

RIGHT CONFIDENCE

A SERMON

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“The confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar oft upon the sea.” Psalm 65:5

HAPPY is that people who are brought to make, rightly make, the God of heaven and earth their confidence. But when we look at the solemn truth that thousands have no confidence in God at all, and that thousands have a wrong confidence in him, a vain confidence, a confidence after a wrong order, and are thereby deluded; it brings us to the conclusion that even in the matter of a rightly placed confidence in God, strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, and few there be that find it.

We may notice our text, then, under, I think, three main particulars. The first is, *the way of right confidence in God*; the second is, *the circumstance or circumstances of the people*, indicated by “the ends of the earth,” and “afar off upon the sea and the third and last is, *the universality of the Savior’s dominion*.

First, then, *the way in which alone we can have right confidence in God*. The Savior was provided in covenant from everlasting, and after the order of that covenant; and he waited until the time should arrive for him to appear in our world. Hence this Psalm begins with, “Praise waits for you, O God, in Sion.” And what praise was that, but the Lord Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ is the praise by which the Lord praises his people. He holding them in that which Christ has constituted them; the Lord hereby praises the people; says everything for them, but nothing against them. And hereby it is that the people praise the Lord. And then comes the Savior’s work; “Unto you shall the vow be performed.” Here is the great Nazarite vow. Under the Old Testament dispensation, as you are aware, when a Nazarite entered into a vow, if, by any unforeseen circumstance, he violated that vow, he had it all to go over again. Now we needed one who should be devoted to God for us, that should have no infirmity, and that should have nothing to go over again, So that the vow here evidently means that sacrificial devotion to God which the Lord Jesus Christ rendered the law of God; the essence of it is, as you know, supreme love to him; and we have all gone away from that; and yet the Lord has so ordered matters, that none shall escape the wrath to come, that none shall escape perdition, that none shall escape eternal condemnation, only in a righteous way. And that righteous way is his dear Son. He has performed the vow; he has lived without blemish and without spot and has brought in an everlasting righteousness; so that the matter is thus, that department,

done, forever settled. And so, in his wondrous death, he has performed the vow there; all the predictions pointing to that wondrous death which the Lord Jesus Christ should die. And when we see what he has, as we shall presently have to notice especially, even in the last part of our subject, what he has achieved by his death, this is the way we are to have confidence in God. It must be by the Savior's sacrificial devotion to God for us; our sins imputed to him, and his work imputed to us; and it shall be, says the apostle, imputed to us if we believe on him. Now, our confidence in God here, is to be according to what the Lord Jesus Christ is. If his blood can cleanse from all sin, then our confidence in God is to be according to the worth and worthiness of that atonement; and if his righteousness can justify from all things, then our confidence in God is to be according to the worth and worthiness of that righteousness. So that we are never, on any account whatever, to think of running away from God. Whatever difficulties, whatever sins, whatever crooks, whatever adversaries, whatever we have to encounter, let it be what it may, as long as the vow is performed, for it was performed, performed by the Lord Jesus Christ, this must be our standing-place, and we must not run away from the truth, nor run away from God, nor give up our hope, as though there was a want of perfection of worthiness in Christ, and as though there was a want of love in God the Father to Christ; for God the Father glorifies his dear Son in the character which he bears. So then, if I am speaking to any that have come this morning with a sort of feeling, Well, I will go once more, but I do not see what use it is, for I shall be turned away at last, my hope and my strength perished from the Lord. Well, if you are sunk so low as this, I would say to you, just look again at the Lord Jesus Christ, and ask whether there is anything about you, or connected with your circumstances, that he is not able to manage. Ask if there is anything in your experience, or in your temptations, or your trials, or your circumstances, that a God of almighty and eternal mercy is not able to manage? Suppose you go away, where would you go to? That would not take your troubles away; that would not bring crooked things straight; that would not bring the mountains down, nor the valleys up. And therefore, still wait, and still watch, and still look; and remember that "blessed are all they that wait for him." Only let your confidence be by faith in Christ. You will please God the Father by an unbounded confidence in the Savior, better than you can please God in any other way; "For this is the will of the Father, that all men should honor the Son;" and to believe the Son to be as able as the Father, to believe in the infinite ability of the Son. Let your confidence hinge there; let your confidence rest there; and set the Savior as far as you can in his worth and worthiness over against all your necessities; and there will be no necessity for you to go away from God, or to despair; because your sins and your circumstances cannot be any reason why the Lord should forsake you; because he has made provision for you. If there were not sacrificial provision; if the vow had not been performed, or if a part of it was left for you; if the Savior had not gone to the end of sin and the end of the law; if the Lord had not made that provision by which no reason is left why he should forsake you; if the Lord had not made this provision, then we should have no gospel at all; for that could not be gospel to us that would for one moment indicate that God is with us today and would leave us tomorrow. Remember, not only is there no variableness nor shadow of turning with God, but that also Jesus Christ, by whom we are to have confidence in God, that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. This, then, is one step towards a right confidence in God, to make use of Jesus Christ, to let your confidence be in him. Here it is he is the confidence of all the end of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea. And then, secondly, he is the way of confidence, as having established a throne of grace. Hence it goes on to say, "O you that hear prayer, unto you shall all flesh come;" all nations, kindreds, and people. "You that hear prayer." What is prayer? Why, it is when you can say, I have cried unto you out of the low dungeon. You get into a cast down, low state, and the soul sighs for

