

Bethel

Pulpit

Hold Thou Me Up

Sermon Number 441

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 13th February, 2022**

Text: *“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually” (Psalm 119. 117).*

I have thought a lot about the preaching of the gospel and its effect, and the hearing of the gospel. In a way, it seems to me that there are two kinds of preaching. There is one which, under the Lord's blessing, really touches our hearts, when we are enabled a little to speak of Gethsemane and Calvary, the cross of Christ, His sufferings, His matchless love, what He has done for sinners, and those can be sacred occasions. Then there are other occasions when the preaching of the Word is not just like that, when it speaks of a sinner's present need, how he ought to behave, what he ought to do, the way he ought to walk. It seems to me that sermons like that do not seem to touch our hearts just the same. But one thing I have realised, and not least when I was a hearer: that sometimes this latter type of sermons can be exceedingly profitable, and many weeks afterwards they are still such a help, when a day of troubles comes, or when there is a difficulty, when we do not know what to do.

Now pondering over these things, the word I have read to you this morning is one of this second class. Last Thursday evening, I tried to speak to you about the Lord's matchless love and condescension in the Garden of Gethsemane. [See enclosed prayer meeting address.] Well, that touched my heart, if it did not touch any other hearts. But this is different. But beloved friends, it is something we sorely need, every one of us. “Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” We need to be held up, and it is only if we are held up that we ever can be safe, and if we are not held up, we are far from safe. And we cannot hold ourselves up. Only the Lord Jesus can hold us up. So this is a simple, a very simple prayer, but it is an important prayer, it is a vital prayer, and if our religion is real, it is a prayer we need to pray continually. I do not mean in the letter of it, repeating the word, but I mean in realising this: “Unless Thou keep me, I shall fall; without Thee, cannot rise.”

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” I suppose if you think of it naturally, little children, especially babies, need holding up. People who are very infirm need holding up, and people who are in affliction need holding up. There is the absolute counterpart spiritually: those who are new in the way, those who are babes in grace, perhaps they need holding up more than anyone else, because at first we think we can manage things alone, and we have painfully to feel that we cannot, and that is why sometimes there are these falls, and once we have fallen, it makes us more careful. And then those who are feeling weakness and infirmity spiritually, and then those who are in great difficulty. “Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” The Lord Jesus has a most blessed ability to hold His people up, to keep them from falling. The reason is because He is *almighty*. We sing, “Upheld by Thy righteous, omnipotent hand.”

Pondering over what reading to take this morning, I could not help but read those precious, well-known words in Isaiah: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God.” He tells us, the Lord mercifully, graciously tells us who He is. That is why we are to fear not. He assures His people of His gracious presence. “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee.” Now this is it: “Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.” “The Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.”

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” Well, why is it so necessary? One thing is because of our fallen nature as sinners. So we are liable to fall because of our nature, and even if born again of the Spirit, there is still the old man of sin, and there is that propensity to go back, to turn away, to slip, to fall. Hold me up, because I am helpless, because I am unworthy, because I am a sinner. But then also there is the devil and the world, and the two are hand in hand, and Satan has a wonderful ability to trip God’s people up. He does not need to trip the world up, because they are in his hand already. O but how Satan tripped up even Abraham, the father of the faithful, and then Isaac in the same way, and Jacob was continually slipping and slithering and falling. And then you have Noah. Who would have thought Noah would have become drunk! Then you have Gideon, a wonderful man and so helpless in himself, so dependent on the Lord, and at the end he seemed to go right away and he brought so much

distress. We have the case of David. We have the case of Peter. All these things should make us careful.

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” I said at the beginning, this prayer to the Lord is because He is almighty. But that is not always the emphasis in the Word of God. “Let *Thy mercy* hold me up.” You say, How can a thing like mercy hold a sinner up? Well, it holds up in this way. It is something we do not deserve. It is the power that holds us up, but it is the mercy to undeserving sinners, and because the Lord is merciful and gracious, He delights to hear and answer the prayers of His people. He delights to hold them up.

