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Kept as the Apple of his Eye

Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel Brighton on 28th October 1987

“He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.” Deuteronomy 32:10

Surely, that person whom the Lord Jehovah keeps, and is kept after the manner that is described in these few words, must be safe for time and for eternity. We will attempt then, as helped, to look just a little at the word ‘him.’ ‘He kept him as the apple of his eye.’

The person to whom this blessing is applicable and to whom it belongs is said to be the person whom the Lord has found: “He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him.” We must be fully assured that no person has ever desired the Lord or sought after the Lord, let alone found him, except the Lord had first found that person and had by his almighty and irresistible grace apprehended and laid hold upon him.

What a wonderful mercy then if, in the first brief consideration of this character, we are among those persons whom the Lord has found. Can we look back in our little experience to a day, time, or maybe the period or season of time, when by the power of his Word, or by the sanctifying of a circumstance or some circumstances, or by an outstanding work in his divine providence, the Lord was pleased to seek us out, and found us in such a place and in such a condition as in the verse: “A desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness.” For the first time in our experience we truly realised that there was a God, that there was such a thing as real religion; that there was such a place as heaven and such a place as hell, and there were such things as are set forth and described in God’s Word, that may be apprehended, known, felt and realised. By his precious Word or by his power, as used and demonstrated in those means good in his sight, God found us, he sought us out. The effect and the consequence of his having sought us by his power and sovereign grace was to constrain and cause us to seek and find him. Our hearts were caused to diligently and earnestly seek after God, hungering and thirsting after him, for God is always first in this matter. No man seeks after God except God first seeks after that person; no man ever finds God except God first found that man.

So we find it in the narrative concerning Philip and Nathanael who was under the fig tree. Jesus had been a long time ministering in that area, he had preached many sermons, he had performed miracles; but although his person might have been observed and his word heard, yet Philip did not find Jesus until Jesus found Philip. But immediately that Jesus found him, in the spiritual aspect of it, found him out by his power and grace, Philip found Jesus, and then: “Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, we have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write.” (John 1:45)

So the time came for Christ to apprehend, in a spiritual manner, Philip’s heart and soul. What a wonderful mercy if we are found! And since the day the Lord found us he has led us about and instructed us. O, the manifold different circumstances, changes, vicissitudes, afflictions, troubles, trials, teachings, leadings about—all for one end and purpose, that we may be instructed and humbled: ‘He led him about, he instructed him.’ What a rich favour if we can discern some evidence that we are under the Lord’s instruction; that he has taught us and is still condescending to teach us in his ways and lead us about in the wilderness from place to place, from one circumstance to another.

If it had been the Lord’s will to have brought his people into the Promised Land immediately, he could have done so. It would not have taken very long to traverse the wilderness from Egypt to the Promised Land had they gone straight there, but the Lord kept them wandering about forty years in the wilderness, leading them about. He went before them in all this. The fiery cloudy pillar, the ark and the tabernacle were all a wonderful types and evidence of God’s presence with his people and his mindfulness of them and his goodness toward them as he led them about. What a wonderful mercy if we have learned, by experience, a few sacred precious matters regarding God and his salvation in these leadings about, that

all the steps that we have taken and all the trials we have come through and all the afflictions we have endured have not been without teaching and profit.

'He kept him as the apple of his eye.' Well, this Jacob whom he found was led about and instructed, in all the leadings, difficulties, dangers and conflicts—he was safe; he was kept. It was impossible that he should perish or be destroyed, or utterly fail, faint and fall—and the whole secret of it was this—that the Lord kept him. Not only did he keep him but he kept him in such a way as is described, 'as the apple of his eye.'

In considering these words, there are two Scriptures that are in sweet harmony with it. One is the urgent petition of the Psalmist David in one of his extremities and difficulties, when he pleaded this before God and begged the Lord that he would do just this, for he said to God: "Keep me as the apple of the eye." (Psalm 17:8) The other Scripture is in the book of the prophet Zechariah, where the Lord, speaking of his troubled people in their oppressions and persecutions and captivity, said this of those whom he kept: "For he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." (Zechariah 2:8) So we see that God regards every one of his own people as himself, as part of himself, for they are his, and they shall know in the enjoyment of it at times that they are united to him, one with him; that he treats them and considers them to be a part of himself. Anything that touches them touches him; anything that hurts them, hurts him, for they are his and he is theirs. They are one in blessed covenant, one in blessed and sacred union. Now I believe that is absolutely true. The great thing is this—Am I one of these persons? Does the Lord promise to keep me, condescend to keep me as the 'apple of his eye'? My friends, if the Lord keeps us, we must be safe. He cannot fail, he will not fail in regard to this precious matter.

We will look at it from four different aspects. 'He kept him.'

