

DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?

A SERMON

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“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.” Hebrews 11:29

FAITH is something definite, not something that is vague and general. There must be three things to make up true faith. First, there must be divine authority. Now the Israelites had this divine authority, as the word of the Lord shows, and by his immediate direction they were brought into the position that is here set before us. And just so now there is, bless the Lord, in the Bible divine authority for any poor, seeking sinner to come to that way of God in which he shall realize that that is typified by their going through the Red Sea, and the Egyptians being drowned. And then, secondly, there must be in faith not only divine authority, but there must be understanding. There must be an understanding of what you believe. To believe what you do not understand is no faith at all; you must understand what you believe. Now when a sinner is led to feel what he is as a sinner, he definitely understands what he is as a sinner, and therefore, from this understanding so believes it that he cannot be persuaded out of it. And such a one, having tried, many ways, like the woman in the gospel, to get rid of this sin, discovers that there is no way in which he can get rid of it but by Jesus Christ, according to God's mercy and good pleasure. For such a one finds out that “it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.” Here he comes to a definite understanding. Then there must be one more thing, there must be a love to that God in whom you believe; for faith without love is the faith merely of devils. Devils believe, and tremble too, but Satan cannot love. These are the three things that make up faith. But it is not my intention this morning to dwell so much upon the grace of faith. I will at once proceed to the great subject, for a great subject it is, which the words of our text bring before, us. I will take, as the Lord shall enable me, a fourfold view of the same. First, here is *a great victory*. Second, that *that victory stands as a pledge and an assurance of possessions to come*. Third, *the contrast*, that the Israelites passed through the sea, which the Egyptians assaying to do were: drowned. Fourth, that we have here *a striking example for our encouragement of faith in God*.

First, then, here is a great victory; for it was a great victory they obtained over all that stood opposed to them. And I am guided in this division I have made by the word of the Lord itself. It is

encouraging to remember that we are not left to our own wisdom for the management or understanding of a scripture like this. The Holy Scripture has in many places set forth the practical and ultimate meaning of the circumstance of the Israelites obtaining this victory over their enemies. Now this Red Sea appears to me to represent four things. I will just name them. First, it represents the world. And does not the world drown men in perdition? Does not the world, by what it is, overwhelm and become the destruction of men? Are not the greater part now so buried in the world that they are on the brink of eternal ruin, but know it not? And the Israelites, therefore, coming out from Egypt and passing through the sea, are a figure of that victory that the people of God have over the world. The world cannot so hold the Christian as to keep him away from faith in Christ; the world cannot so overcome the Christian as to keep him away from a knowledge of the truth; the world cannot so overcome the Christian as to keep him away from the ways of the Lord, or to keep him away from fellowship with God. And thus, by seeking a better country, and by seeing the infinite importance and value of the blessed Redeemer, we thus, by receiving Jesus Christ, become severed from the world. So, the Lord says, "That you may know that I do put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel." As you know, the marginal reading is (which I think throws great light upon it), "That you may know that I do put a redemption between the Egyptians and Israel." I like that marginal reading exceedingly, because it appears to discriminate the real Christian from another man. So that the difference between the Israelite spiritually and the man who is not an Israelite is this: the one has a knowledge of redemption, receives it, believes in it, rests upon it, and by it, by that eternal redemption that is in Christ, such a one has God to be his God, and the promises of the Bible belong to him. Therein lies the real difference between the church and the world; the one receives and leans upon, lives and walks by, eternal redemption; the other does not possess this, does not understand it, and does not walk with God by it. There is the difference, then, between the church and the world. This Red Sea also represents sin. And have not our sins been already our destruction in the first Adam? "O Israel" that may apply to the true Israel, "you have destroyed yourself." We are by nature all in the same condemnation, drowning in our own sin; and so, we should find it, if we were left to them, that our sins would roll upon us like mighty seas, and that forever. But by faith in Christ there is an end to this; we overcome it, come out of these waters, and come into the land of Israel. The Red Sea also represents the wrath of God; and that, if we have to meet it, must also be our destruction. The Red Sea also represents death, for it was death to the Egyptians. So, then, how great is the misery of man! Now, then, just take a retrospect of these four, and say to yourself, Here is the world to destroy me, here is sin to destroy me, here is death to destroy me, and here is the wrath of God to destroy me. So, I need, then, the mercy of God in all these. I need Jesus Christ as being my separation from the world, I need Jesus Christ as being to me the end of sin, I need Jesus Christ as being to me the end of the law, and the way of deliverance from the wrath to come; I need Jesus Christ as having taken away the sting of death, and having swallowed up death in victory. Now let us hear what the word of the Lord says upon this. When John the divine saw on the one hand the destruction of the lost, and on the other hand the salvation of Israel, he was amazed, he was struck with this. And it is a great thing for us when we are brought into such a state of mind as to appreciate the greatness on both sides, the greatness of the ruin, and the greatness of the salvation from that ruin, and the greatness of the victory over all that stands opposed. John speaks in this way: "and I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous." So, if we have eyes to see we shall see that it is great and marvelous as we go on: "Seven angels having the seven last plagues." These seven angels are of course a definite number for an indefinite. You are aware that the seven ministers of the churches in the beginning of the Book of Revelation are called seven angels. And they are said to be clothed with

