

SAFTY IS OF GOD

A SERMON

Preached

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"They shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid."—Ezekiel xxxiv. 28.

That is, none shall make them fatally afraid. Because we must take such declarations according to truth and according to experience. Were we to assert that none of the people of God have ever been afraid, but always bold, always decided, and always full of faith, we should then deny our own experience and deny existing facts. We are obliged, therefore, to take the words in a sense in which they are true—that they shall not be afraid fatally. Now mere professors may be afraid naturally, and give up their profession, apostatize, and be lost. And the people of God may partake of this fear; but they shall recover from it. A troop may overcome Gad at the first, but he shall conquer at last. I notice, then, first, the respects in which the people of God dwell safely. Secondly, I will notice a fourfold respect in which they shall not fear; that is, not fear fatally.

First, then, I notice the respects in which the people of God dwell safely. This safety pertains not to this life; — not, bless the Lord, but that it is true in relation to this life that,

"Not a single shaft can hit.
Till the God of love see fit;" —

that is our mercy. But at the same time, everything in this life is changeable, everything uncertain, and we know not what a day may bring forth. And besides, there stands the declaration, which has never been either recalled or modified, and I have no idea that it ever will be while the world lasts, that "in the world ye shall have tribulation," and that "we must, through much affliction, enter into the kingdom of God." Let us then see where this safety is. First, it is in the love of God. "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety." And, indeed, how can it possibly be otherwise? What is the love of God? It is, as we see, everlasting. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, in lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Why, the very first object of the dear Savior was to destroy all the danger to which we were exposed, and bring us into a state of safety. It is the work the Holy and Blessed Spirit to bring us out of that state of nature wherein we are children of wrath even as others, and exposed to every danger, even to damnation itself, apart from the grace of God considered. Now when brought into the love of God, in that love there is safety; because, as the word of the Lord assures us, there is no salvation apart from it. There are many things that we have already been separated from by very painful experience; and there are many more things we shall have to undergo a rending from—yea, even from mortal life itself. But there is no

separation here. "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety." And it is always to be understood that the real people of God cannot love the Lord only in that same covenant order in which he himself hath loved them. If the Lord be represented in a kind of legal form, in a kind of task-master form, away goes the Christian's affection. He feels there is something he cannot love; he feels there is something against him; he feels there is a demand upon him that he cannot meet; and fear takes the place of love. But "perfect love casteth out fear." Let the Christian see, then, in Christ Jesus, where God hath loved him, that he has loved him sovereignly, and entered, by that love, into an everlasting covenant, and that that covenant is by the eternal priesthood of Christ; — let the Christian be brought to see this—there he knows he is safe, and there he can love the Lord. The love of God is always certain. Whatever may leave us, the love of God will not leave us; and whatever we may be separated from, we cannot be separated from the love of God. Some of us have been joined to the Lord in what in Jeremiah is called a perpetual covenant—we have been joined to the Lord some of us for many years. Bless the Lord nothing hitherto has been able to lower the blessed Redeemer in our estimation. Here then it is we are safe. Then again, we are safe in the choice of God. What should we do in relation to the choice of God if that choice were not of grace? The apostle says, "There is a remnant according to the election of grace;" and if of works it is no more of grace; otherwise grace is no more grace." It cannot be both conditional and unconditional; it must either be conditional or else it must be unconditional. Well, then, it is unconditional, "that the purpose of God might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." So, then, this choice to eternal salvation in Christ Jesus stands eternally good. Here we are in safety; here we are chosen, never to be refused. We often tremble and fear that we shall be refused; that the Lord will cast us out; but no, "Him that I have chosen I will cause to draw near unto me." Hence it is then that this eternal election stands sure. And it is a great privilege for us to understand this—that it is of grace; to understand the necessity of it. I am sure that even some good people, if they understood a little more about election, they would not think so little of it as they do. Only look for one moment at what it has done for you. The Lord, by choosing you, made you heirs of himself, and joint heirs with Christ the Lord, by choosing you in Christ Jesus, did thereby make you indissolubly, eternally, one with him; the Lord in choosing you in connection with that choice, that that should perfectly answer the high, the lofty, the dignified, the noble purpose of that choice; — he blessed you with all spiritual blessings in that choice, that you should be holy and without blame before him in love. Oh, this great end of eternal election! See what it has done. It has indeed done great things. Do you not think there is plenty of ground for the Saviors exhortation when he says, "Rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven." And then, if you trace out this great transaction of mercy to the last—if your name be found written in this eternal register, you are admitted into the city, but not else, for none can enter there whose names are not found in the Lamb's book of life. If, then, we understand this, we shall hold election to be one as it were, of the wells of salvation, out of which we shall at times draw water with joy. Let me go a little farther, and just ask the question. Is it not a wonderful thing to be an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ? Whatever can put us into such a position? Why, it was election that did this; and then the Lord followed it up by a gracious decree; "Having predestinated us to the adaption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself;" and he made us accepted in the Beloved. Here, then, in this love there is safety; there will always be a God of love to look to; in this choice there is safety; nothing can shake it; it remains forever. "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting." Then, again, in the completeness that is in Christ, see what safety there is there. And I do pray increasingly for wisdom to be enabled to speak in a hallowed and a proper way of the wonderful privileges that we have in Christ. It is a delightful thought that such is our safety and completeness in Christ that we have upon record those wonderful words, that "the Lord will not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel. There is no enchantment against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel; the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is in his midst." I would not, if I knew it, for ten thousand worlds abuse or speak presumptuously of such a blessed truth as this; but it is a truth blessed beyond expression. You will observe that there is no possibility of Christ's holiness being tarnished, and the people of God are holy by

