

## THE DANGER OF DOUBTING

### NO. 439

A SERMON  
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 16, 1862,  
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul.”*  
*1 Samuel 27:1.*

TO doubt the loving-kindness of God is thought by some to be a very small sin. In fact, some have even exalted the doubts and fears of God’s people into fruits and grace, and evidences of great advancement in experience. It is humiliating to observe that certain ministers have pampered and petted men in unbelief and distrust of God, being in this matter false to their Master, and to the souls of His people. Far be it from me to smite the feeble of the flock; but their sins I must and will smite, since it is my firm conviction that to doubt the kindness, the faithfulness, and the love of God is a very heinous offense! Unbelief is akin to Atheism. Atheism denies God’s existence—unbelief denies His goodness, and since goodness is essential to God, these doubts do, in reality, stab at His very being! That can be no light sin which makes God a liar; and yet unbelief does, in effect, cast foul and slanderous suspicion upon the veracity of the Holy One of Israel. That can be no small offense which charges the Creator of heaven and earth with perjury; and yet, if I mistrust His oath, and will not believe His promises, sealed with the blood of His own Son, I count the oath of God to be unworthy of my trust; and so I do, in very deed, accuse the King of heaven as false to His covenant and oath! Besides, as I shall have to show this morning, unbelief of God is the fountain of innumerable sins. As the black cloud is the mother of many raindrops, so dark unbelief is the parent of many crimes; and what if I should say that unbelief concentrates the vice of ages into a moment, and gathers up the virus of all the offenses of the race in one transgression? I would not be far from the mark. But I shall say no strong words in the preface, because I think the incident in David’s history, to which I shall call your attention this morning, will be in itself enough to lead you to give your verdict with mine, that unbelief is a damnable sin, that it should be condemned by every believer, should be struggled against, should if possible be subdued, and certainly should be the object of our deep repentance and abhorrence!

Now let us listen to David, and may his sin and sorrow be as beacons to warn us from evil! “David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul.” First, I shall remark that *what he said in his heart was false*; secondly, we shall ask the question, *how he came to think so?* And then we shall notice, in the third place, *what mischief came of such a hard unbelieving thought.*

**I.** First, THE THOUGHT OF DAVID’S HEART WAS FALSE. He said, “I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul.”

We might conclude it to be false upon the very face of it, *because there certainly was no evidence to prove it.* On no one occasion had the Lord deserted His servant; he had been placed in perilous positions very often, but not one single instance had occurred in which God’s strength was not sufficient for him. The trials to which he had been exposed had been varied; they had not assumed one form, only, but many; yet in every case, He who sent the trial had also graciously ordained a way of escape. David could not put his finger upon any entry in his diary, and say of it, “Here is evidence that God will forsake me.” In looking back through his whole life, from the time when he kept his father’s sheep, and slew the lion and the bear, onward to the day when he challenged the Philistine, and upward to this moment, when he had just escaped from his bloodthirsty pursuer, he could not find a solitary fact which would be proof that God had changed His mind, and would leave His anointed to fall into the hands of his cruel enemy.

Now, mark—when you and I doubt God’s Word there is this to be said of it—we mistrust it without a cause. I bear my willing testimony that I have no reason to doubt my Lord, nor even the shadow of a reason—and I think that you who were in Christ many years before I knew Him can say that since you have trusted in Him you have never once had any reason to suspect His faithfulness, or to imagine that

He would cast you away. Brothers and sisters, we condemn not a man without evidence! Shall we condemn our loving Lord without evidence? I challenge heaven, and earth, and hell, this morning, to bring any proof that God is untrue! From the depths of hell I call the fiends, and from this earth I call the tried and afflicted believers, and to heaven I appeal and challenge the long experience of the blood-washed host, and there is not to be found in the three realms a single one who can bear evidence of a fact which should disprove the goodness of God, or weaken His claim to be trusted by His servants! Now, let our unbelief be thrown out; let our sense of justice expel it at once. Let us be just to God as well as to man; and if never yet has He failed any of His people, or broken a solitary promise, far be it from us to doubt or to be unbelieving!—

***“Thus far we prove that promise good  
Which Jesus ratified with blood.  
Still He is gracious, wise and just,  
And still in Him let Israel trust.”***

