

Christ Our Sentinel

by Daniel Steele

Daniel Steele's sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in Christ's keeping power for spiritual safety and victory over sin.

Scripture: Psalm 46:1, Psalm 121:7, Isaiah 26:3, John 15:5, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Philippians 4:13, 2 Timothy 1:12, Hebrews 13:8, 1 Peter 1:5

Topics: "Faith Assurance", "Spiritual Victory"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the importance of unwavering faith in God's keeping power, drawing parallels between the trust in physical laws for safety and the trust in God's promises for spiritual well-being. He emphasizes the need for Christians to have firm assurance in God's ability to sustain them through all trials and temptations, highlighting the superiority of the kingdom of grace over the kingdom of nature. Steele urges believers to look to Jesus as their ultimate source of strength and victory, rather than relying on their own resolutions or efforts to combat spiritual enemies.

Transcript

"DON'T you know that a hat full of wind would have sent you straight to the bottom?" said the captain of a war-vessel to an old slave, who had ventured from Charleston, in a leaky skiff, risking life for liberty. "De good Lord habn't brought dis chile so far toward freedom to send him to de bottom ob de sea, nohow," said the sable believer in special providences, as he stepped from his sinking boat to the deck of the blockading ship, amid the cheers of the patriotic marines. He had faith in the keeping power of God. Deliverances past laid stronger foundations for faith in deliverances to come. This principle underlies St. Paul's faith when he exclaims, "I know whom I have trusted, and am persuaded that he is able to keep my deposit for that day." [Dean Alford's version.] Past ventures of his soul upon the keeping power of his omnipotent Saviour had intensified his trust in him for still greater things, all along the future, up to the very descent of the Judge of the quick and the dead. The philosophic assumption on which this faith rests is that like causes always produce like effects. Confidence in the stability of the physical world keeps us from fear as we dash through the sky at break-neck speed on this planet which we call earth, and which is bowling along its orbit with perilous velocity. This faith in nature, or rather in Him who presides over nature, is not only the charm which allays our fears of future ill, but it is the spring of all our activity and the secret of all our success in attaining material good.

When will Christians learn that "the God of all grace" affords in his recorded promises just as stable a ground of trust as the God of nature? Yea, more stable, inasmuch as physical laws, in the case of miracles, have been occasionally suspended for the attainment of spiritual ends. Thus God shows that the kingdom of grace is superior to the kingdom of nature. The laws of the former were never, and never will be, suspended to attain the inferior ends of the latter. Here is the basis for even a firmer assurance of the immutability of the God of revelation.

Many a weak believer loses sight of this great fact, and is deaf to the jubilant song of those who stand on Christ, the solid Rock, ever singing,

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,

Is laid for your faith in his excellent word."

Hence the doubter goes about in sadness, expressing his fears about the sufficiency of Christ to keep him amid future temptations, though he would blush at the very thought of questioning the permanency of nature's provisions for his future physical support in the sunlight, air, water, and annual wheat harvests.

When Lowell, the city of spindles, was projected, and the immense water-power of the Merrimac was about to be harnessed to the machinery of numerous mills, one thought permanently lodged in the minds of the people would for ever have blocked the wheels of that grand enterprise, and left the site of Lowell a desert, as it was when the Pilgrims stepped upon Plymouth Rock. No money would have been subscribed to the corporations, no house-lots would have been bought, no factories would have been reared, no dam would have been built, if there had been in the public mind a serious doubt of the permanency of the water-power.

This would have paralyzed the gigantic scheme, and the power of the river would have continued to run to waste, as it had done for untold ages. But the people had unquestioning faith in the sun, that he would daily evaporate the waters of the ocean; in the winds, that they would move the clouds to the hills of New Hampshire; in the rains, that they would fill up the mountain springs, in the brooks, that they would constantly replenish the river: and in the Merrimac, that it would from age to age, to the "last syllable of recorded time," roll downward to the Atlantic.

