

SAFETY IN DEATH

A SERMON

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“These all died in faith.” Hebrews 11:13

IT is clear, at least to those that have any experience of the things of God, that there is a special faith, which is the special work of God, and by which alone we can be saved. There is a moral, a mental, and a natural faith that is the duty of every rational creature; but then this is one thing, and that faith which the Lord gives is another. Hence the faith that he gives is called the faith of the operations of his power, called the faith of God's elect, and is said to be the gift of God, and the work of God, and that Christ is both the author and the finisher of the same. Ah, strange it is that we are so perverted by sin that there is not anything upon which we are so willing to delude ourselves as we are upon the great matter of the eternal salvation of our souls. Hence, if those who experimentally know the truth insist upon supernatural faith, insist upon a personal experience of the things of God, insist upon it that the faith connected with salvation comes direct from God, and that it is the special sovereign work of the Holy Spirit of God, such men are accused of being narrow-minded, bigoted, and I know not what. But then this is not so bad to endure as it would be to endure the just rebukes and reproaches of the Most High for being unfaithful. Hence it is, then, that all through the Scriptures, when the prophets speak of new covenant things, and of things pertaining to eternal salvation, they go direct to the soul, they go direct to the heart. “I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” So it is, then, the apostle says, “He that has begun a good work in you;” and it was their being quickened by the Spirit of the living God from death to life that made real believers of them; for what is saving faith but a divine persuasion of God's eternal truth?

I will, for conciseness' sake, take a twofold view of my subject this morning. First, *the necessity of faith, in a dying hour*, “These all died in faith.” Secondly, *the necessity of faith to keep us until we come to that hour*.

First, then, *the necessity of faith in a dying hour*. I will assign several reasons for this. In the first place, then, see with what different opinions good men die. Here is one good man a Baptist, another is not a Baptist. One holds that the Lord Jesus Christ in his deity is the Son of God by eternal

generation; another holds, in opposition to that, that the term “generation” can never apply to the personal, self-existent deity of the Savior. Some hold that Jesus Christ was a complex person before this world began; some hold that he was not. And, indeed, great is the variety of opinion among men whose state before God we cannot doubt. Luther, for instance, did not believe in the Book of the Revelation he believed that the Book of the Revelation was an imposition, that it was written by some crafty, designing man, and that the book was not of God at all. And yet Luther, who for one moment doubts his state? And he believed also in consubstantiation, and in some sense in a kind of virtue in sprinkling. Thus, then, we see all this variety of opinion. Now, how are we to put this right? My answer is this that if no man could be saved but the man that dies in his own perfection, whether that perfection be moral or mental, then not a soul could be saved. There never was since the foundation of the world, and there never will be, but one that could die acceptable to God in his own personal perfection; and that was the man Christ Jesus. He did not need to die by faith in another; he was perfect in himself. He was free from sin, his life had been perfect, his death was sacrificial, substitutional, and atoning; so that he died in his own perfection. Now then, when I come to die, where is the remedy for my errors? For I am not weak enough to suppose that everything I have said is right. I know that I am right in all essential matters; bless the Lord for that; but “who can understand his errors?” Where, then, is the remedy? The remedy is here, that however good men may differ, they die in the faith; that is, they die in the perfection of Christ. They die not in what they are in themselves, because they are deficient and faulty in themselves; but they die by faith in that perfection that is in Christ. And therefore, however much we may differ now, “When we meet on the plains of heaven, we meet first in the perfection of Christ. And then we read of something else; “the spirits of just men made perfect.” “Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known.” If there were no way provided for us to die in safety but in our own personal perfection, who could be saved? But if we are to die in the faith, believing in Jesus Christ, in his perfection, that perfection as the soul enters heaven gives that soul a perfection of knowledge, as well as a perfection of joy, and in perfection in every other sense of the word. There does not appear to be more than one class of men whose lot it has been to see in everything in the things of God eye to eye; and those were the prophets and the apostles. You never find (and that is worthy of your attention) any prophet after Moses, and nearly all the prophets not only refer to Moses, but they refer to him largely; you never find one prophet misunderstand Moses, though the Pharisees did misunderstand him, and shut the Savior out of the writings of Moses; but so did not the prophets. Just so the apostles the apostles never misunderstood each other in the things of God. Some people have said the apostles differed. They differed on one occasion in relation to a person, whether he should go with them or not; but they never differed in doctrine; they never differed in the things of God. And thus, you have in the prophets and in the apostles that Scripture fulfilled in the 52nd of Isaiah, where the Savior is first represented as bringing certain things, and the apostles, who are pointed to there, are represented in their harmony with entire agreement in, and knowledge of, those things. There is the ministry first of Christ, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings, that publishes peace; that brings good tidings of good, that publishes salvation; that says unto Zion, Your God reigns.” Now here is an epitome of the gospel. Then in the next verse you have the apostles pointed out and their entire agreement in the things of God. “Your watchman shall lift up the voice,” that is, the voice of God's truth; they should lift up the testimony of Christ in what he had done, and the glory that should follow; “with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.” The Lord brought Zion out of Egypt literally; but now, by the apostles, he brings forth Zion spiritually.