But, again, what David said in his heart was not only without evidence, but *it was contrary to evidence*. What reason had he to believe that God would leave him? Rather, how many evidences had he to conclude that the Lord neither could nor would leave him? “Your servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them.” That was good reasoning. Why not reason like that now, David? Why not say, “Your servant slew the Philistine, Your servant escaped from the javelins of Saul, when the mad monarch would have pinned him to the wall; Your servant escaped from all the devices of Doeg; Your servant escaped when Saul pursued him in the tracks of the wild goats and in the caves of Engedi; Your servant escaped out of the power of Achish, the Philistine; and, lo, this Saul, who seeks my head, out of his hand shall I escape also”? That would have been a rational conclusion, a proper way of dealing with evidence; but to say, after such love and kindness past, “He will let me sink at last,” was to draw a lying conclusion, and to bring in a verdict directly contrary to the evidence!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, your case is similar—at least mine is. O Lord God! You have not left us at any time. We have had dark nights, but the star of love has shone forth amid the blackness; we have had our cloudy days, but our sun has never set until we have had glimpses of sunlight from heaven. We have gone through many trials, but never to our detriment, always to our advantage; and the conclusion from our past experience—at least, I can speak of my own positively—is that He who has been with us in six troubles, will not forsake us in the seventh! He has said, “I will never, never leave you and will never, never, never forsake you”; do not think I repeat these “nevers” too often? I repeat the text just as I find it in the Greek! What we have known of our faithful God goes to show that He will keep us to the end, and even to the last, He will be our helper. Go not, then, contrary to evidence! What should we say of a jury who, after having heard a case in which the verdict should evidently have been “Not Guilty,” should, nevertheless, say “Guilty”? Let the earth ring with the cry of indignation! A man has been condemned not only unjustly, but in the very teeth of evidence which proved his innocence! O heaven and earth, ring with the universal indignation of honest men, that we should think God untrue, when all the evidence of our past lives goes to prove that He *is* true and faithful to His Word—

***“Our Savior’s Word abides sure,  
His record is on high,  
He who has made our souls secure,  
Was never known to lie!  
Munitions of stupendous rock  
Our dwelling place shall be;  
There shall our souls without a shock  
The wreck of nature see.”***

Thirdly, this exclamation of David was *contrary to God’s promises*. Samuel had poured the anointing oil on David’s head—God’s earnest and promise that David would be king. Let David die by the hand of Saul, and how can the promise be fulfilled? Many times had God assured His servant David that He had chosen the son of Jesse to be the leader of His people; let him die, and how can that be true? It was, therefore, contrary to the promise of God that David should fall by his enemy’s hand! Christian, it is contrary to every promise of this precious book that you should become the victim of the lion of hell! How, then, could He be true who has said, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not

have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, they may forget, yet will I never forget you.” What were the value of that promise—“The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, says the Lord that has Mercy on you”? Where were the truth of Christ’s words—“I give unto My sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father which gave them to Me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand”? Where were the doctrines of grace? They would be proved to be a lie if one child of God should perish! Where were the veracity of God, His honor, His power, His divine grace, His covenant, His oath, if any of those for whom Christ has died, and who have put their trust in Him, should, nevertheless, be cast away? Oh, by this precious book which you believe to be true, unless you are prepared to cast it away as a vile thing of falsehood, distrust not your Lord, but rather say—

*“The gospel bears my spirit up;  
A faithful and unchanging God  
Lays the foundation for my hope  
In oaths, and promises, and blood.”*