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” In one place we beg the Lord to hold us up lest our feet slip, because the world is a slippery place for the people of God, and if you have ever really tried to walk on a very slippery place, it is impossible to hold yourself up. Only once in my life have I really tried to walk on a very slippery place. I remember it was a new year’s day, and we were to be going up to chapel for the Sunday school prize giving. I cannot explain all the weather conditions, the meteorology, what had happened, but it was a viciously-cold day and there was a heavy shower of rain, and immediately it froze. There was about a quarter of an inch of solid ice everywhere. Haslingden having steep streets, it was just impossible. I remember some of the way we were going up the street on our hands and knees, pushing a basket carrying things in front of us. It was utterly impossible to stand in those slippery places. That was a slippery place where all God’s people were by nature, and if grace had not intervened, they would have slipped away to all eternity. But we sing,

“The arms of everlasting love
Beneath my soul He placed,
And on the Rock of Ages set
My slippery footsteps fast.”

If you are standing secure on the Rock of Ages, your feet will not slip there. “Kept by the power of God.” O but, “Let *Thy mercy* hold me up.”

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” So I read to you for the second reading this morning the account of Simon Peter (Matthew 14. 22-36). He did what no mortal man has ever done before or since: he walked on the waves. How it happened, we cannot explain – whether in some way

his body lost its weight, or whether the waves took more strength, we just do not know – but it was a miracle. It was a miracle when the Lord Jesus walked on the waves, but then Peter, as impulsive as ever, said, “If it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee.” He got quite a short answer: “Come.” And there you see Peter walking on the waves. But it was a slippery place. We are told what made the difference: “*When he saw the wind boisterous,*” he began to sink. And then he entered into the fulness of this word: “Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” He was not safe any longer. The miracle was performed. He was walking on the waves. “But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried.” Really, he was safer when he cried than when he was trusting in himself and walking on the waves. But if you think about it, as long as his eye was on his Saviour and his God, he was safe. That is the value of this prayer: “Hold Thou me up.”

“To keep our eyes on Jesus fixed,
And there our hope to stay.”

And the Lord reached out that almighty arm, and supported him, and you see that wonderful picture. The two of them are still walking on the waves, both the Lord and Peter, but he has got that almighty arm now supporting him. We sing,

“This tried, almighty arm
Is raised for my defence.”

And we need it, don’t we!

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” It is the only place of safety, when we are upheld. God’s people do need this upholding. There is the time of temptation. There is the time of affliction. There is the time when you are tempted to go astray. You need to be held fast as well as held up, held fast in God’s way. How many people are tempted: this seems to be a better way, an easier way. What happened to Bunyan’s Pilgrim in *Pilgrim’s Progress* when they saw such an easy way? It was not the way God had appointed, but they tried to walk it out. They ended in confusion. They were captured by Giant Despair. They thought it was going to be the death of them. When we are ready to walk out of the way, we need this almighty arm to hold us fast as well as to hold us up.

Sometimes you feel you can hardly go on. How can you continue? You need this almighty arm to hold you on, to hold you on so that you can continue. The only way you are safe, the only way you can continue to the very end, is when the Lord holds you on. But those days of sadness, affliction, disappointment, trouble – then you need the Lord to hold you up, and when He holds you up, you are safe, and He will hold you secure, and He will not let you go.

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” But safety – where is safety to be found? It is to be found in the Lord alone. How do God’s people find safety? In following after Him, in seeking to cling and cleave to Him, and all the while the Lord almighty, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, are clinging and cleaving to that sinner. It is like that tiny child who tries to take hold of its mother because it is so fearful, it is frightened it is going to fall, but it does not realise, it is not its weak little arms that are keeping it safe. It is its mother’s arms that are lovingly holding it fast. This is what you need, what I need.

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” I said at the beginning, this is the kind of sermon we all need; it is vital. If we do not know the experience of it, then we shall sink, and if the Lord does not appear, we shall sink to rise no more. But you can say of sermons like this, “These shall profit, if not please,” especially if they cause us to pray, if they cause us to feel our helplessness, our weakness, our need, if they cause us to walk out that word:

“Nearer, nearer, to Him clinging,
Let my helpless soul be found.”

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” Can I just alter the word with two letters: “Hold Thou me up, and I shall be *saved*.” Not just safe, but *saved*. “Saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” Of course, that is coming to a greater, a wider, a more glorious dimension, the everlasting salvation and security of the blood-bought people of God in the arms of the dear Saviour, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is where salvation is to be found. It is to be found in His arms. We have to learn that lesson: salvation, safety, in the arms of Christ and there alone. I do like that little old hymn:

“Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His loving breast.”