By Jesus Christ God delivers a literal Israel literally; by Jesus Christ God delivers a spiritual Israel spiritually and eternally. By Moses God turned the literal captivity of the literal Israel; by Jesus Christ God has turned the spiritual captivity from sin, and death, and hell, and the curse of the law, to be saved for ever. And the apostles saw eye to eye. Hence the Bible is summed up with a curse to the man that shall add anything to what they have recorded or take anything therefrom. And as to apostolic succession, there is no such thing in the Bible. There cannot, in the nature of things, be such a thing as apostolic succession. Their work is done; there is no successor to any apostle. There has never been an infallibly inspired man since the last apostle died and will not be down to the end of time. My hearer, once and for all, the Bible is complete. The men that saw eye to eye have put their harmonious testimony upon record; it is complete. These birds of Paradise have flown off to the happy shores, the blissful realms, where they sing out now in perfection to eternity those wonders they enjoyed and realized here below. So then, some that have been very bitter against us Baptists, and we are very bitter against some of our brethren on account of their attachment to sprinkling, yet when we come to die, we die not in our own selves, but in the perfection of Christ; and when we meet in the future, we shall have something better to talk of than these disputes. Ah, you will say, brother, I was but a babe then; I was very near-sighted, I knew but little; and therefore, let us wonder that we made such few mistakes, considering the infirmity of poor old human nature, considering the unfathomable deeps of the mysteries that we had to deal with; let us bless God that we were made wise in everything essential to our eternal welfare. That difference of opinion, then, in which good men die is one thing that makes it needful that they should die by faith in the perfection of Christ; that will be a remedy for all their differences.

The second reason why faith is needful in a dying hour is because of the prejudices of good people. I have known many instances of this. "Would you like to see Brother so and so? He is a good man." "Oh no I don't want to see him." "Would you not like to see Sister so and so?" "No, I don't want to see her. I won't see her." "Why not?" "Oh, they offended me." "When!" "Oh, fifteen or sixteen years ago, and I have never liked them since, and I will have no more to do with them." "Well but the Lord has not dealt so with you. Well, I won't see them." "The ruling passion strong in death." "What," say some of you, "have you seen such things as this?" Yes, I have. Well, perhaps there is another dying that has just the same prejudice towards that one. How are these two to meet? Why, faith lifts them out of self and out of these prejudices; for these prejudices and ill-feelings belong not to grace but to nature. Nature dies and faith lifts them out of those prejudices into the perfection of Jesus Christ. And if these two that are prejudiced against each other should die at the same moment and meet in heaven they meet in Christ's perfection, with a perfection of knowledge, without any of those prejudices of which they are the subjects here below. Faith has given them the victory over this department as well as over all others. Therefore, what should we do without faith in a dying hour? See what a remedy it is, uniting us thus to the perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ. There will be prejudice, and there will be envy here. "How is so-and-so getting on?" "Oh, thoroughly well." "Glad of it;" but secretly sorry for it. "Why," say you, "you don't say that!" "Ah," say some, "perhaps you are speaking from experience." So, I am. Many a time when I have heard a man I didn't much like was getting on thoroughly well, I have said, "Well, I am glad of it." And yet, while I have thus spoken, my wicked heart has felt and said, "I am very sorry for it. I would rather have heard they had met with some trouble, or with some accident." Now what do you think of that? That is my infirmity; mind, I am conscious of it; I don't approve of it; it is my old, wicked nature; so that I have no design to exempt myself. What, then, is the remedy? This precious perfection that is in Christ Jesus. The man that knows his own heart, that is conscious of

