

THE DUE ORDER

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, May 30th, 1869

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“And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.” Joshua 3:17

I HOPE I shall not tire your patience by just having a few remarks more this morning to close what I have to say upon this interesting verse. I have three more points to set before you. The first is, that of *confidence in the midst of trouble*; they “stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan.” Secondly, *the way of progression*, by the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the Lord. Thirdly, *the final triumph of every spiritual, every true Israelite*; for all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, and the priests thus stood still until all were passed clean over Jordan.

First, just a word more, in addition to what we had last Lord’s day morning, upon *their confidence in God in the midst of trouble*. Observe, they were standing in the very midst of Jordan; and therefore, their present position, to keep it must be a matter entirely of faith. They might have put the ark down and have run backward or forward out of the bed of the river, and not have retained that position. They had opportunities to escape; but then the spirit of true faith is to escape in the right way, not in the wrong. You read of the ancients, that they had opportunity to return to the country whence they came out, but they well knew something of the wretchedness of the country they had left, and of the blessedness of the country they desired. Now this confidence must be in the Lord God Almighty by two things. First, by the substitutional work of Christ. If your confidence be in his mediatorial work, atonement, and righteousness, and by the promise of God that is yea and amen, then your confidence cannot be wrong, it is sure to be right. There never was a man or woman either yet rejected by the Lord who placed their confidence in him by the atonement and righteousness of Christ, and by the promise of God. which is yea and amen by Christ Jesus the Lord. Perhaps you will say, Is there nothing required on my part? Well, the promise certainly is to character, and to faith, and faith certainly will have works if it be true faith, for faith without works is dead. But then the kind of works, and the extent of those works, will depend upon the circumstances in which you are placed. For instance, the thief on the cross, his faith seems to have had only two works, perhaps I ought to say three. let us say three. In the first place, his faith made the Savior his way of confidence; he appealed to Jesus Christ, that was his way of confidence.

That is one work, we will say, of faith, to renounce all other confidence, and let Christ be your confidence. The second work of faith there was that of testimony. He said to his fellow thief, "Do you not fear God, seeing we are in the same condemnation, and we indeed justly, but this man has done nothing amiss." So, where there is true faith there will be a testimony for Christ. Then the next work was that of prayer, hence we read of the prayer of faith, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And I think I may fairly say here that the thief was in the midst of trouble. You can hardly imagine a man in the midst of worse trouble. He had forfeited his right to live, even among his fellow dying mortals; he was dying in public disgrace; there were all his sins, and there was no time for any works or for any worthiness to be obtained, as men suppose they can if they get time. Here was eternity now within a few minutes at hand, and I think we may safely say that he was in the midst of trouble; and yet in his faith he stood firm in confidence. What is there required more? It does not matter how bad the sinner may have been; his sins may indeed be as scarlet and as crimson; he may be, as Ezekiel expresses it in his 15th chapter, like a piece of vine wood cast into the fire and burnt, black from end to end; so is the poor sinner; but this is recorded to allow that such a one should not despair. And if your soul has a tendency thus towards God and towards Christ, whatever your troubles are, though you may see no possible way out of them, the Lord will be sure to appear if this be your confidence; only let your confidence be in Christ, and in the yea and amen promise which is by him. Pray do not let it be anywhere else. If you have any confidence in anything else and think the Lord will appear for you because you are in any shape or form in and of yourself entitled to deliverance, then you will be deceived. But confess with Jacob that you are not worthy of the least of his mercies, and still hold fast; you may see no way of escape; but just as the Lord brought the priests out of Jordan, and the Israelites all safe over, he will make a way for you out of every one of your troubles; and he will wonderfully sustain you in them also. There is such a thing as rejoicing in the midst of trouble, as being happy in the midst of it. Hence said the apostle, "We are exceeding joyful in all our tribulations that is, through the confidence they had in God by his promise in Christ Jesus and realizing also the presence of God. And if we have this confidence, how steady it keeps us! It is wonderful what it will do. It keeps us devoted to the Lord, when we feel sure that he will not do us any harm we do not know what others might do to us, we do not know what circumstances, apart from him, might do to us; we know what Satan would like to do to us, he would like to destroy us; but our God will never do us any harm himself, nor suffer any one or any circumstance in life or death to do us any ultimate harm. Is there not something in this that wins our confidence to God, and wins our souls to Christ? "They stood firm in the *midst*." And then look at the three cast into the fiery furnace. There is a remarkable expression there to encourage our confidence in God; and if I am speaking this morning to some desponding one or other, and you say, Perhaps I do not know that you are such a sinful, rebellious, stumbling, poor creature; well, then you have the more need of Christ, and of God's promise, and of the testimony that where sin has abounded grace does much more abound. Look at the three worthies in the furnace, what is said of them? There is a remarkable expression; the word "*midst*" in our text naturally brought it to my mind; there is something wonderfully expressive in it. When they were cast into the furnace, it is written that they fell down in the midst of the burning fiery furnace, and yet not a hair of the head singed, nor were their coats changed; nothing was burnt but the bands with which they were bound. Ah, see how faith shines here; see the confidence here. The out-reaching flames, as it were of that furnace slew the mightiest men that Nebuchadnezzar could find to cast these three apparently defenseless men into it; the very outside of the furnace killed the others; but the very center, where all the heat seemed concentrated could not singe so much as a hair of their heads, because they believed in their God.