fine linen, that is to denote their consecration to God, to his service, to his people. They are said to be girded with a golden girdle! because their loins are girted about with pure truth. And it is said also about these seven angels that they came out of the temple, to denote that all that the Lord sends belong to his temple, belong to his dwelling, belong to his presence. But we shall come to these again presently. And John said, "I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire," that is, the judgments of God in the Red Sea were transparent, for they saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore. And here again the world is represented. Is not the world a kind of mirror that reflects in many solemn ways the judgments of God? Is not the world mingled with fire, not literally so, but in the scriptural and figurative sense of the word? Are not the judgments of God overtaking one and another of our fellow-creatures from day to day? And is not sin also a sea mingled with fire, the fiery threatening and judgments of the great God? And is not death also a kind of sea mingled with fire? How fearful to the unconverted is the Jordan of death, and having there to meet the terrible judgments of God! But now John comes to the victory: "And I saw them that had gotten the victory over the beast." The beast there, in the first place, means Egypt. A wild beast; that nation was wild, and alien to God's truth. Again, it represents the world. "I saw them that had gotten the victory over the beast and over his image." The image there means Pharaoh literally; he was the embodiment of all the tyrannical power that was exercised over the Israelites; and so, Pharaoh stands a type of the great enemy of our souls, and is called by the same name, namely, the dragon. But they obtained victory over him, "and over his mark." Now the mark there of the beast was submission to him. The Israelites had hitherto submitted to him, but now they were delivered from serving him and were made free. "And over the number of his name." The number there means the number of persons that were represented by Pharaoh. Now it is said of these, that they stood "on the sea of glass," or on the shore, as the meaning is, "having the harps of God?" Can we bring this home to our own personal feeling, and understand it? Let us take the beast to mean the whole world, including all false religions as well as including all non-religions; and they obtained the victory over that world, as we have said, by the blood of Jesus Christ. "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb." You are severed from that world by possessing what the world does not, by possessing eternal redemption, by the truth and spirit of God, which the world does not possess. And if you try to unite yourself in mind, spiritually so, with the man that does not possess this redemption, that does not possess the testimony of divine sovereignty that has made this difference, that does not possess an experimental acquaintance with this truth, you cannot feel any union to him; there is a separation, the characters are as opposite as the characters of Satan and the Savior. "They are not of the world," says Christ, "even as I am not of the world." Satan is of the world, the god of the world. So, the image means any tyrannical power, let it be what it may. And so, whatever we have had to encounter, we have been victorious hitherto; we have stood hitherto, and having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel, we have been preserved hitherto; we have been able to stand fast on the ground of the gospel, and Satan has not been able hitherto to blind our eyes or to move us from our belief in, and love to, the truth of the blessed God. And so also his mark; we feel we cannot side with that that stands opposed to the liberty of the gospel, "And the number of his name." What numbers there are at this tune against God's truth! and yet the few that are for it are enabled to overcome the numbers that are against it. And one, I think, of the best ways of overcoming the numbers that are against God's truth is to take as little notice of them as possible, but to go on in God's love, to go on in Christ's love, to go on in God's truth, and to let them alone. It is a great thing to be enabled to do so, and to leave it all in his blessed hands, and then, whatever scenes we have to pass through, whatever may stand against us, they are all nothing when set by the side of the Lord our God. Now it is said of those who thus overcome that they