the manifestation of God's mercy, that mercy may come into the soul, and enable you to realize its sympathies, pardon, peace, and liberty. What is prayer? Prayer is that expressed by Jonah, when he said, "I cried by reason of my affliction." Oh, what a difference, when you are in soul-trouble, or circumstantial trouble, and your soul out of that trouble sighs, and groans, and mourns before the Lord, desiring his mercy, his salvation, and that he would arise, and that he would appear for you, and strengthen you, and direct you, and succor you, and guide you, and not cast you away, and not take his Holy Spirit from you. Now this is real prayer. And if you have this feeling, know what this is, this is the prayer the Lord looks, upon, if you don't say a word. It is not the words that you may say that constitute prayer. The words are, indeed, expressions of thought; but then expression is not essential. And so, the Lord says, "Before they call, I will answer." And bless his holy name! he does too. And if we have the gift of prayer to call, why, it is good, the use of that gift as well. "You that hear prayer."

Why, my hearers, we, if taught of God, shall have many petitions to God that would be no use to lay at the feet of men; and if we have any petition to lay at the feet of any fellow-creature, it is best to lay that petition first before the Lord; and then if the Lord put a little incense upon it, he can make the petition acceptable unto the man. Like Nehemiah, when, he feared that his life was in danger, because of the sadness of his countenance, he prayed in his heart. He had a favor to ask of the king of Persia, and he would first lay the matter before the Lord; and so, he said, "Lord, show me mercy in the sight of this man." And so, the man granted him all the favor that he requested. God is a God that, heard prayer, that answers prayer. Not that his counsels rest upon our prayers; but I do say this, that if we have these feelings after him, it indicates that our faith is a living faith. It is the prayer of faith that avails with the Lord, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man. But a man cannot be a righteous man before God in any way but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; but by faith in him we stand righteous before God, and plead before God the worth and worthiness of his dear Son. Here is effectual prayer. The prayer is effectually wrought in the heart, and the prayer comes fervently out, "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." Confidence in God, by faith, without prayer, would be mere fancy and presumption; and prayer to God without faith in what Christ is, would be utterly helpless; for he hears prayer in no other way. The command is, "Go to Joseph;" the command is, "This is my beloved Son, hear you him." So, then, where there is a living confidence there will be a living desire unto the Lord, let your necessity or circumstances be whatever they may. And the less, perhaps, as a general rule, you say to your fellow-creatures about some even of your experiences, and especially of your circumstances, the better; for if you give them into their hands, they will most likely, if they do not at the first, they will after a time tear them all to pieces, and put them into all sorts of shapes and forms, and in their gossiping scandal will represent you through them. And therefore, the best way is to cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, and let your faith be not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. There you may commit your souls to him, and you will find him a God hearing and a God answering prayer. This, then, faith in Christ, and this praying heart, this spirit of grace and supplication to God, with a desire more and more to reason with God, and to be acquainted, with him, and to occupy with him, and to make known our requests to him, and to leave matters with him, this, I say, is another essential to right confidence in God. There must be this knowledge of Christ, and there must be this living desire unto the Lord for his mercy.

