

FIRMNESS

A SERMON

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

I COMMENCED this subject last Lord’s day morning by observing that as the word *Jordan* signifies “the river of judgment,” the arresting of this river, in order that the Israelites might go into possession of what the Lord had for them, sets forth the arresting of judgment in the first Adam by Christ Jesus the Lord; and I then went on to show from many Scriptures how that judgment was arrested, and hereby mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other.

Now the part we have to notice this morning is the firmness of the priests; they “stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan.”

Their standing firm, as a type of the firm standing which the Savior made on our behalf. This is such a self-evident truth, namely, that Christ on behalf of sinners stood so unexceptionably firm, that it would seem at first sight as though hardly anything could be said upon it; but the truth is, a very great deal may be said upon it. I shall therefore notice the Lord’s own account of this matter. Is it not one of the endearments of Christ that he stood so firmly by his people? He saw the wolf, the lion, and the bear, he saw all sorts of mighty enemies coming against the sheep, but he never forsook them, he stood by them, and the consequence is, not a hoof shall be left behind; all are safe under the shelter of his hand, and in his firm standing on their behalf. Let us first hear his own account thereof, as in the 16th Psalm. “I have set the Lord always before me;” mark that. What does that mean? It means that God had willed an eternal blessedness for poor sinners, and that Jesus Christ came to do that testamentary, good, acceptable, and perfect will of God; and Christ never lost sight of that, in everything he thought, and did, and said, he always kept in view the will of him whose will he came to do. “I came not down from heaven to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me.” He felt that the great mission of his life and death was to save much people alive; that his mission into this world was the eternal salvation of a number that no man can number. “I have set the Lord always before me;” we cannot say this, at least, I dare not say so; and if you know your own heart, you will not dare to say so either; but you will bless God that Jesus

Christ was unexceptionable in this, and that you are brought also to set the Lord before you, according to your position as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter, in his Pentecostal sermon, seems to me rather to strengthen the idea given there in the 16th Psalm; he there says, "I foresaw the Lord always before my face." I think that is very beautiful. The dear Savior anticipated today what the will of the Lord was concerning him tomorrow; he at all times understood what the desires, designs, decrees, counsels, and purposes of the most High were. "I have set the Lord always before me;" and in so doing he became the ground, the stronghold, of all the confidence we are to have in God. "Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." There is his firmness. He was never moved from God's will, from God's covenant of grace. That covenant was provisional towards the will of God, the justice, holiness, and all the perfections of God; and therefore, not being moved from God's will, or God's covenant, he was not moved from the law of God, or from anything that pertained to the honor of God, and to our eternal welfare. "Therefore, my heart is glad;" as though he should say, It would very much sadden my heart if it were in the power of Satan to point to any one instance of failure in me, to any one instance of discouragement in me; for he was not to fail nor to be discouraged. "Therefore, my heart is glad," that the Lord is at my right hand, that he approves of all I am, and say, and do. And really, I should be almost ready to question the reality of your religion if this is not the kind of truth and gospel that gladdens your heart when it is made glad. Are we not glad to see such a friend as this, that loves at all times, and has displayed a friendship which none but such a person could display? "And my glory rejoices." If we take the glory there to mean, as in some parts of the Psalms it does, the tongue, then it will mean his testimony, that his testimony rejoices; it is a rejoicing testimony, a testimony of great joy, that shall be unto all people. "My flesh also shall rest in hope, for you will not leave my soul in hell." I take the hell there to mean the hell of God's wrath; for, of course, Christ did not go into the hell of the lost; there was no necessity for Christ to go there; his immortal spirit went from the cross to the throne, direct from earth to heaven; but he certainly did go into the hell of God's wrath. You will not leave my soul there. Why not? Fallen angels are left there; the human race, except the saved, are left there; and those on the Savior's left hand at the last day will be left there; but You will not leave *my* soul there. What is the reason? The reason is plain, simple, and delightful, that he had suffered all the wrath that was due to sin, all the curse, all the penalty. The words of Kent are ponderous, but I do not object to use them, that he had, as it were, drank damnation dry; he had drunk the cup to the very dregs. Therefore, he was not left there, because there was no more due to the sins of his people. As you see written in the latter part of the Bible on the forefront of the throne, there it stands in living, laughing, rejoicing, beautiful letters, infinitely more than golden letters, standing in the positive form, "There shall be no more curse:" consequently God's blessing is upon the people, and they are called to inherit the blessing, and by inheriting the blessing they shall to eternity bless the Lord their God. "Neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption." He went to the place of corruption, but he himself saw no corruption, because there was no sin in him. "You will show me the path of life," meaning his resurrection; "In your presence is fulness of joy;" God's presence giving a fulness of joy means God's approbation; and so the apostle Peter, in his Pentecostal sermon, explains it for the words are varied; and you will find it is good to bring different Scriptures together at times upon the same subject; "you shall make me full of joy with your countenance." Your approbation, oh, what a delight it was to Christ to think that God approved him; how it must have thrilled through his manhood when the voice came to him on Jordan's banks, the banks of the very river embodied in the language of our text, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And when he came to Mount Tabor, the approving presence of God turned him into heaven itself, as it were; his