have the harps of God. 22nd verse of the 71st Psalm: "I will also praise you with the psaltery, even your truth, O my God." It puzzled me for years what the spiritual meaning was of musical instruments. I thought, these musical instruments can never be mentioned so frequently in the Scriptures without their having a spiritual meaning. And when I came to the Revelation, and found there harpers harping with their harps, when I found them there having the harps of God, and vials full of odors sweet, which are the prayers of saints, I at once saw there must be a spiritual meaning. So, it comes out at last that these harps are the truths of the gospel. And what a musical testimony is it when God comes into your soul and says unto you, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, in loving-kindness have I drawn you"! That is indeed a harp of gold that makes melody in the soul. And so, when the Lord comes in and says, "Rejoice that your name is written in heaven," and you learn that this was done before the world was; and when the Lord comes in and says, "Return unto me, I have redeemed you, you are mine;" when the Lord comes in and says, "I am your salvation;" when the Lord comes in and says, "I have blotted out your sins as a cloud, and your transgressions as a thick cloud;" when the Lord comes in and says, "What ails you? Am I not better than the whole universe besides? Have I been a wilderness unto you? Have I been a land of darkness unto you? I will never leave you; I will never forsake you. In blessing I will bless you: blessed is he that blesses you, and cursed is he that curses you," have we these harps? Can we say that these blessed truths are music to our souls? Can we say that these blessed truths, whether taken singly, or taken generally or collectively, are what the 89th Psalm declares? Oh, my hearers, if they are, the victory is ours, heaven is ours, God is ours. There it is said, in the 89th Psalm, "Blessed" how blessed eternity alone can show, "blessed is the people that know the joyful sound." Ah, then, the Lord coming in by these blessed testimonies fulfils his own word, that "there shall be the voice of joy and melody;" "you shall go forth in the dances of them that make merry." And so, on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, they used musical instruments, and they danced there, and sang there of the wonders the Lord had done. John might well say he saw something great and marvelous. The eternal damnation of the soul is something great and something fearfully marvelous; on the other hand, eternal salvation from this wrath to come, conformity to Christ, and interest in these eternal things, is also great and marvelous; all of which John saw. May we not, then, here say, "Thanks be to God, that gives us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ"? The learned tell us a great deal about the beast; they treat it all historically. This is very well in its place; but we must remember that the Bible is a book intended for all ages, for all nations, and for all descriptions of character. There is not a description of character the photograph, shall I say, of which is not truly given in God's blessed word, from the lowest profligate that crawls, to the highest-flying Pharisee in the world. And just so in the church there is not a Christian, from the hyssop that grows out of the wall, the least in the household of faith, to the mighty cedar in Lebanon, prophets and apostles, that stood like mighty cedars, there is not one description of Christian character that is not noticed. And the same word that thus describes the variety describes also the variety of the same persons. It takes up the little one as soon as he is born of God, and ministers to him the sincere milk of the word. It then leads him on and gives him a little fruit and a morsel of bread of life to comfort his heart. It then, as he gets old enough to bear it, gives him strong meat, the strong truths of the everlasting gospel, brings him into the banqueting-house, and the banner over him is love. And then, when the work is done here below, a door is opened in heaven, and the soul is commanded, by some disease or affliction, either gradual or instantaneous, "Come up hither." It is nothing else but the Lord gathering in his treasures, summoning the soul to leave this lower region, to enter those realms of light and life and blessedness, where it is forever to dwell. Now, then, my hearer, do you thus receive Jesus Christ? Yes, says one, I receive Jesus