Another is that of the faithfulness of God. Hence it goes on, "Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions, you shall purge them away." Every Christian feels that his iniquities prevail

against him, and hinder him in his faith, hinder him in his hope, hinder him in prayer, and hinder him in anything that is spiritual. And when the Christian gets a little enjoyment, the iniquities of his heart will rise and reach out in all directions, like a spider after some fly or another, and try to make the soul forget the Lord, and again bring the soul into bondage. There is not a Christian living that does not understand the meaning of the apostle when he said, "I have a law in my members bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members;" and at such times we sum up our own experience, if experience it may be called, "Oh, wretched man that I am!" Where, then, is the remedy, where is the confidence here? Why, we have a merciful and a faithful High Priest, who has made reconciliation for the sins of the people. And so sure as the Savior has done that at Calvary's cross, it shall be done in our consciences. "If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God!" It is one of your privileges to know there is this pardoning mercy from time to time. Sin will accumulate in the mind and in the conscience, and you will feel wretched, and dead, and guilty, and seem afraid of the Lord; as John says, "If our heart condemn us" he does not then say God will condemn us too, but, "he knows all things." And so, it is. And then here is confidence in his faithfulness, "You shalt purge them away." And is it not so? When the Lord brings home a word with power, it takes away the guilt, it takes away the slavish fear, it takes away the terror, it takes away the trembling; or, to use the words of the prophet, it takes out of our hands the cup of trembling, and puts into our hands the cup of salvation; and then are we glad when we are thus renewed and thus refreshed. Now, my hearer, you may think me, perhaps, a little child in divine things, but this is just the life I live. I am not content, though I bless God with all my soul for it, for the pardoning mercy I realized many years ago at the first; but then I have wanted token upon token ever since, and so I do now. I think that logical forgiveness of sins is a very dangerous religion, and yet that is almost the universal fashion of the day, A logical forgiveness of sins, and a divine application of the forgiveness of sins, are two very different things. I will explain presently what I mean by the logical forgiveness of sins, and the realization of it by the power of God, bringing peace into the soul, and enabling us to cry, "Abba, Father!" enabling us to say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his," are two very different things. What, then, do I mean by the logical? This; A man from natural conscience, the working of the letter of the word, passes over either from a non-professor to a professor, or perhaps from being a profane character, to a character pretty tidy and pretty decent, he is converted. From the change that he has undergone, though, mind, this same man is not brought really into acquaintance with what his own heart is, nor really into acquaintance with Gods truth, nor really into acquaintance with what he is in the eyes of God, nor really to know his need of God's gospel, but a change is wrought; there is a change, and he infers from that, without any experience of it, that his sins are forgiven; he infers from this change, without any experience of it, that he is justified before God; he infers from this change, without any experience of it, that he is a saved man, he infers from this change that he has no cause ever to doubt and to fear. And the enemy, who had very much hand in this conversion of the man, now works very hard to keep that man from doubts and fears. Thus, you see the moral change, the mental change he has undergone become the premises from which he logically comes to the conclusion that all is well; and so, they wrap it up. And hence both the ministers of such a religion, and the professors of such a religion, what do they say? Away with your doubts and fears! say they. And they say that, because they themselves are strangers to the narrow path, because they themselves are strangers to the piercing work of the eternal Spirit, because they themselves are strangers to the corrective hand of the Lord. They have

never been brought to feel the necessity, not only of regeneration, but of the Lord himself, as much speaking liberty into the soul after the soul is alive, as it was the work of God to speak life into the soul at first. It is not enough for the Lord to speak life into the soul at the first, but he must speak liberty into it afterwards, and healing into it afterwards. Therefore, let us beware.