countenance became as the sun, and his very raiment shining whiter than the snow, so white as no fuller¹ on earth could make them; and the disciples were afraid, astonished, and yet happy. And three days before his death the same approbation again. And if the Savior were so delighted with this Divine approbation while he was in this world, what must he be on high, where that approbation is carried into eternal perfection. There he has a name above every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come; there he is enthroned above all thrones, for he has ascended up far above all heavens. "At your right hand" there is his eternal glorification; "there are pleasures for evermore." Now, come, some of you that have been having a little conversation with your own heart and Satan, just look at that. You have sometimes thought, Well, perhaps heaven will be a sort of sameness, and a sort of dullness, that after a time, perhaps, we shall get a little weary. But then, just look at that word "pleasures," that means variety. You are not going to be set down in heaven like a parcel of statues, and posts, and pillars, stuck there as so many nothings, no such thing; there will be life there, action there, travelling there, buoyancy there, everything that can carry out in perfection the mission of the dear Savior, or God's approbation. Here, then, is our immoveable Savior. He stood fast until he reached these happy climes; and he said, where he is, there shall his people be also.

Let us have another sample, wherein the prophet Isaiah personates the Savior, in the Savior's firmness. "The Lord God has opened my ear." You know in the 21st of Exodus why the ear of the Israelite was opened. When the Israelite said, "I love my master, and it is well with me," then his ear was opened, and that meant that he was to be his master's servant during his whole life. Now Jesus Christ loved God, and he was therefore the proper, the holy, the appointed child; and so his ear was opened, and that meant that he was to be God's servant as well as God's Son forever; for he was not only God's servant in his humiliation, but he is God's servant in his exaltation, and will lead the innumerable flocks of his people to all eternity to fountains of living waters, God with him in so doing, wiping away all tears from off all faces. "I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." Look at the New Testament, how true that is. Ah, many of the prophets, all of them more or less in some shape or form or another, showed that they were but men, and showed their weakness; and even the prophet Jeremiah feared that his hope and strength were perished from the Lord. Not so with the Lord Jesus Christ. "I gave my back to the smiters." What for? Because I loved the people, and if I would redeem them, that is a part of what I must go through, and I will go through it, without rebelling, murmuring, or complaining. "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair," as though he should say, Do what you like with me up to a certain point. "I hid not my face from shame and spitting." And the poor disciples, they were discouraged, thought everything went against them. Here is our Master, with not anywhere to lay his head, obliged to work a miracle to pay the tribute-money; we are few, weak, and insignificant; what will become of us? we are afraid we shall all come to nothing at last. Such would be some of their fears, in judging not by what the Savior really was, not by what the Lord really was, but in judging by the appearance of circumstances, which are always a very fallacious and deceptive rule to judge by. We should always judge of things by what the Lord is; and if we are enabled so to do, it will keep us,

"Calm amidst tempestuous motion,
Knowing that our Lord is near."