Christ, but I do not like the musical instruments. Ah, you cannot get to heaven unless you learn to sing; you must be a musician, you must know how to play the harp, you must know how to handle the truth of God's everlasting love, you must know how to handle the truth of election. You must not handle it upside down, as some do, make the creature choose the Lord, and then the Lord choose the creature; you cannot make the harp sound in that way. And you must know how to handle predestination, and redemption, and imputed righteousness. You must know how to handle these glorious truths; these are the harps that make up the music of heaven. So, then, you cannot have the harps without having Christ, and you cannot have Christ without having the harps; you must have them both. "Harpers harping with their harps;" and what are all the blessed truths of the gospel but declarative of the greatness of the victory that God gives unto his people, and the greatness of the glory to which they shall come? John said, "The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled." That is a scripture that has puzzled the learned amazingly. Some place the fulfilment of those plagues in one age, some in another, some in another, and thus they differ one from another. The Lord said, "I am the Lord that makes diviners mad, that turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolish because they try to get at the meaning without Jesus Christ. Now the simple-minded Christian, he is not puzzled to understand that scripture, that "no man was able to enter into the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled." Why, the Christian, without, perhaps, any human learning, just enough to carry on his business, I understand it, he says. I know what the temple is; the temple is God's dwelling, and the church, of God is God's dwelling, and I cannot enter into that church until these seven plagues are fulfilled; and they were fulfilled in the sufferings of Christ, for Christ took the first plague and the last plague; he took the first sin and the last sin; his atonement is complete. And so I can enter into the true church of God, and I can enter into the ultimate temple, the house not made with hands, only by the fulfilling of these plagues; that is, Jesus Christ must endure all the curse, he himself must endure the completeness of God's wrath. There the plagues are fulfilled, and precious faith in what Jesus Christ has done lets me into the church here below, and will let me into the church triumphant at the last great day. Whereas if you are not a believer in Christ, then if you are never to enter heaven till those plagues are fulfilled by yourself, you can never fulfil them, but you must be cast into the prison of hell, and shall not come out from there till you have paid the last mite. But let the dear Savior appear; he is the end; then we come by him into the true church, and shall enter into everlasting glory.

Now I do not know whether I have made these matters clear; but I want, this morning, to make you that are true Christians rise above your doubts and fears. Just look at what the Lord has done; see how the Savior has overcome the world; see him as your victory; see how he has overcome sin, and you receive him as your victory; see how he has overcome Satan, and you receive him as your victory; see how he has overcome death, and you receive him as your victory; see how he has overcome the beast, the world at large, and you receive him as your victory; see how he has overcome his image, the tyranny, and you receive him as your victory, and abide by him; see how he has overcome the mark, and you receive him as your victory; see how he has overcome the number of his name; see what ten thousand times ten thousand foes he has conquered, put them all to flight, and you receive him as your victory. Can you truly say this? Do you understand this and receive it? If you do, why, you can no more go to hell than prophets and apostles can. If God intended to destroy you he would never have shown you this. And I ask, before I go any farther, is not a right apprehension of what Jesus Christ has done enough to endear him beyond all

description? Blessed Redeemer! blessed God! blessed Father! blessed mercy! I do not wonder at some of the people of God, in their last moments, losing all sight and sense of bodily suffering;

“A mortal paleness on the cheek,
But glory in the soul.”

Call me what you like, fanatic or what not, I believe with all my soul that Theodorus, you read of in the third century, was right, he was not deluded, when they put him to the rack, tortured him, tore his flesh off, till they took him down at last, afraid that he should die before they had wreaked their vengeance on him sufficiently, and, astonished at his calmness, they asked him, “How could you endure such torture?” He said, “I felt a little pain at first; but a young man stood by me, invisible to mortal eyes, wiped the sweat off my face, gave me cold water, and made me so happy that I felt no pain afterwards.”¹ There is the reality of religion then. The poet might well say,

“Through floods and flame, if Jesus lead,
I’ll follow where he goes.”