So faith built Lowell, and made many a fortune. Widespread doubt would unmake that beautiful hive of human industry, unhinge all its enterprises, and cause the grass to grow in its busiest streets. Thus Christians become rich toward God, and make everlasting fortunes, when they exercise the same faith in Jesus Christ, the Author of Nature, who upholdeth all things by the word of His power, as they habitually and unconsciously exercise in the stability of the forces of nature.

It is the lack of this faith in Jesus Christ that makes so many Church members hesitate in action, timid in conflict, weak for burden-bearing, doleful in view of the future, and spiritual paupers all their days. Their hold upon Christ is less than that of the nerveless grasp of infancy itself. Hence they are not kept, for the divine safe-guard of the saints is that they "are kept by the power of God through faith." Human and divine agencies coalesce in keeping the soul. It is ours to trust in Jesus; it is His to keep us by His power.

For this very purpose his representative and successor, "another Comforter," is sent to abide in the heart of the believer. A definite act of all-surrendering faith admits him; a continuous attitude of submissive trust retains Him. In the constancy of His presence and power, girding the soul with "might in the inner man,"

there is no caprice. The Mississippi will sooner cease to flow into the Gulf of Mexico, and roll northwards to the Arctic Sea, than the Holy Spirit vacate the trusting and obedient heart.

Reader, sit down with your Concordance, and trace through the writings of John and Paul the words "abide," "dwell," and "remain," as they are used in connection with the Holy Spirit in the soul of the believer. You will be both surprised and strengthened by this research. Then go and give a Bible-reading on the abiding Comforter to some Christian of wavering faith, and cheer him by unfolding the many and exceedingly precious promises which Jesus has left on record relating to the amplitude and completeness of His provisions for the conservation of our spiritual life.

If your old doubts should ever recur -- God forbid! -- give yourself and your doubting friend another Bible-reading on the word "able," in the New Testament, as it is related to power over sin and power to do effectual service for the Lord Jesus. Acquaintance with the promises fertilizes the heart and prepares it for the upspringing of faith.

When the Rev. George Muller, of the Bristol Orphanage, was recently asked why the average Christian had so little faith in Christ, he promptly replied: "Because he is so little acquainted with Him." Heart-ignorance of Christ begets heart-distrust, and this, in turn, begets spiritual weakness, over which Satan easily triumphs. The cure is found in Bengel's motto: --

"Apply thyself wholly to the Word;

Apply the Word wholly to thyself."

Then, when "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe" is laid open to your wondering eyes, and experienced by your exulting heart, you will sing with Frederick William Faber: --

"O little heart of mine! shall pain

Or sorrow make thee moan,

When all this Christ is all for thee,

A Saviour all thine own?"

We cannot leave you, dear reader, without warning you against a mistake which is so common as to be almost universal. It is that you are to be kept from yielding to sin by your strong resolutions, fixing your will as a flint against that temptation. This seems to be very reasonable. All the moral philosophies will approve your course, for this is their favorite method of conquering sin. All who know nothing of divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit teach salvation by good resolutions. Many have trusted this keeping power, and have made a wretched failure. The gospel scheme of keeping men from sinning is so peculiar that it never was conceived or dreamed of by mere human reformers. It is to commit the keeping of your soul wholly to another, even Christ. The attitude of the watchful soul is to be that of Peter's eyes when he first stepped from the ship upon the waters of the sea -- LOOKING UNTO JESUS. Philosophy says, "Eye well your deadly foes;" the Gospel says, "Eye Jesus only." Philosophy says, "Dispose of your enemies first, and look to Jesus afterward;" the Gospel says, "Look to Jesus first and last, and He will dispose of your foes." Weakness, not strength, comes from a constant survey of the hosts in battle array against you. Power comes into the palsied arm when the eye turns wholly toward the Angel of Jehovah, who encampeth around about the believer. Philosophy says, "Grow strong by a downright grapple with the

threatening foeman;" but the Gospel of the Old Testament, as well as that of the New, says, "THEY THAT WAIT UPON THE LORD SHALL RENEW THEIR STRENGTH."