his partialities and his prejudices, will rejoice in the truth that he is not to die in his own personal perfection, for he does not possess it; but that when he comes to die, he is to die in Christ; he is to die in the faith, he is to die where all is perfect, there all differences and prejudices are gone.

Thirdly, there is another reason. Noah, for instance, was overtaken with excess of wine. Now suppose Noah had died under that excess of wine, he might have done so, how could he have been saved? Only by faith. Where the soul is born of God, it is born of God for ever; where the soul possesses divine faith, there is nothing to destroy it. So that if Noah had died while he was under that wine, the secret faith that was in his soul, that united his soul to Christ's atonement, to Christ's righteousness, and to God's covenant, if Noah had then died, he would have been carried to eternal glory with as much safety as Stephen, though not so happy before he died, and with as much safety as the Apostle Paul. Suppose you held the lying doctrine, the Popish doctrine, the delusive and utterly false doctrine, that repentance forms any part of an atonement for sin, then if Noah had died while he was under that excess of wine, and not recovering so as to atone for that fault by his repentance, why, he would have been lost, and God's everlasting love would have been disappointed, the Savior's blood would have lost its purchase, and the counsel of God would have been upset, his covenant would have been thrown into confusion, and the devil would have enjoyed an eternal triumph over God Almighty. "Well, but" says one, "must not every Christian repent of every individual sin?" There never was such a thing yet. Suppose you hold an error, is not that a sin? You die in it, as we have shown; your remedy is, you die in Christ. You do not repent of your error; you do not see it when you die. Repentance, therefore, means change; repentance is that change the Lord works in the soul when he brings it out of enmity into reconciliation to God, and no repentance forms any part whatever of atonement for sin. I hate, abhor, and detest such a doctrine. It robs the Savior's blood of the honor of what it has done. What says the Bible? "You are complete in him." Therefore, I hold that if Noah had died while he was under this wine, his soul would have gone to heaven just the same, because he would have died, not in himself considered, he was not to be accepted into heaven by what he was in himself; but he was to be accepted into heaven by what he was in Christ. And if he were to be accepted by what he was in Christ, could the wine, and the state he was in by that wine, hinder it? I think not. Now some of you, like myself, are total abstainers; but for mercy's sake don't get conceited. I have seen many a total abstainer become a common drunkard; and if you get piquing yourself and priding yourself and thinking yourself so exceptionally holy, and so exceptionally good, and so shocked at Noah, why, it is just possible, to teach you a lesson or two, you may go down before you die. Ah, "let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." "Well, but" say some, "does it not say that 'the drunkard' therefore you are wrong about Noah 'shall not inherit the kingdom of God?'" I will freely give my opinion upon that. I believe the drunkard there means the man who so habitually and continuously perseveres in drunkenness as to prove that he himself is destitute of the grace of God. That man that is thus willingly, perseveringly, continuously a drunkard, he is destitute of the fear of God and the grace of God, so as to prove that I apprehend to be the drunkard that shall not inherit the kingdom of God. The wine that Noah took was an exception to his character, and not a rule. And besides, there is nothing more detestable than to see professors' character proud. "Ah, but I am very consistent indeed, sir." Well, you get the benefit of it. And some of you are as proud as the devil of it, and don't forget to boast of it, and your proud Pharisaic stomachs heave at God's mercy toward a poor sinner. So, then, if Noah had died while under that wine, faith would have been the remedy, because he died in the completeness that was in Christ. It is true there are some professors holier and wiser than God, and, in their blindness and hypocrisy, would forbid such a