How glorious was this pathway through the Red Sea made to the Israelites! They passed through in the light of the Lord, in the power of the Lord, with the presence of the Lord, and there was not one feeble person among them. The Lord give us an increase of faith in him, and that will produce an increase of devotion to him, an increase of delight in him. “Delight yourself in the Lord; he will give you the desires of your heart.” Here, then, is a mighty victory which the Lord wrought. Well might Isaiah want this in the spiritual sense that was in olden time in the literal sense: “Awake, awake; put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Are you not it that has cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Are you not it which has dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that has made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?”

But I notice, in the next place, that this victory stood as a pledge and an assurance of possessions to come. But only to them that believed. The right-minded among the Israelites would say, “This is the God of Abraham that has thus divided the sea; this is the God of Abraham that has given us this victory.” But the majority of the people did not understand this, and therefore soon apostatized from the flimsy profession they made. There was with them a want of understanding. If they had understood it they would have cleaved unto the Lord their God. “This people do err in their hearts, for they have not known my ways.”

Now let us stop here for a moment. Do we or do we not so understand the greatness of the victory Christ has wrought, and that this victory was wrought, not for himself, but for us if we are believers? Do we so understand it as to believe that that victory can carry us through all, land us safe at last, and give us as welcome a possession of heaven as Christ himself had? Do we believe this? do we understand it? If we do, we shall cleave to him. Let us hear what Moses said upon this, namely, this victory being a pledge and assurance unto all that believe, of future possession. They were to take it with them. He says, “You shall bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of your inheritance” take that as a figure of heaven itself, “in the place, O Lord, which you have made for you to dwell in.” You recollect the Savior’s words, “I go to prepare a place for you;” “in the

¹ Foxes “Book of Martyrs,” Page 45, edited by Kennedy

sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.” And then he said, “The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.” Now go to the 19th of Revelation: “Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigns.” So that this victory was to carry them with certainty into the land, all that believed. “You that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive unto this day.” Why, my soul cleaves to God as naturally as my body cleaves to the earth: for that that is earthly will cleave to the earth; that that is creature will cleave to the creature; our old Adam nature will cleave to this world, ties the soul down, and brings us into bondage. But the soul cleaves to the truth, cleaves to God; and when the question comes, “Will you also go away?” Go away! Lord, we disdain the thought. “To whom shall we go?” What is there to rival this Rose of Sharon, this pearl of great price, this apple tree in the midst of the trees of the wood, this Friend that loves at all times, this sworn covenant God? Go away! Why, none but mad people go away. What! go away from the fountain of living waters, and do as an apostate old-covenant people did, that had no understanding, and hew out to ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water? Go away! No, Lord; we disdain the thought. We are sometimes afraid you wilt send us away, but we have no desire to go away. And if we have no desire to go away, he will never send us away, depend upon that. Ah, well, but then there are a great many enemies before we get there. There are the dukes of Edom. Well, they will be amazed. Well, but there is Palestina. Sorrow shall take hold of them. Well, but there are the mighty men of Moab. Trembling shall take hold of them. Well, but there is the swelling of Jordan, and the Canaanites beyond that. The Canaanites shall melt away, except Rahab. “Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of your arm”. I would not have any of you afraid of death for a week after I have said this; “by the greatness of your arm they shall be as still as a stone; till your people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which you have purchased.” Here, then, this victory stood as a pledge of future possession.