First, the Lord's ability to keep:

Secondly, his willingness to keep;

Thirdly, the manner of this keeping; the infinite goodness, kindness and compassion of his heart; for it is 'as the apple of his eye';

Lastly we will attempt to look, just a little at 'their desperate need of being kept, from the consideration of what they are in themselves and what they have to encounter.

1. First, the Lord's ability to keep. This is in his precious and glorious character, his divine and infinite perfections which are all exercised in sweet harmony for the present and eternal safety of those whom he has loved, redeemed and appointed to salvation, a proof of which is that he has found them, or in other words, he has called them by his grace. He has apprehended them by his irresistible power and grace. This is their evidence of being interested in the finished work of Christ, the electing love of the Father and the quickening power of the Holy Spirit. Now I ask the question: Is it possible that one of these should be lost?

*If one believer may be lost,
It follows, so may all.*

(Gadsby's 351)

*For O! they ne'er shall lose their God,
Or God e'er lose a saint.*

(Gadsby's 772)

He has promised to keep: "Kept by the power of God." Yes, there is the secret, "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:5)

Firstly, kept by his omnipotence. This precious Jesus, he is able to keep that which they have committed to him and he is able to keep those whom the Father has given him to redeem: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." (Matthew 28:18). He is omnipotent, he is infinite in his ability, he is mightier than all, and he is an almighty Saviour. His people are kept by his power, he preserves them and he is round about those that fear him, he dwells in them by his Spirit. The Lord is able to keep by reason of his omnipotence.

Secondly, he is able to keep on account of his omniscience. O what a precious foundation this is for faith! We profess to believe it, and what a wonderful mercy when we really are able to believe it as it is worthy to be believed—that there is nothing that can possibly escape his notice. He is omniscient,

everything in heaven, everything in earth and everything beneath the earth is open to his searching all-seeing eye. Not only is this in regard to present circumstances, and that even to every hair of our head and of every single sparrow, but his fore-knowledge is also infinite; so that although you and I may often be surprised and overtaken and bewildered by many unexpected temptations, trials, fears and difficulties, Christ is not. He is omniscient and he knows everything concerning the thoughts of Satan and the thoughts of every man. He knows all our thoughts and he knows everything that concerns us. Everything in earth and heaven and hell are open to his view. Now he is able to keep because of this. O, it is sometimes a humbling, also an encouraging consideration to really be convinced feelingly, just for a few moments, that he sees us and knows all about us exactly as we are. Nothing can escape his view.

The third thing, spoken of in the Word of God as the protection of God's people, is his infinite love—the almighty and gracious love of this precious Saviour and Redeemer. It is impossible to fall from it, fall out of it or not be a subject of the preserving power and grace of that infinite love of Christ. He is all love, boundless in his love and the apostle was persuaded that nothing was able to separate from it.

Another thing is the infinite wisdom of this Keeper. He knows best what means to use, what grace to communicate, what power to exercise, what circumstance to appoint for the preservation and keeping of those upon whom his eye is ever set and fixed. For his eyes are upon his people, "From the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." (Deuteronomy 11:12) Now I realise and recognise for myself that although these things are blessedly true, and declared in God's Word, yet we cannot receive any comfort or strength from them unless the Lord is pleased to grant unto us the gift of living faith in sweet exercise, to believe in him who is so able to keep and most of all to keep our souls unto everlasting life "Unto him that is able to keep you." (Jude 24) "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." (1 Peter 1:5) O, the wonder of the sufficiency and the ability of this precious person whose eye is constantly upon his people. 'He kept him.'

2. Now in regard to the willingness of this blessed Keeper. It is a willingness which proceeds from the super-abounding compassion, pity, faithfulness and kindness of his heart. O, that precious perfection of the dear Saviour which influences everything in this particular matter, his unfailing faithfulness in his undertaking! He has pledged, he has promised, he has entered into a blessed agreement or covenant to keep his people and this he will do in all the faithfulness of his compassion, pity and love.

A further proof of his willingness is in that which he has endured and suffered on their account. He himself has taken upon him our nature, descended into the lower parts of the earth, and battled with and overcome every foe and every enemy of his people. It is a blessed thing to see at times that Satan is a chained foe and that all of his vessels and all his agents and slaves are like himself, restricted and chained; he is overcome by Christ, sin is overcome by Christ, the world is overcome by Christ Jesus. He condescended to do this; and what it cost him to do it! How this demonstrates his abundant willingness and ability! He is that almighty Redeemer, the Rock of their salvation, who is willing and kind and compassionate beyond measure and degree. O, they must be safe when he vouchsafes to preserve and to keep. 'He kept him as the apple of his eye.'