My hearer, it is a good thing sometimes to be in the midst of trouble, to be beset on every side, and to see no way of escape, because then, when the escape does come, the Lord's interposition on your behalf will appear so conspicuous that you will acquire an increase of acquaintance with him. Hence, I have no doubt that the Israelites, when they came to the shores of the Red Sea, would say, Well, here is no way of escape; here are the Egyptians in the rear, and here are impairments on the right hand and on the left, and here is the roaring sea before us; why, we are caught as in a snare, as in a trap. But Moses does not seem to have been put out, he seems to have stood fast, and he was not the only man that stood fast, there were many right-minded men among them; though the majority were disbelievers in God's truth, yet there were many among them that were right-minded, and no doubt drank in with sweet delight the sermon that Moses preached to them. He said, "Fear not; stand still;" be quiet; believe that the Lord will appear. Ah. But what if he does not appear immediately? But he will appear; he will help, and that right early; "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord," which he will show to you today; you will not have to wait beyond your strength for it; "for the Egyptians whom you have seen today you shall see no more forever. The Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." Am I speaking this morning to any that are in soul-trouble, circumstantial trouble, family trouble, let it be what it may, and yet you know that Jesus is the only foundation in Zion? Let your confidence be in him; and if you do not believe the Lord intends to deliver you from your troubles, for there are some thorns in the flesh the Lord intends to be permanent, there are some troubles that he intends shall accompany you all your days; there are some Canaanites that he intends to remain in the land as long as you live, then have confidence in the Lord that he will strengthen you to bear them, that he can make you happy in them; and you can at times smile at them all, especially when he turns the captivity of the soul; then, notwithstanding that perpetuation or continuation of some of these troubles, your mouth shall be filled with laughter, and your tongue with singing; then can you say, in the sweet confidence of faith,

"How harsh so ever the way,
Dear Savior, still lead on;
Nor leave us till we say,
Father, your will be done."

Let us not forget, in accordance with what we have been reading this morning in the 22nd Psalm, that trouble attended the Savior all his days; and then we have an evening time to be light, but he had an evening time to be dark, even thick darkness, the darkest of all, until he had suffered that darkness away, and has brought in everlasting light. So, then they stood firm in the midst of the river of judgment, in the midst of tribulation; and so, may it be our lot to stand last in God's truth, not to cast away our confidence, which has great recompense of reward. You do not know what a reward it will bring you by and by; you will say, How glad I am I did not give up that, but held fast the truth! though connected with many doublings and fears, oh, how glad I am that I did not give up the truth, that I did not get away from my trouble in the wrong way, that I held the truth fast! And now that holds me fast, and the Lord appears for me. for the Lord's eyes are upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with him, and he is able to do abundantly above all we can ask or think. See how beautifully the 138th Psalm speaks of this confidence in the Lord. I always feel at home when dwelling upon this, because I do not know what I should do without confidence in the Lord, without such a way of confidence. Hence in the 138th Psalm, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble;" if it were just at the boundaries, or outside, I might perhaps see some