The power of Jesus to keep from sin is fitly illustrated by the superintending Providence which guided and protected Noah in the ark. Did you ever notice, in the minute description of that ship, which was built to make a voyage from the old world to the new, bearing the seeds of all precious things with which the new world was to be sown, there is no mention of the rudder? Our modern ship carpenters would laugh at the idea of launching a rudderless ship, just as unbelief sneers at committing one's ways unto the Lord instead of a so-called manly, self-reliant self-guidance. A good type of the fully trusting Christian is good old Noah, sitting serene and unconcerned in his ark, as it floats over the drowned world, confiding in the skill of his invisible Pilot to keep his craft from the rocks, and to land it in safety on some appropriate spot.

How could a man who had been "moved with fear" to build his ark, sail in it, month after month, with no chart, nor compass, nor rudder, and be kept from distressing fears on that long and perilous voyage? There is but one answer -- his perfect trust in Him who had commanded the building of the ark. During this voyage of one hundred and fifty days the faith of Noah was more severely tested than it was during the one hundred and twenty years in which the ark was being prepared. It requires a higher style of faith to be passively borne along under the guidance of our heavenly Father than it does to be active in fulfilling the divine command. Obedience is the soil out of which such faith grows. If Noah had not obeyed Jehovah in building the ark and embarking in it, he could not have trusted Him so unwaveringly.

The Christian's ark is already prepared. All he is required to do is to put all on board, and to keep himself there. If he should be so unwise as to extemporize a rudder, he has no chart by which to lay his course, for each individual life is mapped out only in the mind of the great Pilot. We are as ignorant of our individual future as was Noah ignorant of his course and destination when he climbed up the side of the ark and the Lord shut him in. If Noah had unwisely taken the guiding of the ark into his own hands he would probably have wrecked it and lost its inestimable cargo. Thus thousands, in their distrust of God, lay their own hand upon the helm, and ship a crew of fears to torment them in their whole voyage, and run their vessel upon some uncharted reef, and lose all at last, or save themselves with great difficulty, when, through "the rest of faith," they might have had a joyful voyage and an abundant entrance into the haven of eternal life. How many, through unbelief, miss the power of Christ to keep them, and the ineffable peace which it brings.

"If our love were but more simple,

We should take Him at His word;

And our lives would be all sunshine,

In the sweetness of our Lord."

The very simplicity of the keeping which Christ exerts over all who "know the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe" renders it impossible to describe it. Blessed, indeed, are they whose grasp upon the divine promises makes their lives a perpetual twenty-third Psalm: "The Lord is my Shepherd."

Other ancient worthies as well as Noah were led into the secret of the Lord, which made their lives cheerful and victorious. How calm and unmoved was good old Elisha, when the Syrian horses and chariots and a great host of soldiers came thundering and tramping about the little city of Dothan, where the prophet was. They had come expressly to capture him, because God enabled him to tell the king of

Israel the words which the Syrian monarch whispered in his bed-chamber. Why was he calm and unterrified? He did not look at this noisy army of Syria investing the walls of Dothan. He had an eye which saw a mightier army filling all the mountain above them, under the command of Jehovah Himself, the celestial Captain, who appeared to Joshua before the gate of Jericho. This host and its General absorbed all his thoughts. He could look at nothing else. Not so Elisha's servant. Arising early in the morning and going forth, he sees the beleaguering army of foemen. With breathless haste and pallid cheek he rushes back into the house, exclaiming, "Alas! my master, how shall we do?"

In our mind's eye we see Elisha sitting on the side of his bed, tying on his sandals. The alarming news produces no tremor in his limbs, no change in his countenance. He coolly replies, as he completes his toilet, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them, But the trembling servant's fears were not allayed. He saw no such friendly army as his master was gazing intently upon. Then Elisha, in pity toward his frightened servant, kindly, prayed, "Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the young man's eyes, and he saw, and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire, round about Elisha as his body-guard. The servant trembled no more. He who keepeth Israel, who doth not slumber nor sleep, is at hand to protect all who trust in Him.