¹ The term 'fuller' comes from a person who steps or stomps on wool for cleaning the wool (or cloth) to eliminate oils, dirt, and other impurities, and to make it thicker. In this process the fabric is also made whiter.

Now hear what the Savior said on this matter of standing firm “The Lord God will help me;” there he speaks as the Son of God and as man; “therefore shall I not be confounded.” He never was, others were confounded at his answers, and destructively confounded by those judgments they brought upon themselves; but he was never confounded. Remember that Jesus Christ is not only standing for us, but he is at the same time our example; we are to pray that we may be partakers largely of his spirit, that is, in our humble measure, the Spirit was given without measure to him, but in measure to us. “Therefore, have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.” I despise the thought of being ashamed, the shame that men may heap upon me will last but a little while. “I have set my face like a flint.” And so, with us. Our religion is not worth having if we have not this same spirit, to set our faces like a flint in decision for God’s truth; and not to move from it on any account whatever, or for anything whatever; for “is anything too hard for the Lord?” “As your days so shall your strength be.” And then the Savior goes on, still describing his firmness and refers to the temptations of Satan which he would have to meet. “He is near that justifies me.” My Father is with me; I am alone, yet not alone, for he is with me. “Who will contend with me?” Satan will, Lord. Well, then, the Savior says, “Let us stand together; who is my adversary? let him come near to me.” And so, Satan did as recorded in the 4th of Matthew; there Satan presented his plans and schemes, and, as you well know, Satan got the worst of it and the Son of God came off, as he always must do, triumphant; and so in this way, by what he has wrought, shall he from time to time, tread down Satan under our feet, and give us the victory. The prophet Isaiah is then, in the visions and revelations of the Lord, carried into the New Testament dispensation, and he sees that his own nation would condemn Christ, and the prophet sees and records the consequence to that nation. “Who is he that shall condemn me!” Why, said the Jewish nation, we will. And what follows? “They shall all wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.” Before I open up that part let me say, if we are reconciled to God by Christ Jesus, we shall never wear out. We have a new nature, incorruptible, that will never wear out; we have the garments of salvation, that will never wear out; we have consolations that will never wear out. But if I am speaking to any of my fellow-creatures, travelling as we all are to eternity, and you know not the Lord, but are in a state of ignorance of and enmity against him, then all your comforts will by and by pass away, be worn out like an old garment; the moth shall eat them up, and you will have nothing, as it were, living and dying in your sins, but hell and eternal woe left. Ah, the state we were in by nature, to live, and but for grace should die, careless about these eternal things. Now, they all shall “wax old as a garment.” The holy Scriptures present the Jews, their land, and their dispensation, all three, as waxing old like a garment, becoming an old garment, moth-eaten, cast away as that which is of no use, contemptible. Mark the language, here you see the persons; “They all shall wax old as a garment;” was it not so? In their standing in that covenant, did not all their beauty fade, did not all their comforts fade away, did not everything to which they were entitled as the literal descendants of Abraham fade away, on the ground of their apostacy and enmity against God's truth, that enmity including, of course, enmity against his Son? Then you also find that their land is spoken of as an old garment in the next chapter, the 51st of Isaiah. “Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke.” not the physical heavens, not the planets, the sun, the moon and the stars this is what people think, but it is not the prophets meaning. The heavens there mean the Jewish heavens, the institutions, laws, and orders of that dispensation, as you see in the 4th of Jeremiah, where he says, “I beheld the heavens, and they had no light.” Do you mean to say that Jeremiah meant that the sun, and moon, and stars were gone? No, the sun, the moon, and the stars, went shining on all the