testimony as this to be borne, as neither honoring to God nor profitable to man. The same wretched fraternity called the Savior a friend of publicans and sinners, that is, a friend to all manner of sin, that his preaching was neither honoring to God nor profitable to man. Such is such a generation, pure in their own eyes, but are not washed from their sins, hence their deadly enmity against this part of God's eternal truth which I am now declaring, namely, that God, in the deeps of his sovereignty, suffers some of his children to die as the result of their own sin, and makes that very sin the rod of chastisement to them. Yet they are safe, by the completeness that is in Christ, and by the power and immutability of God. Yet conceited hypocrites say this ought not to be spoken, and so set themselves against God himself, for God himself has spoken this selfsame truth, and all Scripture is honoring to God and profitable to man. Hence the Corinthians did what Noah did, and even very much worse, and died, many of them, in their degraded condition, and did thus, as it were, eat and drink chastening judgment to themselves. "By this means," says the apostle, "*many sleep,*" that is, are dead, but not condemned with the world (see 1 Corinthians 11). Yet professors, with free-grace heads but questionable hearts, dare to condemn the testimony of God; but "wisdom is justified of all her children." Again, Uzziah sinned when he rushed into the temple to burn incense. And if Uzziah had to be like some of John Wesley's followers, perfect in themselves before they are fit to die, then certainly Uzziah must have been lost; for he carried his leprosy with him all his days and died with the leprosy upon him. But did that hinder his acceptance in that completeness that is in Christ Jesus? No. "These," then, "died in faith." Faith is something that is indestructible; you cannot destroy the faith of God's elect. It is the work of God; it has the power of God in the root of it, and in the operation and ultimate object of it. Then, again, suppose Peter had dropped dead with the oaths upon his lips, that would not have destroyed his faith, that would not have destroyed the life of his soul, that would not have touched him in his completeness in Christ Jesus the Lord. Ah, say some, all this is very shocking. It may be to your hypocrisy, perhaps; but it is not shocking to the man that knows his own heart. Let me tell you, and tell all this assembly, what some of our deacons, that have visited many of the sick, and some of you that have visited the sick in a dying hour, I have no doubt know that many a poor child of God has been attacked in his last moments with the most blasphemous and awful thought of God; so that such have trembled like an aspen leaf to feel themselves on the verge of eternity, and yet these awful thoughts, the very dregs of hell. Where is the remedy for this? The faith they have in Jesus Christ. Ah, my hearer, you may depend upon it we can do nothing without Christ; we must have faith in Christ. So that if Peter had dropped dead at the time, then in that case he would have gone to heaven just the same. Now you know how to handle this. I know what some will say. Oh, well, then, according to this minister we may get intoxicated, and be presumptuous like Uzziah, and swear like Peter. Ah, you hypocrite, you know I mean nothing of the kind, no, God forbid you all know that. At the same time, I will not give up God's truth. His truth is dearer to me than anything else I can name except himself; yea, I include the Lord himself in his truth. So, then, when I look at difference of opinion, I see that faith in the perfection of Christ, in which you are to die, will put that right. When I look at the prejudices, faith in Christ, dying in that perfection will put that right. When I look at sin, faith in Christ will put that right. And I may just say here (and it has distressed my mind beyond measure to think of it) that I certainly have witnessed the death of good men, and ministers too, whose death was the result of excess of drink. They have drunk, and drunk, and drunk those nasty, deadly poisons, till in a dying hour their bodies have been almost in a putrid state; and the undertakers have told me afterwards that they never met with such corpses. So that do not think that I make light of such deadly poisons that have done so much mischief. Still, while I deeply regret all this, I must not allow the gospel of God to fail. I must not allow the sovereignty

and counsel of God to be defeated; “his counsel shall stand, and he shall do all his pleasure.” Those are solemn words that we sometimes sing:

“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.”

God keep us humble, and prayerful, and careful; for the best of us are but poor creatures, taken care of only as he takes care of us.

