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"I BELIEVE GOD."

A SERMON.

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"I BELIEVE GOD."

I TAKE my text from the twenty-seventh chapter of Acts, part of the twenty-fifth verse,—just three words in the twenty-fifth verse, "I believe God."

The whole verse is, "Wherefore rise, be of good cheer; for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me."

The great difficulty that comes to hearts everywhere, not only to unbelievers, but even to professed Christians, is this, how to believe God. People look at the promises of God, and say, "Why, it is not possible that God would do such a thing for me, and give me such promises!" Instead of looking at Him, who has promised them, they look at their own hearts, and say, "I am not worthy that God should let me claim such a thing of

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Him." God teaches us to yield ourselves to Him, putting self out of our minds. We have been preaching to you these eight days about giving up self, as the only one way to receive a direct blessing to your souls. It is God's command, not ours. We should not dare to give up self, if we had not God's Word for it. And the moment you do that, you will be ready to take God at His word.

What God promised to the prophets of old, He has promised to us. What He has promised to the apostles, He has promised to us. This book is not a mere matter of history. It is God's word to every one; to your souls, and to mine. Paul was the one who, at one time, went from city to city to persecute the church of God; haling men and women to imprison and destroy them. He was walking in the street one day, going on his wicked course, when the very heavens opened. A voice came unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" My friends, have you ever heard that

voice, that seemed to come right out of heaven, to your own soul, when you have rejected God,—when you have turned from Him? The same voice echoes its words to-day in the unsaved soul, "Why persecutest thou Me?" Saul said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." It is not necessary you should stone Christians to death to become persecutors of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor to put them in prison. You can give your voice against them. You can persecute them even from city to city. You can persecute those who profess to live for Jesus with all their hearts. Yes, that voice echoes to-day, not only to unsaved hearts, but to those who are persecuting the Lord Jesus, in the form of His servants, anywhere and everywhere. The voice of God had its own effect upon Saul's heart: he fell to the ground under the power of conviction. Then and there Saul was saved, and became Paul,—God's servant from that hour. This learned and cultivated man, who under-

stood the law to the fullest extent, had now come under grace,—the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. He began to live. We hear people talking everywhere about getting ready to die. To all, whether sick or well, will come the fear of dying. Don't be troubled about that. Do not seek after dying grace, but living grace,—there is plenty of it for us all,—so that you can say, "It is not I that live, but Christ that liveth in me."

From this time, you will find, both in Paul's sermons and in his epistles to the churches, that he frequently gives his experience. He tells what the Lord Jesus Christ had done for his soul. He tells repeatedly the story of his conversion, and so often he declares the fulness of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in his own heart. So, my friends, when you go back to your homes, do tell of the grace of the Lord Jesus,—the grace that He has given you here. God is not to be with you simply these eight days; but He is to be with you when you reach

your homes. Under persecutions, trials, difficulties, God has grace enough for you all. Moment by moment, He will pour it into your souls. *Only use it!*

Paul was afterwards taken prisoner and sent from city to city. You remember how he stood before the governor, and thanked God that he could bear witness to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a wonderful speech was that before Agrippa, when, in language strong, but simple, so plain and forcible with the power of conviction that the cry was wrung from the king himself: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." You remember that forty men banded themselves together, declaring that they would neither eat nor drink until they had taken Paul's life. But God's grace did not fail even here. Paul's nephew, his sister's boy, overheard the conversation of these men. He reported it to the chief captain, who immediately ordered two hundred soldiers and

three score and ten horsemen, and a beast to set Paul upon, that they might bring him, by night, safely out of the city; and so, by the grace of God, his life was taken out of the hands of these bloodthirsty men.

I wish I could say one word that would make you realize and believe that the same Lord God lives to care for you, as He cared for Paul, in whatever danger may overtake you. Why, look for a moment at Paul's early career! He had committed terrible crimes against the Lord Jesus Christ and His followers. Does God respect persons? We have not persecuted the Christian church, as Saul did, and yet, message after message came to save him. We know not from how many unseen dangers God has saved us in the past. We know not, as we have ridden over the rails, where so many dangers encompass, from what we have been delivered. God has kept us, and we have almost forgotten to be thankful. Oh, let us commune with our God and give thanks! I never take a

position in a railroad train without saying, "Lord Jesus Christ, carry me safely to-day!" We are exposed to dangers, but we are in the Arms of safety. He who numbers the very hairs of our head, keeps us and holds us; and has promised to do thus, to the very end. Oh! if there is any security in the world, it is in being a child of God! Then believe that He who is giving us these great and exceeding precious promises can keep us, does keep us, and shall "deliver us from every evil work."

Paul was saved from his enemies, and was carried out safely from the castle, under cover of the night, to the ship, that he might go to Italy. And the Lord says to Paul, "As thou witnessed for me in Jerusalem, so thou shalt witness for me in Rome also."

The Lord brings all the common things of life into His service. You remember, at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, He took the waterpots that were there. He didn't send out to buy elegant ones: He took common

ones, and ordered them to be filled to the brim; then, to draw out for the governor of the feast.