I will have a word now with my old friend Rahab. Rahab heard of the victory. That will do; I will keep that; that is the God for me; that is the mercy for me. She had more sense than the Israelites had that threw it away, and would have gone back to Egypt. She heard of the victory, and kept it. And when the spies came; I am one of you. Your God is the God of heaven above and the God of the earth beneath; I know he has given you the land. I am a thorough out-and-out high Calvinist; I know he has given you the land. All our gods here are gods of uncertainty, but your God is a God of certainty. Well now, if you take care of us, and do not betray us, and you shall have wisdom enough to hide us to the last, and complete your mission, and utter not this our business. And what was the result? You know what the result was; “she perished not with them that believed not,” and the Holy Spirit, by his apostle James, justifies Rahab in all she said and did; it remained for uninspired men to condemn what God has justified. So then, if some of you, as it were, are afar off, and say, Ah, I have lived among the ungodly all my lifetime; I am a poor foreigner to anything spiritual and sacred; ah, then, if like Rahab you hear of this victory, and are ready to say, This God be my God, this religion be my religion; he will not say you no; for the law of our God is, “Him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out.” Just so you must hold fast the victory Jesus Christ has wrought, keep that, and that will carry you through it all; that will divide the Jordan for you, that will open the gates of heaven for you, that will make you happy when you get there, and make you welcome when you get there, and make you at home when you get there, the victory he has wrought.

But I must hasten to *the contrast*. Now, then, here you have the one saved, and the other drowned. The doctrine here set forth is not only that of judgment and mercy, but also to show that the people

of God can be saved where others are in danger. I felt yesterday I should want two hours this morning instead of three-quarters of an hour, and so the proposition I have now made, how full of indication, the people of God are safe where others are in danger. Is there a flood to overwhelm the world? God will take care that his little few shall be saved. Are volcanoes to burst forth, and swallow up and consume the cities of the plain? God will take care that Lot shall be saved. Is the sea to overwhelm the Egyptians? God will take care that not an Israelite shall be injured, that not a hair of the head shall be touched, not a hoof shall be left behind. And so, in the wilderness, who perished? None but those who disbelieved. There was no other disease could kill them, there was nothing else did kill them at the last but unbelief. Now, then, grace reigns in the hearts of the people of God, and they shall go on believing. Does Nebuchadnezzar roll in like an avalanche upon Jerusalem? Baruch shall escape, Jeremiah shall be safe, and those who hold with Jeremiah shall be safe. They went to Babylon; God was a little sanctuary to them there. Are the three worthies cast into the furnace? They are safe; not so with them that cast them in. Is Daniel cast into the lion's den? He is safe; but not those that got him cast him into the den. Is a gallows prepared for Mordecai? Mordecai is safe; not so with Haman. And so, we might go on again and again to show that the people of God are safe everywhere. Well but, say you, suppose they are martyred. Well, they are safe then; their strength is proportioned to their day. Fear not, you have the eternal God to be your refuge, underneath you his everlasting arms; you shall go from strength to strength, until you attain glory's full possession. But again, the Egyptians were drowned because their object was very bad. They were pursuing the Israelites to slay them or injure them, bring them back into slavery. So if any of you have been pursuing a Christian, you had better stop before it is too late; you had better make a halt; you had better think; you had better go and sit yourselves down at the feet of a certain person who said, "Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counselor this work be of men, it will come to nothing; but if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it." The work was of God, and so the Israelites passed, safely through the sea, while the Egyptians were drowned. The Lord took as much care to destroy the one as he did to save the other. And what had the Israelites to do? Why, to stand still, and see the salvation of God. I suppose they never had a more pleasant walk than it was thus through the Red Sea. When do we walk with God happily, but when we realize his salvation and his presence in our favor? Bless his dear and holy name, therefore, while his enemies must be scattered, and they that touch his people touch the apple of his eye, yet his friends shall be safe; they shall conquer all, yes, be more than conquerors at the last.

But lastly, we have *here a striking example, for our encouragement, of faith in God*. The Israelites did not attempt to meddle with the Egyptians, If any of them had proposed, Let us go back and stop those Egyptians; let us go and drive them back; Moses would have said, The Lord is between you and them; he will stop them after his own manner; he will stop them in his own time. And the Lord did not stop them.