But further, this wicked exclamation of David was *contrary to what he himself had often said*. Here I convict myself, I remember on one occasion, to my shame, being sad and doubtful of heart, and a kind friend took out a paper and read to me a short extract from a discourse upon faith. I very soon detected the author of the extract; my friend was reading to me from one of my own sermons! Without saying a word he just left it to my own conscience, for he had convicted me of committing the very fault against which I had so earnestly declaimed. Often might *you*, brothers and sisters, be found out in the same inconsistency; “Oh,” you have said, “I could trust Him though the fig tree did not blossom, and though there were no flocks in the field, and no herd in the stall.” Ah, you have condemned the unbelief of other people, but when it touched you, you have trembled, and when you have come to run with the horsemen, they have wearied you, and in the swellings of Jordan, *you* have been troubled. So was it with David. What strong words he had often said when he addressed others! He said of Saul, “His time shall come to die; I will not stretch out my hand and touch the Lord’s anointed.” He felt sure that Saul’s doom was signed and sealed; and yet, in the hour of his unbelief, he says, “I shall yet one day fall.” What a strange contradiction was that! What a mercy it is that *God* changes not, for *we* are changing two or three times a day! But our own utterances, our own previous convictions are clean contrary to the idea that He can ever leave us or forsake us. I appeal, as did that ancient worthy who appealed from Philip drunk to Philip sober, I appeal from Philip unbelieving to Philip in a proper state of mind. I bring up before you your own thoughts, your own emotions, your own joyous shouts of song, your own psalms of victory, and I ask you to make these consistent with your present doubts. “Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should arise against me, in this will I be confident.” That is David. “I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.” That is David, too! “I will love You, O Lord, my strength! The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from my enemies.” That is David. “I shall one day fall by the hand of Saul.” That is David again. Do not fetch up any other evidence; let the man convict himself; his unbelief is absurd from his own showing. So with you and with me, brothers and sisters; we are great fools when we doubt God, and that is saying the best of it; what the worst of it is, God only knows. O Lord, from this great sin deliver us!

Yet once more, this exclamation of David was *contrary to the facts*. I mean not merely contrary to the facts that were in evidence, but contrary to the facts that were transpiring at that very moment! Where was Saul? Saul was seeking a miserable witch of Endor, to raise Samuel from the dead. The spears of the Philistines were being sharpened for the battle, and the arrows were being made ready upon the string that should reach the heart of the King of Israel; and yet, here is David, just within a short period of attaining the kingdom and of seeing Saul slain, saying, “I shall one day fall by the hand of Saul.” Oh, if he could have read the mysteries, if he could have understood what the right hand of God was doing, and what the Eternal One designed for him, he would never have whined thus his unbelief! And so with you and with me. “Ah, but,” you say, “it is not so with me this morning; I am brought very low.” Yes, and God is getting ready to bring you up very high. “Ah, but my trouble is a very dreadful one.”

Yes, and His bare arm is a very potent one, and He knows how to deliver His children. “Yes, but I do not see.” No, and you do not *need* to see! It is still being done. God’s purposes are ripening. Now, do not misjudge them! Do not antedate the time of your deliverance, but patiently wait and quietly hope. I know that some of us, when we have escaped from our trials, have said, “Well, if I had known it had been so, I would not have been so troubled about it.” Just so, and now, I pray you, though you do not know it, yet still believe it, and do not run contrary to the fact in doubting God! You are very poor, are you? But still you take care of your children. What would you say to your child if he were sitting down at the table crying? “What do you cry for, child?” “Because there is no food for me.” “Why, silly child,” you would say, “I was just cutting a slice from the loaf; do not cry till you are sure there is no food.” The Lord says to us often, “What do you cry for, silly child? This is what I was doing behind the mysteries of My providence, getting ready some sweet and precious mercy for you.”—

*“The clouds you so much dread,  
Are big with mercies and shall break  
With blessings on your head!  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace.  
Behind a frowning Providence  
He hides a smiling face!”*

II. But I must now, while my strength shall hold out, proceed to the second part of the discourse, namely, HOW WAS IT THAT DAVID CAME TO THINK THUS OF HIS GOD?

The first answer I give is, *because he was a man*. The best of men are men at the best, and man at the best is such a creature that well might David himself ask, “Lord, what is man?” If we always performed feats of faith, onlookers might imagine that we were demi-gods, for in truth, I say that the feats which a man of faith can do are only surpassed by the doings of the Almighty One Himself! Next to omnipotence is faith; no, not next to it in some respects, for faith can do all that omnipotence can, when God makes it strong. What were the hosts of the Philistines to Samson? “Heaps upon heaps with the jawbone of an ass, have I slain a thousand men.” And what were the pillars of the temple to him? He bowed himself with all his strength, and pulled down the goodly palace of the Philistines upon the princes and upon the assembled multitudes! Faith can do everything; but if faith never gave place to unbelief, we might be tempted to lift up the believer into a demi-god and think him something more than mortal! That we might see that a man full of faith is still a man that we might glory in infirmities, since by them the power of God is the more clearly proved, therefore, God was pleased to let the feebleness of man grievously show itself. Ah, it was not *David* who achieved these former victories, but *God’s grace* in David! And now, when that is removed for a moment, see what Israel’s champion becomes!