his holiness; he is their sanctification. There is no possibility of his righteousness being subjected to any fault or flaw whatever, and the people are righteous by his righteousness. And there is no possibility of his right to eternal glory being in whole or in part invalidated; and their everlasting right is founded upon his. It is, then, in this spiritual sense that we are to dwell in safety; it is in this heavenly sense that we have a sure love, a sure choice, and a sure standing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then we come, in the next place, to life. Now it is only a truism, but it is no less weighty, that our mortal life is always in danger. Death is everywhere. The fact is, we carry death with us. We all have death in the body, we have mortality in the body. When we go out of doors we never know whether we shall come in again; when we rise in the morning we never know we shall see the evening; and in the evening we never know we shall see the morning. Nay, we can hardly think of a thing that is more precarious, more uncertain, than poor mortal life. Where, then, is the remedy for this? Ah, to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, to be born of an incorruptible seed, that lives and abides forever; to be brought into a life where we can never die; to be brought into a life where we shall live forever; to be brought into a life that will carry us through this life, will carry us through death, and will enable us to escape the second death. What can be a more beautiful representation of this department than that given by the apostle, "I have praised the Lord many times for that testimony — "Your life is hid with Christ in God." Only look at it - "in God." Oh, it must be safe there. You see it is when men have been placed upon conditional footings, without any vital oneness with God, that is where the failure has been. But where it is in God, and God undertakes to do everything, there must be safety. "Your life is hid with Christ in God; and when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear in glory with Him." Now, do not let us pass lightly over this— "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear." So, your life is swallowed up, and, as it were, one; Christ is to be your life. How proud you will be of such a life as that. You may point to His life, and say, That is the life that is imputed to me. You may point to His death, and say, That is the atonement that is imputed to me. You may look to the victory He wrought, and say, That is the victory that is imputed to me. "Then shall we appear in glory." What brings you this glory? Why, the life that He lived, the death that He died, and the life He lives now; for He not only lived to save, and died to save, but He lives now to save. He has said "Because I live, ye shall live also." Hence the apostle, when enumerating a great many blessings the Lord had bestowed, says, "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." I am fully aware, friends, that religion does not consist in hearing the gospel merely; and I am fully aware that a minister may preach too much, and the people may be hearing too much, until hearing sinks down into a kind of formality, and the preaching of the minister may become more or less a mere form as well; and, therefore, it does require judgement in this matter. I think the number of services we have—two of Sunday, and three in the week—I think that is perhaps quite enough of preaching; for, whenever we go in the use of the means beyond that which is profitable, it then does harm rather than good; so that we need judgment in this. Nevertheless, the few services we do have, it is nothing to our credit if we do not do our very best to attend those few; for after all, the Lord does, as Watts says, —

"Make a more delightful stay
Where churches meet to praise and pray."