While I say nothing against logic in its proper place, let not our conclusions be logical here; let them be divinely authenticated. Why, even Saul of Tarsus, now his conversion was of God, and yet he was so taught of God that he would not infer even from the change that was then wrought that all was then right, until God sent Ananias, and God brought the word with power into his soul that he was a chosen vessel, and that he could read out his eternal election of God; and then he could say, as one had said before him, "My soul does magnify the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." Oh, my hearer, examine yourself whether you are in the faith; whether your confidence be founded upon divine authority, whether your religion be vital, or whether you have undergone a mental change, and you are inferring everything from that one circumstance; whereas, your conversion is only fleshly, as is proved by your utter destitution of real soul-trouble, and that you are now but a deceived man. You did serve the deceiver of souls before in one shape, you are serving him now in another shape. Ah! know you not that he is transformed as an angel of light? And it matters not to him how he can obtain final possession of your souls if he can but carry out his murderous, his dreadful ends. True confidence in God, then, must first be by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, there must be this living prayer to God; and third, there must be a seeking after, and you will be content with nothing short of a realization of your conscience being purged. You must know something of this forgiveness in your own soul; the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto you at a time when you may be found." Remember, my hearer, it is written, Let a man have what he may, if he have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And the spirit of Christ is a spirit of illumination, that reveals to the soul the Savior in all his suitability; the spirit of Christ is a spirit of confidence in what Christ has done; the spirit of Christ is a spirit of grace and supplication; the spirit of Christ is a spirit of purification, a spirit of sanctification, a spirit that brings home the word with power. Thus, it is, then, he shall purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living and the true God. And none but the real Christian knows the blessedness of the reconciliation being renewed with God. Not but the reconciliation is always the same in Christ; I know that: our iniquities are there purged away once and for ever but then we need the clean water of pure truth sprinkled upon the conscience, according to the Lord's promise, again and again and again. "Your visitations," said one, "preserve my spirit." Religion, then, is a personal, vital reality. Thus, he becomes the saving confidence of all the ends of the earth. I have thus pointed out three steps in this momentous matter. For I do sometimes tremble when I think of it, that a man shall live full of confidence that he is going to heaven and be undeceived only when he lifts up his eyes in hell. There is a narrow way of vital godliness which the vulture's eye has never seen. The keenest philosopher, the keenest theologian, who might have raked up, and scraped up, and contained in his mind all the opinions of all the divines that ever lived, and be a great theologian, and yet, at the same time, utterly ignorant of that path of vital experience which the vulture's eye has not seen, which the lion's whelps have not trodden, letting the soul into the secret counsels of the Lord, while he reveals to them, in and by those counsels, a covenant ordered in all things and sure, upon which the poor and needy are glad to rest, and by which the poor and needy shall forever praise his great and glorious name.

Thus, then, there must be the knowledge of Christ, and faith in him; there must be vital prayer; there must be a seeking after the reality of religion. Upon this point I like the words very much indeed, and they are very significant and very expressive of vital godliness; so far from David resting logically in these matters, he says, "Be not silent unto me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit." So, there were some in those days that spoke to God, but God had never spoken to them; they said, "The Lord says," albeit the Lord, had never spoken. "Be not silent unto me." Lord, let not my religion stand upon logical grounds; but speak unto your servant, that he may feel that you are his God, and that he is called by your grace, and that he may have your own authority for the hope and confidence which he has. "Remember your word unto your servant;" here was a word which had been brought with personal power; "remember your word unto your servant, upon which you did cause him to hope," Many a poor child of God is so cast down that there is no word comes with power enough to cause him to rejoice, but a word may come with power enough to cause him to hope. I could not rejoice, but the word gave me a little hope, seemed to be something gave me a little, hope. And so, "Remember your word unto your servant, upon which you have caused him to hope." Here, then, is the confidence.