But again; you must consider that *David had been exposed to a very long trial*. Not for one week, but for month after month he had been hunted like a partridge upon the mountains. Now, a man could bear one trial, but perpetuity of tribulation is very hard to bear. To lay one’s head down upon the block seems to me to be comparatively easy, but to be strapped, as were some of the martyrs, to a stake, and be roasted on a slow fire, hour after hour, while the limbs wither in the heat, must have been awful. The martyrdom of an hour is sudden glory, but the martyrdom of a life—there needs to be something more than human to endure this! To be crucified, to have the hands and feet nailed fast, but the vital parts intact, to have all the pangs of death, with all the strength of life! Now, such was David’s trial—always safe, but always harassed; always secure through God, but always hunted about by his foe. No place could give him any ease. If he went unto Keilah, then the citizens would deliver him up; if he went into the woods of Ziph, then the Ziphites betrayed him; if he went even to the priests of God, there was that dog of a Doeg to go to Saul and accuse the priest! Even in Engedi or in Adullam, he was not secure; he was secure, I grant you, in God, but always persecuted by his foe. Now, this was enough to make the wise man mad, and to make the faithful man doubt. Do not judge David too harshly; at least judge yourselves as harshly. I think that if we also were tempted, we would fall as he did.

Then again, you must remember, *David had passed through some strong excitements of mind*. Just a day or so before he had gone forth with Abishai in the moonlight to the field where Saul and his host lay sleeping; they passed the outer circle where the common soldiers lay, and quietly and stealthily the two heroes passed without awaking any. They came at last to the spot where the captains of the hundreds

slept, and they trod over their slumbering bodies without awakening them. They reached the spot where Saul lay, with his spear stuck in the earth at his bolster, and his cruse of water standing, that he might refresh himself if he awoke in the night. And Abishai said, "The Lord has delivered him into your hands; let me smite him; I will smite him but this once." David holds back Abishai's hand; he will not permit it, but he says, "As the Lord lives; the Lord shall smite him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall descend into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth my hand against the Lord's anointed." So he escaped from this temptation, as he had previously, when he only cut off the hem of Saul's robe, instead of smiting him as he might have done in the caves of Engedi. Now, brothers and sisters, a man may do these great things helped by God, but do any of you know that it is a sort of natural law with us, that after a strong excitement there is a reaction? I will give you a picture. There is Elijah yonder. He has built an altar unto the Lord his God; the priests of Baal have built another. Elijah appeals to God. "He who answers by fire, let him be God." The priests of Baal supplicate their god. He answers not. They cut themselves with lancets and with knives. Their dumb idol could not affirm his own deity! Elijah mocks them. "Cry aloud," he said, "for he is a god; perhaps he sleeps, and needs to be awakened." So in grim sarcasm, he stirs up the wrath of the priests of Baal. No answer comes. Now it is Elijah's turn. He bows the knee, and lifts up his hands to heaven. The flame descends! Be astonished, you unbelievers! It licks up even the water in the trenches, and the 12 consecrated stones are themselves consumed and are carried in smoke to heaven, even as the flame of the burnt offering. "Take the prophets of Baal, let not one escape," cries the stern Elijah. He grasps one of them and drags him down the hill, and the willing people follow, dragging by the hair of their heads the false priests down to the brook. And then, stripping to his sleeves, he dyes himself with the gore and blood of these, the haters of God, and the betrayers of His people, till the brook runs red with the smoking blood of Baal's priests! Now, what will happen after that? When Elijah gets away from all this heroic daring, because he is a man, there will be a reaction, and lo, he is afraid of Jezebel, who hunted for his life! He cries, "Let me die; I am no better than my fathers," and he hides himself, till God says, "What are *you* doing here, Elijah?" Now if Elijah, the most iron saint of ancient times, felt the result of human weakness, much more might we expect it of David! So that again I say, we are not to judge *him* too severely, unless we feel prepared with the same measure that we mete to him to also mete out to ourselves!