A minister may sit down in a parlor, with his friends in private, and state just what he would state in public in the pulpit, and yet the Lord does not give such honor to what he says there as it were said in the pulpit, in the public proclamation of the-Word. It is not what the minister says, it is the power the Lord puts into what he says. In a word, it is the Lord's own ordinance. Under the Old Testament dispensation, He could have blessed each father of a family in his own house, as to command them to come to Jerusalem; but He appointed that they should assemble there. They had long distances to come, three times the year. It was the Lord's ordinance, and those that did so, and kept in His covenant, and in His ways, why, they were

safe. What did He say? — "I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders; neither shall any man desire thy land when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year." They had to come, many of them, fifty or sixty miles; and in those days, with the humble means they had of conveyance, and many of them, perhaps, walking all the way, it was a long journey. But when each man returned, he found his house safe, and his children safe. And so, I say, we are safe in the ways of the Lord. When their hearts did cleave unto the Lord, they prospered; and if our souls would prosper, it must be by walking in the ways of the Lord. Safety in every sense is of the Lord. And while I thus speak, there is another point I may just name. The dear Savior says, "Pray unto thy Father which is in secret." Oh, my hearer, what awful hypocrites we should be, what self-deceiving professors we should be, what sounding brass and tinkling cymbal we should be, if we had no experience of what we appear to have while in the public ordinances of God. Ah, if we are real Christians, there will be a religion in our hearts and in our souls before God in private. There will be sighing, there will be meditating, and the soul will sometimes in private go out in sweet adoration and in softening love to God, and we shall sometimes think in private in our hearts and souls of the great things God has done for us. I am a little charitable over this. I am fully aware that the greater part of you have your cares and your anxieties in the world, that you have a great deal to perplex you, to harden your feelings in spiritual things, and to carnalize you and to provoke you. Even by these things you learn what poor creatures you are, and these things will make you rather the more earnest than not. So that, if we carry death in our bodies, we carry life in our souls; if we carry mortality in the body, we carry immortality in the soul; if we carry corruption in the body, we carry incorruption in the soul; if we carry weakness in the body, we carry strength in the soul—for the Lord is there. Thus, then, the nature of the religion of the Son of God is, that it cannot be destroyed, it is indestructible. Who can destroy the temple not made with hands? Who can destroy the heavenly city? Who can destroy the life that we have in Christ? Who can touch the holiness, the righteousness, the glory we have there?

Secondly, I proceed to notice a fourfold respect in which the people of God shall not fear. First, they shall not fear man—that is, not fatally. We have a great many instances in the word of God of the fear of man; but I will go to one of the most disastrous that we read of; and I will point out where it was they failed, in order that we may escape failure, and enjoy the privilege which the right-minded among them enjoyed. I refer to ten out of the twelve Israelites that went to survey the land. When they saw the gigantic stature of the Canaanites, and their number, and the strength of their cities, the fear of man so overcame them that they rebelled against God, and gave up all hopes of being able to enter the land; and that fear of man drove them back into the wilderness for thirty-eight years longer, and was the means of the death of thousands upon thousands. Now having just seen where the failure was, I will point out to you what the right-minded looked to, and how the right-minded escaped this fear of man, as you see in the case of Caleb and Joshua. Now it is a solemn fact, which I must just state before I proceed to show where the confidence of the right-minded was—it is a solemn fact, friends, that the main body of the Israelites saw the plagues in Egypt, but they did not recognize the hand of the God of Abraham in these plagues. They escaped by the paschal lamb, but they did not see the hand of God in it. They came through the sea, but they looked at it as a kind of fortuitous event, that took place by some mysterious operation of nature, and they did not see the hand of God in it. They lived upon the manna and the water from the rock, and had the cloud with them, but the main body of them did not see the hand of God in all this. Therefore, the Lord said, "This people do always err in their hearts, for they have not known my ways." But then there were some of them that knew who it was that sent the plagues, and made a difference between Israel and Egypt; there were some of them that knew what the paschal lamb meant even spiritually; there were some among them who knew the God that divided the sea, some among them that knew the God that was in the cloud, some among them that knew the God that sent the manna, some among them that knew the God that brought the water from the rock. But this was not so, as I have said, with the main body. And just so now, there are thousands of professed Christians that know God in the letter of the

