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CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

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Sept. 7.—Ps. 27.

THIS psalm may be called the challenge of David's faith to David's fears. We have no means of determining at what period of his life or under what particular circumstances it was penned. There were so many occasions in his checkered history when every utterance of the psalm would appear to have peculiar appropriateness and significance that we are not surprised to find biographers and commentators fixing upon various periods, some as early as the anointing at Hebron (2 Sam. 2 : 4), others as late as the deliverance of the king in his old age (2 Sam. 21 : 17) through the intervention of Abishai, one of his chief captains.

It is not important that the precise circumstances should be determined. Indeed, it is often best for our spiritual edification and comfort that the details of the history should lie in abeyance, and that the grand lessons of confidence in God in all times of perplexity and trial should stand forth in clearer perspective and in bolder relief by reason of the absence of such personal traits or historical incidents as would distract our attention or divert our thoughts.

Here, then, in this beautiful psalm, we have a sublime instance of what an old divine has called "confidence in

God the best succor in the worst seasons." Let us study the psalm as illustrating the occasions, the grounds and the fruits of true confidence in God.

I. The occasions on which this confidence which the child of God reposes in his heavenly Father may be expected to appear.

As it is an abiding confidence, one "the beginning of which" is to be "held steadfast unto the end" (Heb. 3 : 14), we may expect to see evidences of it at every step in the Christian course. But it is especially in times of trial and distress that it comes conspicuously into view,

"As darkness shows us worlds of light
We never saw by day."

In David's case we find confidence in God illustrated—

(1.) *In Times of Peril.* "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." The true child of God is often in peril. One of the most devoted and illustrious servants of Christ enumerates (2 Cor. 11 : 26) the sources of peril to which in his consecrated ministry he was exposed: "In perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren." There is nothing in such times that can stand us in stead but this assured confidence in God. When the believer can say, "The Lord is on my side," then he can safely add, "I will not fear what man can do unto me." When he can enter into the full spirit of the apostle's challenge, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" then he can calmly look the leagued opposition of earth and hell in the face, and go forward fearlessly, as Martin Lu-

ther did, when, being warned not to appear before the Diet of Worms, he said that, "trusting in God, he would go, though there were as many devils in Worms as there were tiles upon the roofs." Armed with this confidence in God, the believer may look even Death, the last enemy, calmly in the face, and say with David, "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my life and my portion for ever."

But the man who has not this confidence in God is in time of peril like a ship without anchor in the fury of the storm. "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, may Israel now say,—if it had not been the Lord who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick when their wrath was kindled against us; then the waters had overwhelmed us; the stream had gone over our soul; then the proud waters had gone over our soul." (Ps. 124 : 1-5.)

(2.) *In Times of Privation.* It is evident from the earnest desire expressed in verse 4 that when the psalm was composed David was in exile from Jerusalem and deprived of the privileges of worship in the house of God. He endured many privations, both during the period when he was persecuted by Saul and during that when he was exiled by the treason of Absalom. None of them seemed to affect him so painfully as the loss of the ordinances of God's house. "One thing," he says, "I have desired, that will I seek after." In the 84th Psalm he seems to envy the very birds that could make their nests in the temple, while he was forbidden to approach it. But in this, and in all his privations, his great support was found in his confidence in God. In the darkest hour we hear him singing, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my coun-

tenance and my God." And so there are no privations that befall the servant of God in this world, no allotments of penury or sickness or bereavement, in which an assured trust in God will not give the victory, and even enable the sufferer to say with Paul (Rom. 8 : 37), "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us."

(3.) *In Times of Desertion.* It was David's misfortune, as it has been that of many a good man since, to find that just when he needed friends most the ranks were thinnest and his standards most deserted. There are few pangs more poignant than those experienced in the betrayal of confidence, the ingratitude, the indifference, of those whom we have loved, in whom we have confided, and upon whose help in our emergencies we have assuredly relied. But David had a sure recourse when all others failed. He had a Friend who would never desert him. How plaintively, and yet how triumphantly, he says (v. 10), "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up"! The nearest and dearest earthly friends may desert him, until he feels in his loneliness like a little child whom unnatural parents have cruelly abandoned to its fate; but there is a Father in heaven who "takes him up," lifts him and holds him to his loving bosom, places him and keeps him within the secure enclosure of the everlasting arms. Happy is he who amidst the unfaithfulness of earthly friends has found the incomparable treasure of "a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother"!

(4.) *In Times of Calumny.* A more bitter element yet was distilled into David's cup. "False witnesses" (v. 12) "are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty." He had many calumniators and slanderers, men of whom he says (Ps. 57 : 4), "Their teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." One of these was

“Cush the Benjamite,” concerning whom he pours out his soul to God in the 7th Psalm. The enemies of the king, who had the ear of Saul, insinuated the poison of their misrepresentations and slanders, whilst David was utterly unable to defend himself against the aspersions which they cast upon his good name.

There is no meaner character than that of the slanderer or scandal-monger, who, too cowardly to make charges against you face to face, secretly stabs your character, without giving you the opportunity either of denial or of disproof. And yet there is no good man who is not liable to have his character either openly or at least secretly assaulted and maligned. What is he to do when false witnesses thus rise up against him? Here, again, confidence in God is his support and stay. Let him do as David did—make his appeal to God, the Searcher of all hearts, saying, “Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness and according to mine integrity that is in me. My defence is of God, which saveth the upright in heart.” Then he can say, like Job when tortured by the suspicions and insinuations of Eliphaz, “He knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.”

II. Having seen some of the occasions in which this confidence in God is called into exercise, let us look now at some of the grounds upon which it rests. These also we will find beautifully illustrated in the psalm.