But there was another reason, for we are *not* to excuse David. He sinned, and that not merely through infirmity, but through evil of heart. It seems to us that David had put off prayer. In every other action of David's, you find some hint that he asked counsel of the Lord. He says to Abiathar, "Bring here the ephod," and he enters upon no enterprise without first asking of the Urim and Thummim what was God's mind. But this time, what did he talk with? Why, with the most deceitful thing that he could have found—with his own heart, for "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." I do not find that he mentioned it to God's priest; he did not make it a matter of prayer; he could not venture to pray when he undertook it himself. No, he acted on his own head, and a man will soon find that head is full of addled brains that can judge without appealing to God! Having restrained prayer, he did the foolish act; he forgot his God, he looked only at his enemy, and it was no wonder that when he saw the force and strength of the cruel monarch, and the perseverance of Saul's persecution—that he said, "I shall one day fall before him." Brothers and sisters, would you wish to hatch the egg of unbelief till it turns into a serpent? Put off prayer! Would you see evils magnified, and mercies diminished? Would you find your tribulations increased sevenfold, and your faith diminished in proportion? Put off prayer? I say unto you this day, if you will neglect your closet, all the troubles you have ever had shall be as nothing compared with what will yet come upon you! The little finger of your future doubts shall be thicker than the loins of your present mental anguish! You shall know what man can do when he leaves his God, and you shall find out in the bitterness of your soul what an evil thing it is to leave the living fountain and hew out to yourself a broken cistern which can hold no water!

I have thus, I think, as well as may be, opened up the causes of David's unbelief. Some of them will hit your case, my brothers and sisters. You may find some portion here. Well, if you find out the cause, remember that the remedy lies somewhere near it. If a forgotten closet will make you weep, a frequented closet will make you smile. If the excitement of delight has been followed by depression, that excitement itself, if you seek it again, will be the best cure. And finally, your mind, made strong to endure these blessed excitements shall be sweetly strengthened for the bliss of heaven, and on earth you shall be

capable of enjoying the heaven which some of the saints have known before they crossed the stream of death!

**III.** But I must hasten on, for my failing voice tells me I must soon conclude; But not until we have discharged, briefly, the third point—WHAT WERE THE ILL EFFECTS OF DAVID’S UNBELIEF?

It strikes me that this was one of the sins to which David referred, when he asked God to forgive the sins of his youth, and his former transgressions. We have looked so often at his sin with Bathsheba, that we have been apt to think he had no other faults. Whereas, one must say it, the life of David for some few months after this exclamation, was sad, and one might wish it could be blotted out; it was sad, sad, indeed. But we will talk of these matters in detail, though briefly.

What did his unbelief make him do first? *It made him do a foolish thing*, the same foolish thing which he had regretted once before. Now, we say a burnt child always dreads the fire; but David had been burnt, and yet, in his unbelief, he puts his hand into the same fire again! He went once to Achish, king of Gath, and the Philistines said, “This is that David of whom they said, ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.’” And David was greatly afraid, and “feigned himself mad in their hands, and scabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard,” (which to the Eastern was the surest sign of his being mad if he despised his beard), and they drove him away, for Achish said, “Why, then, have you brought him to me? Have I need of mad men that you have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?” Now, he goes to the same Achish again! Yes, and mark you, my brothers and sisters, although you and I know the bitterness of sin, yet if we are left to our own unbelief, we shall fall into the same sin again! I know we have said, “No! Never, never! I know so much by experience what an awful thing this is.” Your experience is not worth a trifle to you apart from the continual restraints of divine grace! If your faith fails, everything else goes down with it; and you, you gray-headed professor, will be as big a fool as a very boy, if God leaves you alone! In fact, I must say it, reverencing as I do the gray head, that of all fools in the world, old fools are the worst. I have seen more falls among aged Christians than among any other sort, till one has been apt to pray, “Lord, save those who are in the slippery paths of old age.” I have often said there is no Scriptural example of a young man falling into any gross, great sin. All the Scriptural examples are quite the other way, and think I might say, as the pastor of this church, that the most sorrowful cases of excommunication we have ever had, have been about men who had some gray hair on their heads, or were fathers of families; far more often than about the young. The reason being, I think, this—that often the old saint begins to rely on his past experiences, and if he does so, it is all over with him; for we are just as much fools after 70 years’ spiritual education, as we were when we first entered into the school, if the Lord leaves us to ourselves. We do grow. We do learn, the Lord being with us; but if we are left, we are no stronger after we have been established in the faith, than we were before! I say again, if we were left at any moment, no matter who we may be, sin would soon be our pursuit, and iniquity our companion. We must offer the same prayer, “Hold You me up, and I shall be safe,” to the very end of the chapter, and we must finish our lives just as David finished the 119th Psalm with that confession, “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments.”