He takes common men, as well as common things. He took David from among the sheep. When David's father said to him, "I want you to take this refreshment down to your brothers in the field, and ask them how it fares with them," David obeyed, and delivered the message. Then the Spirit of God came upon him. And when the Spirit of God comes upon a man, he is God's man, to do His work and service; and God will care for him, and no evil shall befall him. May this spirit of obedience come into our hearts! David was obedient to his father, and went from the sheepfold to the army; and there God met him!

When we are in the line of duty, it is not necessary that we should get out of our business, unless it is one we cannot ask God's blessing in. But it is necessary we should be obedient. So, brethren,

be obedient to those who are in authority over you.

As a young man, I purposed to go into business. I had a great desire to be a business man. I commenced as a clerk. I wished to go on and make that my lifework; but by and by God laid His hand upon me, and laid me aside. For four years and a half I never spoke above a whisper. But during those four years and a half the Lord Jesus led me to give myself to Him. Then (during what I called affliction, when it seemed to me I would rather be out of the world than in it) He led me to a profession which was the stepping-stone to the work He has called me to do. Thank God! I stand before you to-day to praise Him for all the way He has led me. I bless Him for this privilege of standing before you this morning, for Christ is my Saviour and my King. Don't look at your life, and say, "If things had been thus and so, I should have been different." Oh! thank God that you are just where you are and just what

you are. Thank God that there has been no accident in your life: He has ordered every step of the way. Only say, "Lord, I thank Thee and bless Thee for all; now take me and use me."

If He has not given you your work, ask Him for it. Let *Him* give it to you. I am sure that when He could take such a one as I was, and lead me where I am to-day, caring for me all through these years, giving me spiritual grace, supplying all my needs,—He can do just as much for you; and I pray God that He may. But oh! I beseech you, beloved, let there be nothing between your hearts and His great heart of love. If He calls you to do anything, say, "Yes, Lord;" for obedience brings blessing. He will never call you to do anything but that He will make it the very joy of your life, the best and the most blessed work to you that man ever did. I wouldn't exchange my work and the simple faith God has given me in His promises, for millions of dollars. I would rather trust Him to supply all

my needs than to have Vanderbilt's wealth to-day. There are no accidents: all things are of God. Paul was ordered by the Spirit of God to go to Italy. So he sailed there as a prisoner, together with two hundred and seventy-six other prisoners, and the centurion who had Paul in charge had not only Paul, but many other prisoners, so that the vessel was heavily laden. There came a storm on the sea. Do you know what it is to be at sea when the waves dash high, and when you are battened down into your state-room, and when it looks and seems as if everything was rattling to pieces,—tossed from side to side, as if the next moment you must go to the very bottom? I know all about that, and I know that the Lord Jesus can and does keep the soul resting sweetly in Him. I felt safe there in that ship, knowing that the "waters were in the hollow of His hand." There He held me and all that ship's crew. It is so wonderfully sweet to rest in Him.

A storm came up at sea; and Paul

said to the crew, to the centurion, to the captain of all the people, "I exhort you to be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of life among you; but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve."

Can you find a man who would stand before a ship's crew and say, "An angel of the Lord stood by me last night, whose I am and whom I serve"? It was the very first thing Paul said to them. He didn't say, "You need not be afraid;" but he first honored God. He said "I pray to the Lord, I am His, and I serve Him." That is the way to get a blessing in your own soul. It is the way to do good. "For them that honor Me, I will honor," saith the Lord.

So, my dear friends, as you go back to your homes, let it be your first confession, "Whose I am, and whom I serve."

The angel of the Lord said, "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar; and lo! God hath given thee

all them that sail with thee." You say, "The angel of the Lord does not come to stand by me at night, as he did by Paul." But he has given you something better, — the power of His Spirit, declared by this blessed Book. He speaks to you, and tells you God's word. "Wherefore, rise, be of good cheer, for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me."

What were circumstances to Paul? The angel of God stood by him the night before, and said, "You are going before Cæsar; you are going to tell the story of the cross of Christ. I give you all that are in this ship." And Paul declares, "I BELIEVE GOD!" He does not say, I understand God. I do want you to be bold Christians; that you may be filled with the Holy Ghost; that, whether you understand the thing or not, you will be able to stand up and say to the people, "I believe God."

My dear friends, you will go from these grounds, and people will ask you if you believe in sanctification. You

may say to them, "I believe God." They will ask you do you believe you are saved from sin. "I believe God." Do you believe He can heal a body that is sick with paralysis and cancer? "I believe God." Don't argue upon these things, but say, "Here is this Book; take it for yourself, and remember my testimony is, 'I believe God.'"

My dear friends, I would rather have that for my watchword than any other expression ever uttered by human lips since the days when our Lord Jesus Christ walked the earth. I received, the other day, the greatest compliment ever given to me in my life, when a letter came to me, on the envelope of which was written, "The man who believes God." I would rather have that said of me than to have ten, yea, fifty millions of dollars to-day; or to sit in any *high office* on the face of the globe. I would rather have it remembered of me, by all who know me, that I believe God, than that I should occupy any position of **fame and power** that man could give

me. Oh, then, my friends, be bold Christians! Be so bold that to every persecution, every sorrow, every trial, and every blessing as well, to poverty or to riches, you can say, "I believe God." From the cradle to the grave, every condition of your life may be met by the promises inside the two covers of this blessed Book.