Reader, you see no such celestial army forming a hollow square about you. But you may believe that more than twelve legions of angels are bivouacked about you, and God will honour your faith more than He would if you had seen these guardians with your natural eyes. "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

We take from the shelves a book written by the Christian philanthropist, William Wilberforce, entitled, "The Practical View." We read again the pages we had read years ago, wondering why the writer should print in large capitals, amply spaced, six times in the course of nine pages, the words, "LOOKING UNTO JESUS!" We no longer wonder, since we have learned by experience, that this is the conquering attitude of the soul. Then sin appears most hateful, the world with its pleasures shrivels to a mote driven by the wind, the angelic mask is stripped from the face of Satan, time dwindles to a point, and eternity unrolls its ceaseless cycles. Self is then annihilated, and Christ becomes all in all. In this attitude it is easy to "subdue kingdoms, work righteousness, obtain promises, stop the mouths of lions, quench the violence of fire, out of weakness be made strong, wax valiant in fight, and turn to flight the armies of the aliens."

The secret of so much backsliding as we find everywhere is in this, the eye, bewildered by the thousand crosslights of worldly pleasure, loses sight of Christ. The keeping power of this divine vision is broken. The spell of pleasure as taken the place of the spell of the cross. The downward gravitation has taken the place of the heavenward. The soul is in imminent peril: before such, the faithful evangelist, assisted by the Holy Spirit, must hold the lamp of gospel truth so steadily that the wandering eye may see once more the lost Jesus, the only keeper of the soul.

"But," says an objector, "do not the Holy Scriptures command us to a direct hand-to-hand fight with our spiritual enemies, and to put on the whole armour for this good fight of faith? How, then, does the advice to look at Jesus only square with the Bible?" The question is a fair one, for there is an apparent difficulty here which should be removed. Our answer is that looking unto Jesus includes all the good resolutions against sin, all possible antagonisms to moral evil, and vastly more. It includes a sense of our own weakness, which drives us to the supreme source of strength. "When I am weak then am I strong." Why? Because we are led to seek an ally, even the unconquerable Captain of our salvation. And He, instead of placing us by His side to bear with Him the brunt of the battle, places Himself before us as an impervious

shield, interposed between us and the deadly weapons of the foe.

Our safety and our ultimate victory are not secured by rushing rashly out from behind our covert, and slinging a few stones at the enemy on our own account, but by abiding trustfully in His shadow, assured that He is able to bring us off more than conquerors. This thought gives wonderful significance to that inspiring utterance which rang out from His lips just as He entered into His last conflict with the powers of darkness in Gethsemane, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." This supposes that His victory is the victory of all who perseveringly trust in Him, and not that there is to be in each case an independent fight, a species of David and Goliath duel, between the believer and Satan, while Jesus looks on as a mere spectator. No, no; this is not the style of the battle. Faber, the poet of the higher spiritual life more than any other in modern times, thus truthfully characterizes the soul's conflicts with temptation:--

"I have no cares, O blessed Will!

For all my cares are Thine;

I live in triumph, Lord! for Thou

Hast made Thy triumphs mine."

The good cheer which comes to us from Christ's triumph over sin, death, and hell, is something more than the inspiration of another's heroism, crowned with the laurel wreath. It is our victory as well as His, if we abide in Him. Henceforth all we need to do, when the world deploys its hostile forces upon the field of strife, for the prize of our souls, is to point this enemy to his Waterloo defeat, where the Man of Nazareth triumphantly exclaims, "I have overcome the world." When Satan assails us with his seductions to evil, he is to be boldly told that he is a conquered adversary, and that he should better refresh his memory by reading again Christ's dispatches from the battle of the wilderness. (Matt. iv. 1-11). When death arrays himself as the king of terrors, and with bony fingers grasps his javelin and shakes it at us, we point him to the vacant tomb of Jesus. For the victory of Jesus Christ over the last enemy is our triumph. His resurrection assures ours: "I am the resurrection and the life." When Satan challenges us, we will cheerfully accept, with the hint to Apollyon that he will find our substitute, his old Conqueror, on the field. Ah! It is the power of the living Jesus to identify Himself with every believer that carries terror and defeat to our foes.

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