way of escape, but I am just in the very center; and like being in the center of a cyclone at sea, the wind is whirling all round, and I don't understand the law of storms; if I go this way or the other way, perhaps I shall be destroyed, and if I remain where I am, I am tossed to and fro, and whirled round almost like a whirligig. Well, never mind; our God has his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. Hence says the Psalmist, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you will revive me; you shall stretch forth your hand;" I have been stretching forth my hand, Lord, but it is no use; but "you shall stretch forth your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand shall save me." How far will he save you, David? Why, "he will perfect that which concerns me." Whatever concerns my welfare, he will perfect it. How do you know he will? Because "your mercy, O Lord, endures forever." Fellow-creatures may get weary, from several causes, and very natural too, of showing lovingkindness, mercy, and favor one to the other: but not so with our God. "Have you not known," and if you have not known, you have heard, "that the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary?" But then, David, have you the spirit of prayer as well as faith? You seem to show some faith, but is your faith a living faith; has it got the spirit of prayer? "Forsake not the works of your own hands;" Lord, do as you have promised, do as you have said; if you grow careless as to how the work goes on in your soul, as to how you are getting on in faith, in prayer, in knowledge, in love, and in fellowship with God; if you grow careless about the work of the Holy Spirit, I only say it is a just cause of very great alarm. Ah, if Satan can by his opiates send us off into indifference, and make the house of God tedious, and the ministry of God's word insipid, and the Bible a sort of dry and dead book; if Satan can do this, he will. But as one has well said upon this matter,

"More the treacherous calm I dread,
Then tempests bursting o'er my head."

It is a wretched thing to live a kind of dead and alive life. Oh, my hearer, the love of our God is lively, the word of our God is lively, the Spirit of our God is lively, and the Christ of God is lively; "Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, and skipping upon the hills;" and our God himself is lively; and when in our right minds we shall be alive to the welfare of our precious souls, to our present state and our eternal welfare, and our prayer will be, from the very center of the soul we shall say, "Awake, O north wind, and come, you south wind, upon the garden of my soul, that the spices thereof may flow out, that my beloved may come into his garden;" and that there may, by this confidence in God, be a sweet fellowship carried on between us. What a blessed thing is vital godliness! I am sometimes labored to speak of it with some degree of freedom, and I hope with clearness; but nevertheless, when I can speak to the very best of my humble abilities, I can never speak so well as I can think. I can generally preach to myself, somehow or another, with more clearness than I can to others, because then I have not to bring the things into words, but I can think them over, run up and down Jacob's ladder sometimes, and feel taken up in the arms of God's everlasting love into the smiles of his countenance, can satiate my thirst from the rivers of his pleasure, and think to myself, how nicely I could say now if the hour was come, "Come, welcome death, I'll gladly go with you."

Oh, my hearer, godliness is no cunningly devised fable; there is a power in it, a savor, a grandeur, a divinity, an incorruptibility, a greatness, and glory, that infinitely surpasses everything else.