As Paul goes on to say, "that it shall be even as it was told me," so I claimed, a good many years ago, these promises, and I believe them still. I claimed God as my Saviour, Friend, Sanctifier; as my Provider, as my Deliverer; and I believe God to-day.

Now, there are a great many timid ones here, who say, and know in their own souls, that they have received the baptism of the Holy Ghost; but they all have a dread to go back to their churches and confess the Lord Jesus at home, in the fulness of His love. Oh! believe God, that He is able to keep you in your church. You have laid all upon the altar. Stand up and say, "I believe God, that it shall be

unto me even as it was told me"; that He is able to keep me in my family, in my neighborhood, profession, anywhere and everywhere.

Do you notice, my friends, in this narrative, how little is said about the captain of the ship, or the centurion, those who started in command? Now, Paul is the central figure, — the man who believes God, — he who can say, "Be of good cheer." It is easy sometimes to stand outside of another man's trouble and say, "Don't be troubled!" but here was Paul in the ship with them, in the same danger with the rest; but, filled with the Spirit of God, he takes the place of command, — it falls to him; and when some of the crew tried to escape, he prevents them, saying, "Except ye abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved."

Paul, standing there, in an undisturbed rest of soul, could say, "Let us sit down together; you have been fourteen days fasting. Let us eat, and be strong for the emergency that is coming."

Keep under the promise; keep under the Spirit of God, and nothing shall harm you. It is only when we get away from God's commands and promises that any difficulty, trial, or temptation shall overwhelm us. Stay by the ship. So I say to you, dear friends who have come into these meetings, "Stay by the ship." The mighty One cared for Paul and for this shipload of people. He can take care of you under all the circumstances of life. Let us all learn now to believe God, and to trust in Him.

One day at the Cancer Home a dear old lady, eighty-three years of age, suffering with cancer, said to me. "Doctor, I want to say something to you." "What is it?" "I have a son," and the tears began to run down her cheeks. "He is somewhere in Boston, I don't know where; he is a drunkard. Won't you pray for him?" I said "Yes, I will kneel right down here now, and pray." She couldn't kneel. I just asked the Lord to save that boy, wherever he might be. The

poor old lady died about three months after. She had no evidence that her boy was converted. One day a young man came into the Lewis Street Mission, without a vest or coat. He sat there without seeming to listen to the discourse. At the close he was invited to the evening meeting. He came, and was gloriously saved then and there. He then learned for the first time that the Lewis Street Mission was part of the same work of faith as the Cancer Home, where his mother had died; for this boy was the wandering boy we had prayed for, three months before. He had wandered into the Mission in a half-drunken state, not knowing how he reached there. He didn't know of the prayer offered for his salvation; but God knew it, and answered it.

My dear friends, if I could only make you believe God! If I could say anything that would send you to your homes, sincerely declaring "I believe God." " should feel that I had done something that would redound

to the glory of God through all eternity. Then take my word, as well as God's word, that it is a grand thing to believe God.

You believe your friend, you never question father's or mother's utterances. I say to you, above all, *believe God*. Trying circumstances will come in your life; they come to all. But if you can stand up before God, before your family, and before the neighborhood in which you live, and with a peaceful face commit all your care and burden to Him, with an unwavering faith, then you will command an influence that shall reach the hearts of all about you. God did not disappoint Paul. The entire crew was saved. The tackling and everything that could burden the ship was thrown overboard; but not a man was lost. I am sure the same God lives to-day, — lives to save His people from their sins; lives to make true all his promises, to you, as well as to me; lives to enable you, by his grace, to stand up and say, "I believe God."

It is the last service but one that I shall have the opportunity to speak to you. If the Word of God has not already become dearer to you than all books on the face of the earth, I beseech you to ask God to give you a love for it.

"I believe God." For the last three weeks these words have been running through my brain continually. I hope they will be written there forever. Will you make them yours, eternally yours?

From our cottage on the beach we look right on to the broad ocean. When we first moved there, my little three year-old one morning ran into my room, saying, "Papa, there is a boy down on our water!" She knew the house was ours, and she claimed everything before it. So I say to you, my friends, claim everything before you in the ocean of God's love, and superabounding goodness and mercy. A whole sea of promises are ours. Whoever else walks on that sea, at Jesus' command, may it be our eager

desire, as it is our privilege, to follow on, and take the hand of Jesus, and know the upholding of His "right hand of righteousness"!

O Lord God, Thou who livest forever, whose Word endureth forever, we give Thee all glory and praise for the baptism of power that rests upon our hearts! We have spoken in weariness of body, but in rest of soul, We would say here upon our knees, unitedly, "I believe God!" Thanking Thee for Thy grace so freely given. we are Thine, now and forever. Amen and amen!