But fourth, Jesus Christ, in God's presence, is another essential to this hope, this confidence in God. What a pleasing thought it is, that there is no possibility of doubting the truth that Jesus Christ did finish the work, that he did rise from the dead, that he did ascend to heaven, and that he is in heaven! for if he be not there, we can never get there. We are to be where he is, let it be where it may; for if he came short and sunk to hell, we must have sunk too; but if he has completed his work, and is raised to heaven, we must come there too. We are to be where he is. And how clear it is that he is there. Saul of Tarsus knew it; first by his being brought down, and afterwards by his being raised up, and afterwards by his being caught up to the third heaven, where Christ was. And Stephen knew it when he was dying, that Jesus Christ was there. John, in the isle of Patmos, as we showed last Lord's day morning, knew he was there. So says this Psalm, "Blessed is the man whom you choose, and cause to approach unto you" there is Christ in his intercession, "that he may dwell in your courts." Christ dwells in the courts of heaven, and dwells in the churches on earth; he walks amidst the golden candlesticks on earth, as well as dwells in the courts of heaven. And here is confidence; and what is the aspect of our confidence here? Why, if Jesus Christ has performed the vow, if here be thus a throne of grace for prayer, and if here be the faithfulness of God in purging our transgressions away from our consciences, and giving us peace with him, and here is Christ in heaven for us, what is the result? "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house." Christ is satisfied with the travail of his soul, "we shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, even of your holy temple." And what are we to understand by the house? and what are we to understand by the holy temple? Do not let us, if we can help it, come short of the gospel meaning of these beautiful scriptures. The house. Why, says the apostle, "A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." And what are we to understand by the temple? By the temple we are to understand God himself, and Christ himself, and the goodness of the house, oven of the holy temple, is the goodness of God himself, the goodness of Christ himself. "I saw no temple therein" no material temple, "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof." There is Christ in the presence of God, and consequently there is no more curse. Here, then, he is the confidence of the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea. Now we want the Savior, then, in all these, and, indeed, in every other position. "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house," the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, "even of your holy temple;" for you are the temple. The people shall dwell in God, and God in the people, all their springs in him, and being

satisfied with him, they shall never wish to leave this fountain of living waters, but continue to cleave to the Lord their God, and to rejoice in him, as far as he shall enable them, more and more.

I notice next *the circumstances* which I have partly anticipated. These people who are brought into this narrow path of vital godliness are, in entire accordance with the same, spoken of in our text as “the ends of the earth.” Some would take this to mean all nations, the Gentile world at large. I do not object to that; let that go for one thought. But I think the chief meaning is, after all, that these people are driven to the end of all earthly help. Here is a man; his own works, his own supposed holiness, and his own supposed righteousness, all of which are earthly, can help him no longer. The religion of Saul of Tarsus was made up of earthly elements; his Hebrew descent, his circumcision, and his various ceremonies he attended to, all of which were beggarly elements; they were all earthly elements. When God took hold of him, he came to the end of the earth; he could neither help himself, nor could any fellow-creature help him.

Now, he says, if any help me with the help that I need, it must be God himself. He wanted now the help of salvation. And so it is said in the 5th of Micah, of Jesus Christ, that “they shall abide,” that is, these same people shall abide in the faith, and abide in the truth; “for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.” Oh, how true that is when we are driven to the end of every earthly help, to see that we need no help that is not laid upon Christ; he has laid help upon One that is mighty. Then a great many times during your pilgrimage you will be driven to the ends of the earth. A great many earthly hopes will give way; your health and mortal life will give way presently. I do not wish to be dwelling so much upon death as though I thought I could do you any good by frightening you; but still I must refer to it sometimes, for the sake of endearing to you the dear Savior in contrast. Now, I say, by-and-bye, in that sense we must come to the end of the earth. And then, when we come to the end of earthly life, what a sweet privilege that, while we are thus brought to the end of earthly life, it is to make way for the more abundant revelation of a heavenly life; while we thus come to the end of a tribulatory life, it is for the glory of a life that never ends. And Christ will be our confidence there. “Yea, though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