same. Well, then, if you take it physically it is not true, but if you take it figuratively you get the meaning. The Jewish heavens, the Jewish dispensation, now had no light; and the Jewish earth, the Jewish land, was without form and void; and the mountains, their institutions and so on, trembled, and the hills moved lightly, and all the birds of heaven fled. Who were the birds of heaven? Why, the saints of God, Christians that were among the Jews. And how was it the Jewish heavens had no light? how was it that the Jewish earth was without form and void, or empty? how was it their institutions could no longer stand? and how was it the birds of the heavens were fled? what is the secret of it all? This clause explains it, "There was no man." There never was but one man that was the true light, and the prophet foresaw they would get rid of that one man, namely, Christ Jesus the Lord; and when Christ is gone, then there is no heavenly light without him; there is no real form without him; there is no stability without him; and the heavenly birds of Paradise will never stop long where he is not. If they happen to go into a region where he is not, they are birds of passage, they will take wing, and will fly off to the tree of life, they will fly off to the mighty cedar, as in the 17th of Ezekiel; Jesus shall become the great center of attraction. You will thus see it is the Jewish heavens that vanished away like smoke, the Jewish earth that waxed old like a garment. "And they that dwell therein," the Jews as a nation, "shall die in like manner; but my salvation" here is the new covenant, "shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished." One more testimony, from the 102nd Psalm and the 1st of Hebrews, "You, Lord, in the beginning have laid the foundation of the earth," the Jewish earth again; the apostle is there referring to the work of Christ's hands, not to the material, but to the dispensational creation; "and the heavens are the works of your hands; they shall perish," the Jewish heavens, the first heavens and the first earth, "but you," Christ Jesus, "remain; and they shall all wax old as does a garment; and as a vesture shall you fold them up, and they shall be changed; but you are the same, and your years shall not fail, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. Thus, you see, from the 50th and 51st of Isaiah, the 102nd Psalm, and the 1st of Hebrews, that the people, their land, and their dispensation are all compared to old, worn-out, moth-eaten garments, laid forever aside; and this was to take place when Christ had wrought salvation, ascended upon high, and ministered his judgments to them. And they, their land and dispensation being thus compared to an old, moth-eaten garment, from the time that their nation should be destroyed, or rather from the time that Christ was crucified, it really almost tempts one to think that as though to give emphasis, to give solemn, practical, and lasting emphasis to these solemn testimonies against them, *they have cried "Old clothes" ever since*. Let us then bless God for a better covenant, for a better mediation, for better promises, for a better life, for better garments, a better temple, a better heaven, a better earth, a better standing, a better order of things. Thus, then, as the priests stood firm in Jordan, so the Savior stood firm in the river of judgment; for what was this world to Christ but a river of judgment, of tribulation, of opposition? How deep were the waters that he had to arrest? but he waded through them and came off triumphant at the last.

I hardly dare pursue this thought farther, or else a second thought would be that Christ was not only firm *for* us, but he is also firm *with* us; but instead of working that second thought out, I must, for the sake of conciseness, just refer you to the personal history of Christ, that he was not only firm *for* his people, but also firm *with* them. If he had been no firmer with them than they were with him, I do not know what would have become of them. And yet, do you know, he does not look at their little shakings, and discouragements, and mistakes no, he settles the matter very beautifully, in a way that nothing but love could; nothing but love could settle the matter in that way. If an archangel, I was going to say, had had to sum up the same subject, he most likely would