word, but they cannot recognize him in what he has really done in the very truths I have stated this evening. Now just see what the right-minded Israelites had to set out with; I do not see that they could have had anything better. First, they had a glorious victory. I must just notice that, because of its typical meaning. The victory which the Lord wrought there, in overturning Pharaoh and his host, was a type of the victory that should be wrought by Jesus Christ over the great dragon, the piercing serpent, and over our sins. Now just look at the terms that are used in relation to that victory, and then apply them to the great dragon as to his power, and to our safety. "The Lord hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and the rider hath he thrown into the sea." That is one of the terms used. Well then let us set out with that. If the Lord has done that, that is a pledge of what he will yet do. Then, "The depths have covered them; they sank into the bottom as a stone;" to denote the entire helplessness of these adversaries. And so Jesus Christ has so sunk our sins that they can never rise again. And then it says, "Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy." So Jesus Christ hath, as it were, dashed our sins to atoms. The next term is, "Thou sendest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble." And so our sins—they are as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor. And the next term is, "they sank as lead in the mighty waters;" all conveying the idea that they could not come back again. And the last term used is, "The earth swallowed them." Does not this remind you of that beautiful scripture in Isaiah, that "He shall swallow up death in victory?" Now the right-minded Israelite, then, would look at this victory, and say, With such a God as this, who has thus overturned Pharaoh and his host, shall I fear man now? Here is a glorious victory to set out with. And yet the victory that they had to set out with was not so glorious as the victory that we have to set out with, and that we have to go on with, and that we have to get to heaven by; and that is the victory wrought at Calvary's cross by the dear Redeemer, rising triumphant from the dead. Now, said Moses, "Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed; thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation." Well now, we have thousands of enemies to face. Well, "The people shall hear, and be afraid; sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the sanctuary," — there you see the promised land is called God's sanctuary, because it was to be consecrated as his dwelling-place; — "in the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever." Now, Joshua and Caleb, and all that were represented by them, would say, See the victory the Lord has wrought; look at what he saith of our enemies; mark his promise. We will cleave to that promise, and will not be afraid. Just so now, if we receive his truth and love him, then we are a part of that people that he has promised never to leave, never to forsake. Then David said, "Whom shall I fear?" Why should we fear man? Though there are many instances in the word of God of good men being ensnared by the fear of man; and I suppose we have all of us been more or less tinged a little with this; but at the same time, it is one thing to be under the fear of man fatally, and another thing to be under the fear of man only partially. But the point I want to get at now is this; — the Israelites set out upon their journey by a complete victory; they were to take that with them. So, Christian, you believe in Jesus Christ, and you are to take his victory with you, and reckon yourself a conqueror all the time his victory stands to your account, and never to give up until his victory is overcome. Jonah, though he ran away from the outward service of the Lord, yet he did not give up the Lord of the service, he did not give up God's truth; the consequence was, he got out of the whale's belly again. And so, with all the saints of God. They are thus to take this victory with them; and then by this victory there are exceeding great and precious promises. We ought not to be afraid of man, then, if the Lord be on our side, for if God be for us, who then can be against us? The Lord has the hearts of men in his hands. He can turn the heart of Pharaoh to Joseph; he can turn the heart of Ahasuerus to Mordecai; he can turn the heart of Nebuchadnezzar to Daniel; he can do as he pleases. So then, the fear of man, as John Bunyan says, may attack us, and try us

very much, and bring to light some of our weaknesses; but, at the same time, we shall be unhappy under it, and shall recover from it. I need not remind you, which I could do, of many of the martyrs, besides Cranmer, who through the fear of man have recanted. They have felt their existence intolerable; their torment of mind, at the thoughts of having disowned the Lord from the fear of man, has been worse to them than the flames of martyrdom. Ah! how many we meet with in "Foxe's Book of Martyrs" — a book every Christian ought to read—how many we meet with there that have recanted when the terrors of death were presented to them, but afterwards have repented, and boldly faced the flames of martyrdom. So it is. The Lord sometimes, perhaps, lets us fall in that respect under the fear of man, to make us the stronger afterwards, to make us know what a miserable thing it is to deny the Lord, what a miserable thing it is to obey man rather than God. "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God," said the Apostles, "judge ye." So the Savior says, "Fear them not. Your heavenly father taketh care of the little sparrow, and he will take care of you. The hairs of your head are all numbered. Your heavenly Father knoweth what you need; and therefore fear not men, for they can kill only the body, and after that there is nothing more they can do." Thus then the remedy of the Israelites against the fear of man was to have the victory God wrought, and the promises that were given to them by that. Just so now with the real people of God—precious faith in what the dear Savior has done, and the blessed promises that are by him. We are to measure our welfare not by what we are, but by God's ability, by the Savior's ability, by the promises of God. If we were to measure ourselves by ourselves, we should not be wise; or to measure ourselves by others, we should not be wise; but we are to measure ourselves by what the Lord is able to do. Whatever we have to do, we are to take him into the reckoning. And therefore the Lord says, "Come, let us reason together." If you reason without me, you will leave out the right premises; and if you leave out the right premises, then you will be led to the wrong conclusion. "Come, let us reason together;" take me into the reckoning; look at my love, and my power, and my grace, and my goodness, and what I can do; then you will come to the right conclusion—you will come to me; you will not fear what man can do unto you.