Secondly, I notice *the way of progression*, the priests bearing the ark the covenant. Now this ark presents two things. First, it represents, of course, the old covenant, but more especially I shall have to treat it as representing the new covenant. The second thing the ark represents is Christ Jesus himself, as the embodiment of that covenant. First, then, this ark represents the covenant of grace; it is a kind symbol of the covenant of grace. Time would not permit me to show in what way it is a type of that covenant. I will just give an idea or two, and perhaps that will suffice. First, it was a symbol of the covenant of grace by its contents. There was the pot of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, then the tables of the law. This pot of manna literally was a memorial of what God had done, but at the same time a type of that bread of everlasting life which is found in the new covenant, and Christ himself is that bread of everlasting life. Then there was also Aaron's rod that budded. In the 17th of Numbers you find, when Aaron's rod brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and bore almonds, the Lord said, and it is a great and beautiful scripture, "You shall quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not." Ah, my hearer, before you die you will leave off murmuring at Christ's priesthood; you will not find fault with it because it is perfect and eternal, and because it carries out what you are pleased to call Calvinistic doctrines, which indeed are Bible doctrines. The atonement of Christ carries out the yea and amen promises of the blessed God. "I will quite take away their murmurings," and I will turn their murmuring into a song upon this subject, for their song shall be, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto our God." Here is the efficacy, cleansing and sanctifying power of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, then, that priesthood shall yield fruit, and shall quite take away their murmurings, that they die not. Oh, if I live and die a murmurer at Christ's priesthood, where will my soul be? Echo answers, Where? and I must leave you to judge the infinite importance of being assimilated to this substitutional perfection of the Savior. Thus, then, the ark containing the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, makes it a symbol of that new covenant that contains the bread of everlasting life, and the fruit-producing priesthood of Christ; his priesthood will bear fruit to all eternity; never shall those that are sprinkled by his blood cease from bearing fruit; their leaf shall be always green, their roots shall be as the root of Lebanon; they shall become as mighty cedars, and live in a majesty which we must die and rise from the dead to understand; for they are to be like him, and to see him as he is. Then in this ark, also, were the tables of the law, hushed to eternal silence. Tremendous was their voice at Sinai; but in the ark silent, hushed; they cannot move, there is no fire graven on stone, the letters are dead, the stone is dead, and it is all dead together. So said the apostle, "that being dead wherein we were held." The law held us, but the dear Redeemer, the end of the law, comes in; he has hushed the law's loud thunders, stayed its lightnings, and now the law is dead to us, and we are dead to it. The law died honorably; Christ Jesus the Lord has magnified and established it, given it a place in the new covenant, but then it is there as a fulfilled law, as a silent law, as a magnified law; and if I may personify the law for a moment, the law is proud to think it has got such a good position. It never had such a good position before, not even with the angels, for they fell; nor with Adam, for he fell; nor with the Jews, for they apostatized; but with Christ Jesus the law is honored, magnified, hushed to eternal silence. Here, then, is the ark of the everlasting covenant, where mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other. Also, the mercy-seat rested on the ark, and was of the same length and breadth with the ark. So is the mercy of God the same length and breadth with the covenant. Also, the cherubim of glory have no doubt their spiritual meaning. I take the two cherubim, that were of pure gold, to represent three things. First, the Old and New Testament. The New Testament in the gospel sense of it rests upon the mercy-seat. Secondly, the Old and New Testament ministers, called two witnesses, two candlesticks, or two light-bearers:

and thirdly, the Old and New Testament church. And they are called cherubim of glory because the Old Testament in its gospel character is a glorious cherubim. And, as you are aware, the word “cherubim” means “completeness of knowledge,” and so the Old Testament saints all arrived at a completeness of knowledge, and the New Testament shows up a completeness of knowledge. And they are called, I say, cherubim of glory; so the Old and New Testament are indeed cherubim’s of glory and the Old and New Testament ministers are cherubim’s of glory; they are partakers of the glory to be revealed; and the Old and New Testament church also may be called cherubim’s of glory; and so by and by all shall be swallowed up in everlasting glory, mortality swallowed up of life. And then a symbol of the covenant not only for these reasons, but because the Lord appeared there to the people, He said: “There will I meet with you;” that is, by the sacrifice. You see it is no use for anyone but sinners to come. Why, Pharisee, where are you going to? Oh, I am going to the mercy-seat. Nonsense! What are you going to take? Oh, my fasting, and my paying tithes. Oh, you have no business there; it is a mercy-seat; it is only for sinners; it is only for the man that has nothing but sin to bring, nothing but guilt, nothing but wretchedness; it is not for you, Pharisee; you are whole, you are good, you are holy and righteous, it is not for you; as John Bunyan says, the Pharisee went so near as to leave no room for a mediator; but the publican stood far enough off to leave room for a mediator; and the Pharisee lifted up his eyes to heaven to plead his own cause; but the publican would not so much as lilt up his eyes to heaven; he left it for another to do so for him. So, Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven, said, “Father, glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you.” It was therefore for sinners:

