved himself thus, that he should come into such a condition of mind. Do not some of you understand it when you have been envious, rebellious, and thought it best to quarrel with God; that you did well to be angry at His dealings with you, and kicked against them and became querulous in your spirit and nothing in God pleased you. When you were brought to your senses could you not, did not you, unite with the Psalmist in this - "So foolish was I and ignorant: I was as a beast", without a reason before or with God. Now, says he, it is quite another thing with me. I perceive that, notwithstanding all this, my misbehaviour, that I have been continually with Thee. Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Are we today in the faith? Are we believers in the Lord Jesus? Do we now cleave to Him by prayer and supplication. Notwithstanding our sins, is this our present state? To whom do we owe our preservation? Why are we not open apostates today? "I am continually with Thee". The Covenant of Grace is not altered by the graceless condition of mind that men are in sometimes, who are in the Covenant of Grace. It is called the everlasting covenant and by this, God in it, they are held, held back from the sins which, if left to ripen in them, would bring destruction. Held by the power of God so that they come to say, Lord we are just as beasts by reason of our vain and foolish and quarrelsome conduct. "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee". This was a beautiful finish to that particular time in the Psalmist's life and I would draw your attention to it this morning and show, as enabled, a little in the first place of what it is to be with the Lord - "I am continually with Thee", and if we speak according to the gospel, the doctrine of the gospel, we shall see this, that the Lord's people are continually with Him by reason of their eternal union with Him, union given to them before the world began. The Apostle Paul in the Ephesians declares this. He blesses God, as who would not, with the same

teaching and the same view of the same things, do. He says "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself" (Ephesians 1 v 3, 4 and 5) In that way, blessed be our good God, we are continually with Him. "Thy walls" said He, "are continually before Me". "I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands, thy walls are continually before Me." I remember thee, I see thee, a wall; I see thee as established by Me in Christ; I see thee as being immutably fixed in that gracious position I placed thee in when I gave thee a being in Jesus Christ. O happy the people who have this being before God. Blessed, blessed are the people who are continually with the Lord. "I am continually with Thee". This is the blessing of blessings. This is that womb that brings forth all spiritual good to the Lord's dear children, that act of God in snatching them by an eternal act of His love, from the ruins of their first head and giving them to Him who should be to them throughout eternity a fountain of life and of goodness. "I am continually with Thee" in that respect. And secondly, the Lord's people are continually with Him as the purchase of His precious blood. Said Paul to the elders of the church at Ephesus "Feed the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood." What a price Christ paid for rebellious creatures. What a price He paid for the worst of sinners. The best price, if one might so speak, the best price for the worst material. The greatest price for the greatest rebels. Well, if we have one evidence in our souls that so it is with us, that the Father views us as bought by His Son, looks on us as men and women for whom Christ laid down His precious life, a life of infinite value, we are continually with the Lord. The Lord will have His own. It may be a much abused truth, but it is a great truth, a sweet gospel truth. "Them", said He in His remarkable prayer to His Father, speaking of His sheep "Them also must I bring". Speaking of His poor, wandering sheep, the Lord said, by Ezekiel, I will seek that which was driven away, bring again that which was lost, and heal that which was sick and bind up that which was broken. The prodigal goes away from home, carrying the wealth His father gave to him, but spends that wealth. He earns shame to himself. He becomes clothed with rags and very

hungry. He began to be in want. God had devised means whereby this, His self-banished one, might come to Him again and he did. He was continually with His father; he was continually in His father's thoughts, which was manifested when the father saw him a great way off and ran to meet him and fell on his neck and kissed him.

The Lord's people are continually with their God and Saviour in the next place as being His own new creation. "And you hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." "Ye are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works". Can a woman forget her child? She may, yet will not I forget thee, saith the Lord. "This is as the waters of Noah unto Me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee....." His faithfulness shall remain; this Covenant stands fast. O ye who are born again, you may experience many changes; there is one thing you will never experience and that is eternal death.