Again, “Them that are far off upon the sea.” Here is another description of them. And I will try in this part, their being afar off upon the sea, to describe to you just how these people are placed. Now, when the Lord brings a sinner into soul-trouble, or when sinners are brought into real soul-trouble by the Lord himself, they are like people that go down to the sea in ships; and they cannot run away; there is no back-door to run out of, nor front-door either, cannot run away, must stop. And while they are tossed about, mount to heaven, go down again to the depths, their soul melts because of their trouble, they reel to and fro, stagger like a drunkard, are at their wit’s end; but they cannot run away; there is no way to get away. Now can you understand me in this matter? The stony-ground hearer was never brought into this sea of soul-trouble, so he could run away. So the wayside hearer, the thorny, ground hearer, they never were brought into these deep waters; the waves and billows of God’s threatening’s and of their sins never rolled over them; so they could run away, and they did run away. But the man that is brought into the secret of real soul-trouble cannot run away, must stand it out. Go back to the profane world, if he came from that; he cannot do that, he cannot go back. And if he came recently from the duty-faith world, cannot go back again; he has no desire to it either; I say, he has no desire to it; he knows what it is, he knows the emptiness of it, the deceitfulness of it, and he has bid farewell to it, and that forever. There is no

running away; there he is, tossed about, and tried. And many and many a sinner has looked at the sheep grazing, and thought, I wish I was one of those sheep; anything rather than have a soul of my own, rather than be a sinner, and having a judgment to meet, accountable. There is the ox going to the slaughter; but then, when the ox is slain, there is an end of it. Not so with me, I have a judgment to meet, an eternity to meet. Ah! I would rather have been anything but a man, rather anything than a sinner. Oh, that I had never existed; happy if I had never seen life, never existed at all. Many a sinner, convinced of his condition, and made to stagger to and fro like a drunken man, driven to his wit's end, has had this feeling. Cannot run away; cannot go forward; he cannot govern the storm, and he cannot go back again. What is he to do? He must weather it; he must face it; there is no way of escape. By-and-bye, after the disciples have been toiling and toiling in rowing, trying to get to land, and trying to put matters right, all at once one says to another, Oh, what silly things we are! oh, what forgetful creatures we are! Why, we have not a grain of sense. Here are we toiling and toiling; all this trouble, we cannot alter it; and here is the Master near at hand, and we did not think of calling upon him; we quite forgot to call upon him, quite forgot it. All at once the spirit of remembrance, and the spirit of grace and supplication, comes upon them, and they come and say, "Master, care you not that we perish?" And did he hear their petitions? Yes, he arose, rebuked the winds, there was a great calm, and instantly they were at the land whither they went. And so, the 107th Psalm; when their soul faints because of trouble; they are toiling and rowing; what is to be done? Why, says one, we have forgotten the essential thing; we have been trying to do that which God alone can do. Many a poor sinner has labored to quiet his own sins, and quiet his conscience, and quiet his soul, and quiet his troubles, all in vain. And then "they cried unto the Lord." And you may depend upon it, such prayer as this of one that said, "Lord, save me;" they felt it fast enough; they were not content with saying it without realizing an answer. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he commanded, and there is a calm; and then they are glad because they are quiet. And so, he bringeth them, not they bring themselves, he brings them unto their desired haven. Thus, then, by driving us by tribulatory experiences unto the end of all earthly confidence and causing us to be tossed about in this way, we are obliged to leave it with the Lord at last. That is the way he becomes the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and them that are afar off upon the sea. Hence in the apostle's voyage there was nothing but danger; and where laid their security? Well, there was a man of God there; there was the God of the man there. And that man of God, of course, would be thought nothing of; but God knows how to make his ministers thought something of; and so he stood up, and said, Fear not; there shall not be the loss of the life of one of you; not a hair of your head shall perish. The ship will be broken to pieces, but you will be saved.