(I.) The first and highest ground of confidence is found in the nature of God himself as he stands personally related to us. How beautifully the Psalmist expresses this in the opening verse: “The Lord is my light and my salvation;” “The Lord is the strength of my life”! It is not what we are, but what God is, that

affords a solid ground of confidence in time of trouble. And when we think of him as revealed to us in Christ, what more expressive or exhaustive terms could we employ to describe the blissful relations he is pleased to sustain to us than just these three: "my light," "my salvation," "the strength" (or, as Alexander translates, "the stronghold or fortress") "of my life"?

And then what an emphasis there is on that personal pronoun *my*—*my* light, *my* salvation, the strength of *my* life! It tells of an eternal covenant by which he is mine and I am his. It tells of an appropriating faith by which I have set my seal to that covenant, and claimed all its provisions and promises as mine. It tells of a mystical union betwixt my soul and him, by reason of which he is in me and I am in him, and "it is no longer I that live, but Christ that liveth in me," so that I can say, in the quaint rhythm of Wesley,

"But this I do find,
We two are so joined,
He'll not live in glory and leave me behind."

Blessed is he who can truly say, "The Lord is my light and my salvation," "The Lord is the strength of my life"!

(2) The second ground of confidence is found in the previous interpositions of the Lord for our help. "When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell" (v. 2). It is evident that the Psalmist here refers to some particular period in his past history when he was in great danger, and when God very signally interposed to deliver him. The language in the original has an emphasis which is lost in the translation. When his enemies came upon him with all the ferocity of a hungry lion or a pack of ravening wolves, *themselves it was* that stumbled and fell,

and not he, as they had so confidently expected, and as he himself, perhaps, in the timidity of the moment, may have dreaded. This signal interposition of God's mercy and power in the past he makes a ground of confidence as he looks forward to the conflicts of the future, just as in the ninth verse he makes it the basis of a special plea, saying, "Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation."

And is there not, in the deliverances which God has wrought for us in the past, ground for the highest confidence that he will continue to put forth his power in the future? There is no presumption in "being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Here is the groundwork of our comforting doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints. Chosen in the counsels of eternity, redeemed with atoning blood, regenerated and sealed with the indwelling Spirit, the righteous through God's grace "holds on his way," and "he that has clean hands waxes stronger and stronger." And as the child of God looks back over the way by which the Lord has led him, and sees how divine strength has been made manifest in his weakness, he confidently sings,

"Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home."

(3.) Closely connected with the divine interpositions on behalf of the Christian are those religious experiences which he has enjoyed, and which, as evidences of the work of God's Spirit in his heart, heighten the confidence which he has of ultimate salvation. "When thou saidst" (v. 8), "Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face,

Lord, will I seek." It is this answer, this inward echo, of the soul to the commands and invitations of God's holy word which constitutes that double witness of which the apostle speaks when he says (Rom. 8 : 16), "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." And just in proportion as the believer has this witness, his confidence in God grows stronger and more full of comfort.

(4.) A fourth ground is found in the promises of God as they are received and rested upon by faith. "I had fainted" (v. 13) "unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." He does not say, "unless I had hoped," but "unless I had believed," to indicate that there was a special promise upon which his faith rested, and in the fulfillment of which he should see the goodness of the Lord—that providential goodness to which he refers in another place when he says (Ps. 31 : 19), "Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!" The promises of God are the very food upon which faith feeds and grows; and so the Psalmist closes with the impressive words, "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

III. Having seen the occasions and grounds, let us look, in conclusion, at the fruits, of confidence in God as they are illustrated in the psalm.

(1.) This confidence completely delivers from all fear. How boldly the Psalmist utters and reiterates the challenge, "Whom shall I fear?" "Of whom shall I be afraid?" He seems to put away from him indignantly the very thought of fear, as unworthy of one to whom Jehovah

stands in such relations as his light, his salvation and his strength. And of what shall even the weakest and most timorous Christian be afraid, seeing that "the eternal God is his refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms"?

(2.) Not only is there absence of all fear, but a positive sense of security from all harm in the safe-keeping of infinite love. The Psalmist uses several beautiful figures to express this idea of the perfect security of the believer: "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion." Jehovah, the great Captain of our salvation, takes the timid soul into his own royal tent. Surely, there the weakest and most timid may feel perfectly secure. "In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me." In that sacred place, the Holy of holies, guarded by cherubim, kept by combined forces of heaven and earth, surely the soul in tranquillity and quietness may rest. "He shall set me up upon a rock." As though an infinite arm had lifted him up and placed him upon some lofty and inaccessible cliff, far above the rage of his enemies, he who trusts in God has that sweet sense of security to which Lord Bacon refers as possessed by him who "stands in the window of a castle and sees a battle and the adventures thereof below." "Thou wilt," says Isaiah (26: 3), "keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee."

(3.) Finally: this confidence is a well-spring of happiness. "Therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy. I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord." The Christian life has its *hosannas* as well as its *misereres*—its notes of joyous triumph as well as its plaintive "songs in the night." And whenever "the voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous," the joyous refrain of each heart is (Ps. 118: 14-16),

“The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation. The right hand of the Lord is exalted, the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly.” The glad utterance of each separate singer is, “Thou art my God, and I will praise thee; thou art my God, and I will exalt thee,” while the universal chorus in which all hearts unite is, “Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever.”

The experiences of David in this psalm have been placed on record for our direction and comfort. We cannot better close our brief study of it than in the words of the same inspired writer in the conclusion of another beautiful psalm (Ps. 84 : 11, 12): “The Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.”