“Sinners can say and only they,
How precious is the Savior.”

And the publican carried something away with him worth having; he left his sins, and his guilt, and his trembling, and his trouble; he went down to his house with a new heart, a new nature, a new robe, new shoe, a new ring, a new song, and altogether a new man; while the old Pharisee took that away that he brought, he went down with his fasting, and his doings, and his wonderful works. Look at the difference between these two men; the one, a poor trembling sinner, becomes a king and a priest: the other, a poor miserable Pharisaic boaster he remains, and so will everyone be until grace shall lay hold of them, and convince them of what they are. And now notice something else: “There will I meet with you and commune with you.” Let us have a little friendly conversation. What is the matter? Tell me what your troubles are; I know them, don’t mind telling me, it is my order of things you should tell them out “Let your requests be made known to God.” “There will I commune with you,” “of all things which I will give you in commandment unto the children of Israel.” All, then, are all the commandments I am to have as a Christian to be by the new covenant, to be by the mercy-seat? Then they are not legal commandments, not legislative commandments, not commandments tending to bondage; all the commandments are commandments of love, of mercy, of kindness; and there is the same love in all his commandments that there is in all his promises. Ah, precious covenant, ordered in all things and sure.

It must have struck you, I am sure, perhaps many times, that of all the pieces of sacred furniture in the tabernacle, there was none reckoned more sacred, if so sacred as the ark of God. It was put into the holy of holies, and none but the priest was allowed to approach it to show that there could be no access to God but by the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And God was never absent from the ark. The ark may go into captivity, but God goes with it. Oh, the little acquaintance I have with

these things, and you too! If we had been there when the Philistine priests were going off to the house of Dagon with the ark, we should have said. What are you going to do with that ark? We are going to set it up by the side of Dagon, in order to give Dagon to understand that this ark is his captive. Well but, my good man do you know the God of the Hebrews is in that ark? Well, I will look in and see. Oh, you cannot see him if you do; why, your Dagon, you had better keep him away. Oh no, we have got the ark captive. You will see that that is a mistake. So, they went to set up the ark with old Dagon; down he tumbled sprawling, not on all-fours, because he did not have any legs: the lower part was fish. Well, they came next day and set Dagon up again. Ah, it is some mishap or another, set him up again. The next morning there was the poor old gentleman, his hands off and his head off: so, he could not say much then. Why, we had better get rid of this ark as soon as we can. That you had; if you think you are going to play with it, you have made a mistake: it is the ark of the Lord. Are you not ashamed of your Dagon now? I should be ashamed of a god that tumbled down, and his hands and head fell off, and only the stump left. Ah, so it is now; roll in the everlasting covenant, roll in the "I wills" and "they shall" of God's everlasting covenant; and that "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more;" roll in this everlasting covenant, every Dagon, every power of darkness must fall before it, and every true Israelite shall rejoice in the stability and certainty of the victories that shall be obtained by this covenant. Before I pass on to notice this ark still further spiritually, let me say it was ultimately lost, we suppose taken away by Nebuchadnezzar: they had it not in the second temple; the ark was lost, and of course will never be found again; it is gone to powder more than two thousand years ago. This ark was a symbol of their covenant, and just as that ark is lost, so is their covenant; they apostatized from it, and they have lost everything, and they themselves are lost, and will never be saved but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And as their ark is gone to powder long ago. waxed old and vanished away, so their covenant waxed old, vanished away, and is gone, never to return. But the antitypical ark will never wear out; that will never be lost. As though the Savior should say. You Jews have lost the ark, lost your covenant; but "this is the will of him that sent me, that of all he has given me" and he has given me his testamentary will, and that testamentary will is God's everlasting covenant, "I should lose nothing."