3. We will look at the manner of this keeping 'as the apple of his eye.' It is a potent and strong argument and a most sweet and blessed illustration in regard to the exercise of all the sweet and blessed perfections and kindness and love of this blessed Saviour. The eye is very tender; it is very precious; it is instinctively preserved from all that might harm or damage it and it is exceedingly precious in the possession of it and that which we take very great care of. Even in a simple illustration, the eye being such a precious, tender member of our bodies and so easily damaged and that which is so protected literally, sets forth the way that the Lord is pleased to care for his people, 'as the apple of his eye.'

Now there are three particular aspects of this.

First, instinctively. There is no need of any persuasion, argument or influence whatsoever; the protection of the eye is instinctive. This protection is instinctive where the Lord Jesus is concerned. He so freely and readily exercises this concern and care toward 'the apple of his eye,' that, on account of his watchfulness and his ability, there will be a continual and constant preservation and keeping in the midst of all the felt and sensible need of it. There may be times when we are greatly exercised and concerned in regard to this, for there are many things to try faith and patience. But if we are the objects of the Lord's keeping, then this is blessedly true: 'He kept him as the apple of his eye,' instinctively.

Secondly, diligently—no carelessness, no forgetfulness, no unmindfulness where the Lord is concerned, it is a diligent keeping, a constant and diligent watch over his own people for their real good and their preservation and keeping.

Thirdly, constancy—a constant keeping, without a moment's cessation or failing, it is a constant preservation. This is most sweet and blessed, but on the other hand how absolutely vital and needful it is. O, it is as needful as it is true, for that people whom he has found and led about and instructed need to be kept as the apple of his eye. O, this is a vital necessity; it is something that we stand desperately in need of, for if we have not an interest in it, we must utterly fail and perish, it is so needful. Therefore the Lord will keep his people well exercised at times, deeply exercised in regard to their absolute need of his keeping and preservation. He will see to it that there will be constantly and continually a calling upon him and crying unto him for help, that they may be kept, and kept every moment, and preserved unto everlasting and eternal life. They are thoroughly convinced and made to feel over and over again that it is quite impossible for them to keep themselves for a moment; that it is the Lord that preserves and he alone, that they are not and cannot be their own keeper.

*My son, give me thy heart;
Let me thy sorrows bear;
'Tis not thy caution, power, or art,
Can save thee from despair.*

(Gadsby's 1032)

No, it is not our caution, power or art, it is the Lord alone who can keep and preserve, and he has promised to do this and he will keep his promise. 'He kept him as the apple of his eye.'

4. We will attempt to look at a few of those things which are the cause of our need of this keeping and preservation. First in regard to our souls, then secondly as to everything that concerns us in our walk, conversation and circumstances. The Lord will cause us to prove over and over again: "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." (Psalm 119:117) The Psalmist asked to be preserved from slipping: "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." (Psalm 17:5) How he pleaded with God sometimes to be held up and held on and kept and preserved in the midst of all his vicissitudes, difficulties, temptations, afflictions and trials. The thing is this—if the Lord has found us, he is leading us about and instructing us. If he has given us grace, if he has bestowed upon us that greatest of all blessings, a new nature, then we are made a new creature in Christ Jesus, and shall prove to our sorrow, alarm and grief over and over again that we have got hearts that are desperately wicked and deceitful above all things.

We need keeping constantly from the subtlety and deceit and wickedness of our old nature, else we shall fall a prey to some lust, sin or evil. Not that the Lord will suffer any of his people to fall finally—that is impossible—but, you know, some of the best of God's people have had some broken bones, some sore wounds, some bruises which they were hardly, if ever, completely restored from in this life. They had their temporary falls and, therefore, we need to be kept. The Lord can so manifest his tenderness, kindness and compassion toward us and exercise his power that we can be kept from falling a prey to that which is within us through the fall.

We have also a most subtle enemy in the devil. Who can understand his ways, designs or purposes? Who can possibly discern the awful subtlety of that great foe? How heartily he would rejoice in his devilish manner to see one of God's people fall to their ruin and sorrow! O, we need a Keeper, we do indeed, and it is well for us when the Lord allows us to see sufficient of our danger to make us tremble and fear and cry and beg and look unto him that he would keep and preserve us, and that tenderly, compassionately and constantly, 'as the apple of his eye.'

We are also surrounded by a most subtle tempting world. Many, many things can so easily draw our hearts aside, trip our feet, cause us to slip and have a fall, and we need the Lord to keep us.

There are also three great dangers and great difficulties—three things in connection with the spiritual aspect of it in regard to our souls.