have brought in an *if* or a *but*, or something of the kind. But the Savior puts it in the positive form, passes by all, and says, "You are they that have continued with me," with all your little shakings you have been firm enough for that; you have continued with me, and you have not continued with me in vain, for "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father has appointed unto me." So, all shall be well at the last. I need not here, then, dwell upon the self-evident truth of the firmness of the Savior in every way with his disciples when he reappeared unto them, and on the Day of Pentecost. And think you, if those apostles were here now, all of them, and ask them to read the last clause of the last verse of the last chapter of the Gospel by Matthew, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," or, if you render it, "the end of the age," ask them, Did he fulfil this promise? was he with you? oh, how unhesitatingly, how decisively, now triumphantly would they bear testimony that he stood by them! Just as the sun and the moon stood still till Israel had completed the victory; so, will our God stand by us as long as there is a foe to conquer, a burden to bear, a need to supply, a wound to heal. There stands the testimony, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And I do like this firmness myself. Indeed, "Let not him that wavers think that he shall receive anything." If we halt between two opinions, our religion is not worth a thing. You must have this decision, so that you will say, Whether I am one of the Lord's or not, whether I am born of God or not, whether I am interested in his mercy or not, whether I shall get safe at last or not; if I perish I will perish in the belief of the truth, in decision for the truth; if I perish, I will perish at the Savior's feet; if I perish, it shall be trusting in his blood, in his righteousness, in his grace, and in his promise; and such an one never did perish, and, bless God, never will. Let this be your resolution; and if God give you this resolution and this decision, and keep you there, perish you will not; you will pass over on dry ground, and take a triumphant, rightful, divine, and glorious possession of the promised land.

I must now hastily notice the second part. Now these priests in Jordan were a type not only of Christ in his firmness, but also a type of the people of God in their firmness, that is, in their firmness in faith or confidence; I will use the word *confidence*; I think I shall be able with that word to say what I have to say upon this part. Now there are three things essential to a right or saving confidence in God; and if you have not those three things, then your confidence is not right; but if you have those three things, then your confidence will not be rejected or turned away; for you do read of some whose confidences the Lord rejected. Those who were rejected, the foolish virgins, the man with the one talent, and the murmurers, did not possess those three essentials to a right and saving confidence in God. All these three things are suggested by the confidence which the priests of God manifested in standing firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan. The first thing is, your confidence must be upon a right foundation, and that right foundation is the righteousness and atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. You must not have any confidence in anything as taking away sin but in the blood of Christ; you must not have any confidence in anything as constituting you righteous before God but the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Let me first repeat the words for almost the ten thousandth time that Jesus Christ is called Jehovah our Righteousness. Only think of attempting to unite the supposed righteousness of a poor sinner to help out with the great matter of justification; to bring a little of creature righteousness into connection with the righteousness of Jehovah. Why, I shall just make this remark here, that there is an infinity of difference between Christ's righteousness and the righteousness of the highest archangel, between the righteousness of Christ and the righteousness of Adam before he fell; in other words, that the righteousness of Christ is infinitely superior to that of angels or to that of Adam before the fall. Therefore, nothing else must be your confidence before God but the atonement and righteousness of Jesus Christ. The

next essential, equally essential, is the yea and amen promise of the great God, "In blessing I will bless." The promise is yea and amen. This is what Abraham believed in, and it was counted to him for evidential righteousness; this is what Isaac and Jacob believed in, and what the apostle felt very much interested in; he says, "As God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. For all the promises of God in Christ are yea, and in him Amen." God will never bless you by a conditional promise; he will make you feel your need of an unconditional promise; and if we do not receive the sworn promise of God, then we do not receive the covenant of God; and if we do not receive the covenant of God, then we do not receive the Christ of God. The third essential I have in a measure anticipated; there must be faith; there must be no hesitation. Now in my own feelings I just as firmly believe in the suitability, and certainty, and sufficiency of the atonement of Christ as I do in my existence; I as much believe in the yea and amen promise as I do in my existence. I do unfeignedly and most heartily believe in God's promise, and I feel myself in good company in so doing; for all those who in olden time died in the faith saw the promises afar off, and were persuaded of them and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth; wherefore it is that the Lord was not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city, and brought them to that city, for they all died in faith. See then the firmness of the Savior, the confidence of the people.