But secondly, not only do we thus overcome the fear of man by laying hold by faith of the victory of Christ, and the promises of God by him; but we cannot fear any failure in the work of Christ. Here I come to a subject I must say but a word or two upon, because your time is just gone; or else for myself I must confess that I do from time to time find a great deal of holy and heavenly consolation from the one thought of the infinite ability of the atonement of Jesus Christ. I know I am a poor sinner, utterly helpless in and of myself; but then, when I look at Jesus Christ—that he is God—I am not the least afraid of any failure in his atonement; I am not the least afraid that his atonement will leave a spot upon the soul that is washed in his blood; I am not afraid of anything in the shape of inability there. I do value, and solemnly and truly believe in the testimony of the apostle—though he there refers to the eternity of salvation, still it includes the other thought too—that "he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him." May the Lord, then, bless us with unbounded confidence in the ability of the dear Savior. What a moment that was! — if ever heaven was silent, it must have been during those six hours—from nine in the morning till three in the afternoon. What a moment that was! Why, it will never be forgotten to all eternity. "It is finished!" Oh, I am not the least afraid—are you, friends? — of the atonement of Christ failing, or of his righteousness failing; no, we want to take nothing with us but ourselves and sin, as it were—just as we are, and fall down at his feet.

"Nothing but sin I thee can give;
Nothing but love shall I receive."

Then, thirdly, we are not afraid of the promises of God failing; no, they never leave us nor forsake us. Oh, if there were the slightest particle of conditionality about it where would the best of us be? Why, very

soon in despair. But bless the Lord, the promise is yea and amen. When the Savior sent his apostles to preach, he did not say, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world, if." Ah, that if would have stood between them and the promise. And the dear Savior, knowing what poor creatures we are, knew he might just as well make no promise at all. They would never have got at it if he had attached the least conditionality to it. But there it stands in the positive form; "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." So, then, we shall not fatally fear man; we shall not fear any failure in the work of Christ, nor shall we fear any failure in the promises of God.

Then, lastly, we shall not be afraid of the ultimate result. You know when people marry they do not always know how it will turn out. But we know this marriage will turn out well. Our souls have been married to Christ, brought into the matrimonial oath, wherein the Husband hath said, "I will not be wroth with thee nor rebuke thee." We know it will turn out well. You know what is said in the Proverbs, "Let thy wife be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; and be thou ravished always with her love;" which Christ is. There is no need of a divorce court there. There was a divorce court in the old covenant; the Lord wrote a bill of divorcement. But here, in the new covenant, there is no cause for divorce. Then, secondly, when people enter into a business they do not always know how it will turn out. Now we know how this will turn out, for the Lord sets his children up in business, and He will say to each of them at the last, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over few things, I will make thee ruler over many things." Then again, a person that sets out on a journey sometimes does not know whether it will be a prosperous journey or not. But we know our journey to heaven will be a prosperous journey. And when people get to the end of their journey they sometimes say, Well, if I had known this before I would not have come. Never so with the journey to heaven, friends, — quite satisfied. Ah, each might say, if I had travelled ten thousand years, and ten thousand times the distance, I should be quite satisfied. And then again, when men enter into a war, they do not always know what the consequence will be. But we know what the consequence will be here; we have the victory on our side. And so you may gather up all the relations of life, and admit the uncertainty that attaches to them all. But not so here; there is no uncertainty here— not the least of it. If a man takes a farm, he does his best, but he is not sure he shall make a good thing of it. Well, now, there is no danger here, for "He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

So, then, we have no reason to fear man; we have no reason to fear any failure in the work of Christ; we have no reason to fear any failure in the promises of God; we have no reason to fear any failure in the ultimate result. And you know, friends, that all is well that ends well; and the end cannot be more blessed than it is; —the people are perfect in Christ, and their end is everlasting peace.

This Sermon is in place of the usual Sunday Morning Sermon, in consequence of the indisposition of Mr. Wells, which will probably confine him for a week or two.