We need to be kept from error. Ah, you say, no, not me, I am established enough in the truth; I shall never be turned aside to error. My friends, if you feel like that, you do not know anything about your heart or the devil. Error, when it is set before the eyes of a child of God, is so wrapped up, it is so well

camouflaged, it is so craftily set forth that it is too deceitful for us to discern; it is only the Lord who can keep us. It is so easy to be deceived, the easiest thing there is, and some of us have proved this to our grief and sorrow. Joseph Hart, that deeply taught, blessed hymn writer, had an awful temptation from the devil regarding his deliverance and pardon, and you know what deep sorrow and grief that brought the dear man into until the Lord was pleased to show him the trap, the snare and the error, and to manifestly deliver him out of it. But he was kept, O, he was kept. The Lord did not suffer that good man, that blessed child of God, to fall utterly or to be overwhelmed and overcome by the dreadfulness of that temptation. He was kept.

We need also to be kept from backsliding. In this same chapter we read how Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked. He was a backslider, he lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. (Deuteronomy 32:15) Now I speak from my own experience in regard to this matter, for how subtle and insidious it is, often commencing with that which is not discerned. It is so subtle and there is a gradual proceeding from one thing to another, a gradual declension, and we do not realise how far we have backslidden and slipped until the Lord deals with us as he dealt with Ephraim: "Ephraim is a cake not turned ... grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not." (Hoses 7:8-9) O, but the Lord kept him, 'kept him as the apple of his eye.' His eye was ever upon him and his goodness constantly toward him, and he was kept from finally falling into perdition, he was preserved from becoming a reprobate, he was kept. So the Lord is pleased still to keep all whom he finds and leads about and instructs. He keeps them from the power and prevalence of sin and Satan, and he keeps them from error and delivers them from their backslidings.

But I want to go a little further: 'Kept him as the apple of his eye.' The Lord's preservation is round about his people so that they should not be engulfed, overwhelmed, overcome by all those circumstances and enemies that may threaten their destruction, to their grief and wounding and sorrow. I have walked (I trust) that path myself in some considerable measure. O, this preserving power of the Lord—'kept'—O, where might we have got to, what might we have experienced if the Lord had not been pleased to watch over us, keeping and preserving us as he has promised to do! 'Keep me as the apple of thy eye.'

Now, although there be times when for some season we are called upon to walk in exceedingly painful paths (we may be the subject of sore persecution, dreadful depression, great difficulty and distress), yet it is a wonderful mercy in the end to prove that we have a living, indissoluble, sacred and sweet union to the Lord Jesus Christ, and that his care over us and his kindness toward us is as to 'the apple of his eye.' To prove in feeling that what has touched us has touched him. That word has come to my mind more than once in two aspects of it: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matthew 25:40) It has been like a two-edged sword to me more than once. There are times when the Lord regards the feelings of our hearts in a right love and sympathy and care to those whom we love in the truth. He observes every action of kindness, and if it is done in love and in that feeling of union, then it is as unto him. But, you see, it has come the other way round to me more than once; if we hurt one of God's people, if we wound them by our actions or words, if we speak to them and act toward them in any unkind way or hurtful manner, then, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' That has been a sore reproof to me more than once, and made me mourn and grieve over what has been said and done. But the Lord takes care of his people 'as the apple of his eye.' "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye."

At one season in my experience when receiving some very hard and bitter things from a person of the world who was in a position to persecute me, my heart rose up in awful rebellion and I felt well-nigh murderous in my spirit and full of retaliation, ready to do the utmost I could in return. But in the midst of all my fury and anger the Lord spoke those words to my heart: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." (Romans 12:19) The effect was to bring me to real repentance before God, my heart deeply humbled on account of what I felt, and just for a few moments I was enabled to leave everything in the Lord's hands. My friends, if the Lord really cares for us we have no need to have a care. "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

Now he is able to keep, he is omnipotent, omniscient, and full of compassion, pity and kindness. O, may we continue to prove this! After the trial of faith and the trial of every grace that he is pleased to bestow, may we prove him to be an almighty and most gracious Saviour, who is able to keep us from all evil, able to keep us from all danger, and harm, able to keep us to eternal life. Notwithstanding all the

wanderings, woes, distresses, difficulties of God's people, he kept them safe and brought them safely into the Promised Land. He suffered none of his chosen people to perish.

Well, may all our wanderings and all our difficulties bring us into a closer, personal and experimental acquaintance with him, and a greater knowledge and understanding of his compassion, pity and power, and prove over and over and over again that the Lord is our Keeper and our Preserver. May we may be enabled truly, feelingly and unreservedly to commit our souls unto him in well doing: "Unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power both now and ever. Amen." (Jude 24-25) "Fret not thyself because of evil doers." (Psalm 37:1) "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." (Psalm 37:5)

Well, may we have grace to reduce to practice what we read and what we hear in regard to this great God and his ability to save, his compassion and his mercy. You say, the hardest part is to reduce to practice what we hear, but may the Lord enable us to "Trust in him at all times." (Psalm 62:8)
Amen.

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