In the next place the Lord's people are continually with Him so as that, when they sin, He will chasten them. Sin will never be cheap to anybody. If you can sin here and not suffer you will suffer hereafter, but, if a child of God, you will find it a dear thing to sin. It will cost you much. If his children forsake My law, if they walk not in My commandments, then will I visit their transgressions with a rod and their iniquity with stripes. The rod is prepared for the fool's back. The stocks are prepared for the wanderer's feet. I speak the experience of some here. Has it not cost you much to depart from God's ways? There is an image, where the new birth has taken place, which God desires. There is that in a living soul that attracts the blessed Author of that life. "O My dove that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is comely". You do not know, no living man of God knows, fully, the attraction to the Lord there is in a new born soul. The holy life that struggles beneath the impure life, the faith that lives beneath the unbelief, the desires that the soul has again and again welling up as from a spring, to be near and like the Lord, to

have fellowship with Him, to walk in His holy gospel, to cleave to His dearly beloved Son, Jesus Christ, these things attract the Lord God. You may, in your prayers, chattering, making a noise, you may think them to be nothing but that which God must turn away from. He sees in prayer, He hears in prayer, what we may not see or hear for a time. "Hear my voice in my prayer" was one petition of the Psalmist. There may be prayer without a voice to God but a real prayer has a voice in it. "Hear my voice in my prayer". Hear my soul, hear my longings, hear my petition, hear my confessions in my prayer. Well God sees this, but our follies bring the rod, our follies bring His frown, and it is a solemn thing to be under God's chastening. Mark what He does for you. Mark the afflictions that come. Mark the effect of the afflictions upon you. See if you can discover God's dealings with you in them. Does He seem to frown? Ask why. Do things go contrary? Ask why. Is your heart hard? Ask the reason. Have you, through the deceitfulness of sin hardened it? Then is God, by a rod, breaking it? Have you found some attraction to Him whereby you are gathered from your wanderings? Look at it as a kindness sent from God. If a rod is laid on you to teach you the foolishness of your present courses and to gather your thoughts up again to Him on whom once they were apparently firmly fixed, bless God for that. He will deal with His children for their sins. The Psalmist found it so, and he found love in the chastening. He said it was good for him to be afflicted. Before I was afflicted I went astray. God gathers the attention of His children to His Word, to His dealings, to themselves, to their sins, to their follies, by chastening. He gives them to consider. He says, consider your ways, and they are brought to consider their ways. Then they say "I will bear the indignation of the Lord" Why? "Because I have sinned against Him". Then they say, I will get me to my watch, I will stand upon the tower - the fenced place - to see what He will say to me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved of Him. O chastening is a blessing; it is an honour, a very great honour, to be chastened of God, who is your heavenly Father.

And once more, I am continually with Thee, in those promises which Thou hast made over to me. If you have something from God in your souls, dear friends, some promise, God will never forget you. Ah 'tis a great truth. "Thy walls are continually before Me" Can He forget the child to whom He has made a promise of glory? Can He forget

the child for whom He has made a provision from all eternity in His Son? "He that spared not His Own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things". In these ways we are continually before the Lord. And one more way let me name and that is in His providential dealings with us. If God is pleased to come to you in an affliction and by that say "My son give Me thine heart", is it not, though painful to flesh, a wonderful mercy, a sweet mercy, that He should condescend to say "Give Me thine heart" Thou hast forgotten Me, but I have not forgotten you. Thou hast forgotten that I am Thy God, but I have not forgotten My promise to you that I am your God and that you shall be My son. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me." "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it". Make known your requests. If He should come into my house, if He should come into your house and by a rod, by an affliction say: Call upon Me, bring your cases, bring your wants, bring your family, bring your business, bring your body, your sickness, your health, bring all to Me; Call upon Me, I will deliver thee; is He not good, and does He not care with the care of a wise, affectionate Father for the child who has gone astray. The ninety and nine sheep in the fold He will leave to go after and seek and seek and seek till He find the one wandering one and He will find it. God will do this; let us know that He cares for us. And He will let us know it by afflicting us sometimes. You say you would like Him to let you know in some sweet way. That shall be the issue of trouble sanctified. That shall be the outcome of an affliction against which your whole heart goes. "I am continually with Thee". Always before the Lord, always remembered by Him. But I am in the dark, one says. And the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee, said one, speaking to His God. But the Lord has led me into darkness and not into light. And that is that He may bring you into the light later by His great mercies. We are fools when we judge the Lord by part of a dispensation. It is written by the Apostle James "Behold we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." And the end of the Lord there means the end of that particular dispensation of God with His servant Job. That particular end declared God's kindness. He gave Job twice as much as Job had before his trouble came. Ah and you will get twice as much. If you never get a penny back that you have lost, if you never regain your

old position in providence, you will get twice as much and a thousand-fold more than ever you lost when you get a visit from Jesus Christ, when you get a sense of divine love, when you get the sweet presence of your God with you.