I now hasten to notice *the blessings of this covenant*. I had intended to illustrate this point by going all through the 132nd Psalm: but I must say only a word or two. That is a nice feeling of David: he alludes to the ark when he says, "Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house;" oh, your temporal affairs shall not stand first then. David. No; "nor go up into my bed;" that is right. David: set us a good example; sleeping nine-tenths of our time away is anything but a comfortable way to live; "I will not give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob;" the God of sovereign and everlasting love. And so, David brought in the ark, the circumstances of which I must not now touch upon. "Arise, O Lord, into your rest: you and the ark of your strength. Let your priests be clothed with righteousness. and let your saints shout for joy." But David, after taking that temporal view of the ark then passes on to the antitypical, and what can be more beautiful "If your children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon your throne forevermore." They did not do so; they failed. But by and by came David's greater Son; and he did keep the covenant and the testimony that God taught him; he grew in wisdom and stature, and the grace of God was upon him; consequently, he reigns over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there is no end. Now notice the stability of election; "For the Lord has chosen Zion," There is a Zion he has chosen by Jesus Christ; how firm that choice stands! Hence, said the apostle,

“The children not being yet born, having done neither good nor evil; that the purpose of God according to election should stand, not of works,” as did the election of the Jewish nation, that stood of works, and therefore came to nothing; but this eternal election stands by Jesus Christ, and therefore is entirely and exclusively of God; “not of works, but of him that calls; it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved;” and having loved him with an everlasting love, that choice, being by the work of Christ, stands good. “The Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation.” as though the Savior should say. Dear Father, you have desired the people for your habitation, you shall have them; I will make them habitable; you cannot dwell where sin is, I will put their sin away; you cannot dwell where corruption is; I will put the corruption away; and I will present the church a glorious church without fault. So, God dwells with us by his dear Son, viewing us by what he has made us. “This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it,” that is, I have willed it; and Christ came to do the will of the Father. Now notice the blessings of this covenant, “I will abundantly bless her provision;” historically or literally that refers to the harvest and vintage; that they should be abundant; spiritually it means that by Jesus Christ we shall be abundantly supplied with all the blessings we need. “I will satisfy her poor with bread.” You must not take the bread there to mean literal bread, or bread exclusively, because that would look rather dry; you must take it as meaning all sorts of sustenance. Most of you, I suppose, like a little variety; and so, while there is in the things of God a sameness, there is a beautiful variety. “I will satisfy her poor with bread.” Then if you are satisfied you will not want to go anywhere else, and you will never have any occasion to go anywhere else. Whoever saw the seed of the righteous begging because there was not enough in their Father's house? “I will also clothe her priests with salvation.” Who do the priests mean? Why. say you, the ministers. Nonsense! don't you turn Puseyite, nor Roman Catholic either. I deny that the priests there mean the ministers only, for, taken in the Christian sense, one Christian is as much a priest as another; as says the apostle writing to the church of God, “You are a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices by Jesus Christ.” Every Christian is a priest, and every Christian is clothed with salvation, surrounded with salvation. Salvation is the beautification and adornment of every Christian. “And her saints,” another name for the same people, “shall shout aloud for joy.” Then comes the power that shall attend this gospel of the new covenant; “There will I make the horn of David to bud.” The horn, as you are aware, means power. “I have ordained a lamp for my anointed;” so that he will never be left in the dark. That lamp is the yea and amen promise of God. The conditional promises of the old covenant, all those lamps, are gone out, they are all extinguished; but the yea and amen promise will go burning on and showing us light to all eternity. The gospel is the lamp, and it is for me to come every time I preach with this lamp of the gospel and hold it in such a way that I can see Jesus Christ myself, and then you will see him too.