Then, fourthly, disease. How many a child of God has died under a raging fever, died raving mad! Where is your remedy then? If that man's safety was in his repentance, or in his being sensible even, then where is he? What! am I to allow that while one event happens in this respect, as well as in some others, to the wicked and to the righteous, that that good man that dies raving mad, that that madness in his mental powers while he is in the body can destroy the grace in his soul, can destroy the perfection that is in Christ, can destroy his heirship of God, and joint heirship with Christ? But if the poor dear man thus afflicted could go to heaven only by dying in his own perfection, where would he be? Ah, precious faith, then. Again, suicide. How many a child of God has committed suicide! no question about it; I have not the least question about it; but it has been when they have lost their reason; and if they could speak or did speak when they got to heaven, that man would say, “It was no more I that did it, but the insanity that was in me.” There were men that I have known, I could not doubt their state, insanity has set in, and under the pressure of that insanity they have run to the halter, poison, or to the river. But has that touched their standing in Christ? No. One event happens to all. I know I am going a long way for some, but no farther than the grace of God can afford to go; no farther than the great God can afford to go; no farther than the eternal Spirit can afford to go. Why, we are apt to think if there is something we, we, big we, cannot understand, then the great God cannot understand it that if we, big we cannot manage a thing, he cannot manage it. And if there is something that destroys everything pertaining to mortality, then we set our beautiful logic to work to infer that as that has occurred which destroys everything pertaining to mortality, it had at the same time destroyed everything that belongs to immortality. Why, I should not much wonder if some parson were to start up next, and say, Dear friends, the world is so bad that they have destroyed God Almighty; they have grieved him to death, and now there is no God at all; God is actually destroyed; things went so badly that he is destroyed. I should not much wonder at it. Ah, I am going to say something now I make no apology for indeed I am not here to apologize to any man under heaven for what I say; always remember that. While I speak in love to you all, and in love to God I am accountable, and will be accountable, to no man or woman under heaven. I will say what I conscientiously believe to be right, and you that do not like it have your remedy, go away, that is our remedy, and hear what you do like. Now what I am going to say is this, that differences of opinion, prejudices, sins, diseases, must destroy the eternal God himself before they can shut one of his children out of heaven. He has sworn by himself, “In blessing I will bless you.” We are not half believers. If we could believe better, we should love God more, serve him more, and glory in him more. Ah, some people say, I am bringing my family up under the ministry. Right and proper; yes. And one of my chief objects is that they may be respectable and do well in the world. Well, that is very good as far as it goes; but that is a poor concern if that is all. It is a duty to bring them; and I am sure as parents, if you are alive from the dead, you will pray that there may be something more beside; that life may enter the soul, and that they may become true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Next, we come to the eleventh hour. What will you do then? Ah, I have visited in my time some of the most profligate creatures up to the very last, till profligacy laid them down; and when they have disabled themselves, I was going to say, to live, God has come in at the last. The thief on the cross is a kind of proof of this. If the thief had had to repent of every one of his sins, and had to acquire some righteousness and goodness of his own, where would he have been? But just as he was, a thief, a rogue, a vagabond, dying in public disgrace, acknowledging the justice of his sentence, "We indeed suffer justly;" I know I have been that vagabond, that thief, I have so outraged society; I have robbed all I could rob, injured all I could injure; I have done all the mischief I could; and therefore the sentence is just; yet faith enters into the great mystery of salvation; "Lord, remember me" me, the wretch, the thief, the robber, the man that has lived a devil's life down to the time I was shut up in prison, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Here was precious faith. "Verily I say unto you, this day shall you be with me in paradise." Where would the thief have been without faith? "These all died in faith." Oh, my hearer, if the perfection of Christ be precious to us while we live, how precious will it be to us when we die! and if precious to us when we die, how precious when we rise! and if precious when we rise, how precious will it be to all eternity! Our welcome into heaven will be by his wondrous work. So, then, what could we do in the eleventh hour without precious faith, faith in Jesus, that unites the soul to Immanuel? It matters not what the state is, his blood is more than a match for all. God has infinite skill, infinite wisdom, and he knows what he is about.