"Thou hast holden me by my right-hand" and yet I fell, I fell into wrong thoughts, but I did not fall into hell. My friends, we are not in hell, we are not apostates as some of us have feared we should be. The Lord gives us sometimes simplicity of heart and brings us to His blessed throne and enables us to say that we do put our trust in Him and love Him. O what an amazing thing for a man in a devious course, with his heart lifted up against his best Friend, and thinking himself hardly dealt with and perplexing himself by trying to find out the reason of all the painful inequalities in the providence of God, that such a man should be held up, his life preserved, his faith kept alive, and drawn into a fresh exercise on God and some new light shed upon his path, O this is wonderful grace, wonderful mercy, wonderful power, wonderful patience in God and now drawn out to the sinner. "Thou hast holden me by my right-hand". What, when he fell, was God's hand under him, holding him when fell? Was God with him when wrong thoughts filled his heart, and when a kind of beast was within him, fretting and kicking and plunging against the providence of God? O secretly it was there. Secretly faith was kept in being though it lost its exercise for a time. Who kept Peter from final apostacy, but the Lord who looked on Him and whose look made him go out and weep bitterly. Who restored a fallen David but the Lord who held his soul in life and who sent fresh conviction and life into his conscience that had been so long, as it were, seared, so as to make David say, I have sinned; I shall die. The Lord does hold His people up even when they are far from Him, but this does not make sin an easy thing to them. Probably the Psalmist never forgot this time of rebellion and would never cease to mourn. There are some sins that some of us have been guilty of which we must believe, do sweetly believe, God has forgiven, which we never forget. There are some things that have made such a mark upon us, left such a scar, so to speak, upon our spirits, that we shall never lose sight of, never forget. Never forget the pain and the anguish of coming back and never forget the wound that divine love, freshly known, made in the spirit. "Thou hast holden me by my right-hand". Our foolishness was

very great, but God's mercy was infinite. Our rebellion was very provoking to the eyes of His glory, but His mercy was great, and our guilt was very deep, but the blood of the everlasting covenant has washed it out, cleansed the soul. "I am continually with Thee".

And now, as to his present experience, O how he was held up in his admiration of God, in his adoration of God, in his trust in the Lord. He could put his case now into those good hands. "Into Thy hand I commit my spirit". Into Thy hand I commit my all and myself. It is a great comfort to be enabled to put your case into the good hand of God and to feel a quiet, humble confidence that He will take care of you whatever He may do with you. In providence, He will take care of you. Bread shall be given you, water shall be sure to you. Remember what He said - Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Leave your providential things with Him. Leave it to Him to give you sweet or bitter; pain or pleasure; ease or trouble. Leave it to Him. As if He says, I know, I know the things you need. Your heavenly Father knoweth what ye have need of. That contains a promise, as if He should say, there is nothing you can need here that your heavenly Father will not give to you. Seek His kingdom in your heart, His presence with you, His light to shine on you, His love in your heart shed abroad by the Holy Ghost. Seek His blessed kingdom and then He will take care of the rest. "He that spared not His Own Son but delivered Him up for us all how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things". How much more can you need than that, all things that are necessary for you? Support under your burdens, guidance through your difficulties, and blessed spiritual nourishment for your soul. All things, and at the end, glory for "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." O may the Lord make this out to us by the powerful witness of His Spirit that we may say to Him "Thou hast holden me" when I sinned, when I was slipping, when I should have gone into apostacy, and now that I am a poor afflicted sinner, bitten by my sinfulness, hurt and

wounded in my conscience, now that I have come to my senses by Thy mercy and am again on praying ground, "Thou hast holden me" and art holding me with Thy right hand. May the Lord make this mercy over to us, even make Himself over to us that we may be for His praise and glory.

AMEN.