Now there were four things that these priests would naturally, apart from God, fear. I will just make a few remarks here, in conclusion, to help you poor, doubting ones. You cannot help your doubting and fearing, it is your infirmity; indeed, I would ten thousand times rather see you trembling, doubting, fearing than see you arrogant, Pharisaic, and proud, and presumptuous, boasting of an assurance you have never received. I would not make light of the little ones, those that doubt and fear; if I did, I should make light of myself, for I am a little one, and sometimes doubt and fear as well as others. There were four things that these priests, as a type of the Lord's people, would naturally fear. The first would be that those accumulating waters certainly would come down upon them and overwhelm them. So, you sometimes fear, do you not, that the Lord will bring your sins down against you, that some sweeping judgment will come and carry you away? Ah, you say, such and such a circumstance will carry me away; I am very much afraid. "Now may Israel say, If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul; then the proud waters had gone over our soul." But then, if the Lord be on our side, the waters shall not move. It was very natural to fear this, and suppose you fear this sometimes, that that will be the case with you, but it will not. Well, say you, the waters did not come down upon the priests. Just as much as your sins will come upon you; just as much as God's wrath will come upon you; just as much as his curse will come upon you. Has he not sworn, "I will not be angry with you, nor rebuke you"? We do not half understand his love, and consequently do not half love him; for if we knew him better, we should love him more, and his ways would be still more pleasant to us. The second thing they would fear apart from God's promise would be: Well, here we stand, and there are those Canaanites; ten to one if they don't rush in upon us and kill us. We cannot defend ourselves; here are only four of us bearing the ark up. Do you fear the Canaanites will come, brother? Yes, I am afraid they will. Let me preach a sermon to you, then, from the 15th of Exodus. "Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of your arm, they shall be as still as a stone; till your people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which you have purchased." What do you think of that? Oh, that will do; I don't care for them now; I see it is all right now. Ah, though ten thousand Canaanites, Amorites, or Amalekites, set themselves against me, this declaration settles everything, and puts it all right.

Then the third thing they would fear would be whether their strength would hold out. We don't know how long we shall have to stand here; this ark is getting pretty heavy. Could not they put the ark down? Oh no, that would not do; the ark must keep upon the shoulders of the priests; if they put the ark down the waters would come down; and if you put down God's truth, your sin will come down upon you, and God's wrath too. Therefore, they must bear the ark up. It was the presence of God by the ark that arrested the judgment, kept the ground dry, and ensured their triumphant entrance into Canaan. Now they would naturally fear this; and what was said of the Red Sea will be true here. You know what David said of the Red Sea; Dr. Colenso, I suppose, never read that. Impossible, he says, for children, cripples, and old people to get across the sea. He never could have read that scripture, I should think, where David says, "There was not one feeble person among them." Why, if the Lord could make Samson strong enough to carry the gates of Gaza, posts, bar, and all, twenty-two miles, he could make the weakest strong enough to go through the sea, and could keep up the strength of these priests, that they should feel as strong when the last passed over as when the first passed. So, you may fear your strength will fail, and that you will have to give it up; but the Lord will sustain you; he has kept you to this day and will not let you go. Then another thing they would fear. Well, says one priest to the other, brother, I feel so much doubting, and so full of rebellion and evil besetments, that I do think the Lord will forsake me now; if he does not bring the waters upon anybody else, I think he will upon me, for I am the greatest sinner of all. This is one of the sources, indeed, the chief source, of the doubts and fears of the people of God; they feel the plague of their own heart, and feel what poor creatures they are, and therefore fear the Lord will forsake them, forgetting that he remembered us in our low estate, and that his mercy endures forever; and thus, we see that they had no real cause to fear. See, then, the three things essential to a right confidence in God: the work, the finished work, of the Savior. Second, the yea and amen promise; here is the certainly. Third, an unfeigned belief in God by Christ Jesus, and a full assurance of the truth and certainty of the promise. See also how they are hedged in on every side with "Fear not." The waters of wrath shall not reach them. The Canaanites shall not touch them. Their strength shall hold out to the end, and with the Lord there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of our spirits.