Several more reasons I might advance, but I will advance only one more. Of course, the great essential reason is that we cannot go to heaven without faith in Christ; for "blessed are the dead that die in the Lord," and to die in the Lord is to die in the faith. But we are now going through these details in order to clear our way. Now the last reason I name why faith is essential is the salvation of the infant. The infant has no practical bad, alas! no practical good, and I am sure it has no natural good, conceived in sin, sharpen in iniquity, the infant has no natural good, evil and only evil. There is the poor little thing, embodying an immortal soul; having in it, by nature, all the principles of depravity that ever have been practiced in this sin-blasted world. But the Holy Spirit sets in in his eternal power, quickens the soul, unites the infant's soul to Christ, and makes it vitally one with Jesus. And as soon as the body dies, the soul, the Holy Spirit in it, and one with the Savior, one with God's everlasting love, though the babe is unconscious of this, but the soul being quickened has in it all the elements of glory, and has in it all the dispositions of the Christian; When the soul enters heaven, those dispositions that have been wrought in this infant's soul come out, and it bursts forth in heaven in love, and adoration, and joy, and glory. Hence, then, it is written, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus, said the Lord, reframe your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, said the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy." Oh, my hearer, if the infant, therefore, were dependent in whole, or in part, upon any goodness in itself, even a poor little infant could not be saved. But bless the Lord, it is complete in Christ. And here it is, if the Savior shall have the preeminence numerically, it will be by infants. If we take the infants of the heathen and the infants of the civilized world, well might the Savior say, "Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And he took them up in his arms, to denote his power to gather them; he laid his hands on them, to make sin, and hell, and death, take their hands off from them; and he blessed them, to denote they were blessed, and blessed forever. So, then, I am

a firm believer in infant salvation. I believe a non-elect person cannot die in infancy; the very fact of their dying is a proof to me that they are saved. You read the summing up of the great account at the last great day, and you will find that the practical works of the lost against God are brought forward as evidence against them. Can you at the last day, or at any day, bring forward any practical works against the infant? Certainly not. An infant is in a lost condition by nature, for "death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression." Adam sinned practically; the infant has sinned federally, but not practically. But still, at the summing up at the last great day, you will find that those that are lost, their practical works are brought forward as evidence that they were enemies to God; and as no others are lost, the conclusion unavoidably is that infants are not lost. And yet, not long ago, a lady wrote to me— I knew it was a lady by her hand and her mode of speech, she did not give her name, "Dear Sir, Will you kindly send a letter to be left at such a post office? for I was in company the other day with a gentleman who said that he heard you say there are thousands of infants in hell not a span long, and that he heard you say that the bottomless pit is paved with little children." How they could make up this I do not know. Well, I did not reply to the letter, for just before that I had thrown out some hints in a sermon after a similar manner to what I am now saying. So, then:

"He that's convinced against his will,
Is of the same opinion still."

And if this gentleman should happen to be here this morning, and has heard what I have been saying, I have no doubt he will think, "Dear me, I would rather you had said the other" yes, no doubt, "because I could have got hold of you then." But you have not now, have you? No; I ever wish to be as an iron pillar, a brazen wall, and a defended city, in decision for God's truth; but God forbid I should ever live to be a barbarian; God forbid I should ever lose the sympathies either of a man or of a Christian. No; the man that is taught of God, his decision, his sternness, and his severity occasionally, are no proofs of the absence of sympathy, but rather a proof of its presence; for if you deeply sympathize with an object, and know well the danger to which it is exposed, does it not stir you up with all your zeal and determination to carry that out which you feel will be to the good of the persons to whom it belongs, and to the glory of that God whom it is our desire to serve?

"These all died in faith." It may be our happy lot to live pretty calmly, and perhaps to die pretty calmly; perhaps with our faces shining, like Stephen, or perhaps with salvation in our arms, like Simeon, or perhaps in the strength of the everlasting covenant, like David.