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe,” and not just safe, but saved – saved by grace, saved now, saved at last, saved eternally.

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” I commend this prayer to you. We all need it. It is a wonderful thing if the Lord does uphold us, if the Lord does keep our feet, for if He does not keep us, wherever should we get, wherever should we go!

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” Now there is a bit more to the verse. At first it does not seem altogether to belong. “Hold Thou me up ... and I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually.” Surely this is not legal ground. It is not as if a sinner says, Lord, if Thou dost do this for me, then this is something I will do back in return. It is not that at all. What is the point? What does it mean? I take it to mean this: that when the Lord does favour a sinner in any way, then there will be an *afterwards*, a *nevertheless afterwards*, and there will be a sanctifying effect of it. It will work for good. So here, “Hold Thou me up.” Well, if I am favoured to prove the Lord does hold me up, then it will deliver me from all carelessness. I will not go on heedlessly and carelessly, unthinkingly.

“I will have respect unto Thy statutes *continually*.” There is going to be something *continually* when we are under the influence of the almighty arm of the Lord holding us up. “Continually.” We need His arm to hold us up continually, and then we need grace afterwards, the sanctifying effect, to walk before the Lord tenderly, continually. I will have respect unto Thy Word – that is what it means. As you all realise, in this long Psalm, we have God’s holy Word, and in the New Testament it is the gospel, the glorious gospel of the grace of God. But the psalmist uses different expressions: sometimes, the Word, the Word of God; sometimes His law; sometimes His commandments; here, His statutes; then again, His testimonies, and also His judgments. But in the spirit of it, it is the same point – the holy, sacred, infallible Word of God. We need it to lead us. We need it to guide us continually. We need it to keep us.

Now this is a resolve. You have quite a lot of resolves in the 119th Psalm, the psalmist saying what he will do. I know people have different opinions. Some people say you should not make resolves, especially when

the new year comes. Some say it is a good thing to make resolves. Surely, surely the scriptural position is: it is right to make resolves, *but* not to make them in our own strength, our own ability, but asking the Lord to enable us to fulfil them, to walk them out. Well, so it is here.

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually.” What is this *having respect*? Well, on the one hand, if you have respect for a person, you esteem that one, you honour that one. I know at Bethel you have different people in the congregation, and you really respect them. Why do you respect them? You esteem them, you honour them. Well, that should be our attitude to the holy Word of God, ever to esteem it, ever to honour it, and the best way to honour it, to esteem it, is by seeking grace to obey it.

So it may be a strange thing to say, but we need the Lord to hold us up that we might be safe, but then we still need the Lord to hold us up that we might respect His statutes continually, seeking grace to walk according to the Word of God. That 1003rd hymn, we quite often sing it; it is a good hymn. It is entitled, “Breathing after holiness.” But I wonder if you have ever realised, it is really the language of this psalm, a piece here, a piece there, a piece somewhere else, and it is the language of the psalm, and Dr. Watts has beautifully put it into poetry, as only he can.

“Order my footsteps by Thy Word,
And make my heart sincere.”

This is having respect unto His statutes, constrained by love, because He graciously upholds us.

“Let sin have no dominion, Lord,
But keep my conscience clear.

“Make me to walk in Thy commands;
'Tis a delightful road;
Nor let my head, or heart, or hands,
Offend against my God.”

“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually.”

Jesus, thou Almighty Saviour,
Prostrate at Thy feet I lie;
Humbly I entreat Thy favour,
Condescend to hear my cry.

When I was to Thee a stranger,
Wandering in forbidden ways,
From the paths of sin and danger
Thou didst call me by Thy grace.

Let not, then, my foes confound me,
Thou art all my help and hope;
Let Thy arms of love surround me,
Let Thy mercy hold me up.

Grant me Thy divine direction
In the way that I should go;
Let Thy hand be my protection
From the power of every foe.

Gracious Saviour, never leave me,
While my toils and conflicts last;
To Thy kind embrace receive me,
When the storms of life are past.

J. Fawcett