But next—for the beginning of sin is like the letting out of water, and we go from bad to worse, *he went over to the Lord’s enemies*. Would you have believed it—he who killed Goliath sought refuge in Goliath’s land! He, who smote the Philistines, trusts in the Philistines! No, more, he, who was Israel’s champion, becomes the chamberlain to Achish, for Achish said, “Therefore will I make you keeper of my head forever,” and David became the captain of the bodyguard of the King of Philistia and helped to preserve the life of one who was the enemy of God’s Israel! Ah, if we doubt God, we shall soon be numbered among God’s foes. Inconsistency will win us over into the ranks of His enemies, and they will be saying, “Why are these Hebrews here?” And the question will be passed round from man to man, “Is not this David of whom they said, ‘Saul has slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands?’ What is David doing here?” Brothers and sisters, if “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall,” I may, without wresting Scripture, say, “Unbelief goes before destruction, and a doubting spirit before a fall,” for so it is. “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” “The just shall live by faith, but if any man turn back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him”—the two sentences put together as if the failure of our faith would surely lead to a turning back to sin!

Have patience with me while I notice once again that not only thus did David become numbered with God's enemies, but that *he actually went into open sin*. You will read this chapter, and the next, and the next, at your leisure—and you will perhaps have leisure this afternoon; it will keep you from talking about ministers, and about a great many other things that are just as well let alone on Sunday afternoons, for that is the general gossip of Sunday afternoon—“Did you ever hear Mr. So-and-So, and Mr. So-and-So?”—ministers being thought a subject useful for Sundays—that is to say, the pulling of them to pieces! However, if instead of that, you will read those chapters, you will be profited. David did two very evil things. He acted the part of a liar and deceiver. Harsh words, you will say, to use of David; but they are not too harsh. He went out and slew the Geshurites, and sundry other tribes, and this he did often. When he came back, Achish asked him where he had been, and he said he had been to the south of Judah—that is to say, he made Achish believe that his incursions were made against his own people, instead of being made against the allies of Philistia. This he kept up for a long time, and then, as one sin never goes without a companion, for the devil's hounds always hunt in twos, he was guilty of bloodshed, for into whatever town he went, he put *all* the inhabitants to death! He spared neither man, nor woman, nor child, lest they should tell the king of Philistia where he had been. So that one sin led him on to another. And this is a very sorrowful part of David's life. He who believes God, and acts in faith, acts with dignity, and other men will stoop before him and pay him reverence; but he who disbelieves his God, and begins to act in his own carnal wisdom, will soon be this, and that, and the other, and the enemy will say, “Aha, aha, so would we have it,” while the godly will say, “How are the mighty fallen! How has the strong man been given up unto his adversary!” O that God the Holy Spirit may preserve our faith in God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, that so we may be preserved without spot until the day of His appearing!

Furthermore, not only was David guilty of all this, but he was on the verge of being guilty of still worse sin—*of overt acts of warfare against the Lord's people*; for David, having become the friend of Achish, when Achish went to battle against Israel, he said to him, “Know you assuredly, that you shall go out with me to battle, you and your men.” And David professed his willingness to go. We believe it was only a feigned willingness; but then, you see, we convict him again of falsehood. The day comes when a decisive battle is to be fought, and the lords of the Philistines go on before Achish. “Where is David?” “Oh, David is with king Achish in the rear-guard,” for the king had made him captain of his lifeguard. He was thus raised to a very high position, the companion of Achish, at his right hand—the commander of the men who were to protect the king in case of danger. Now, there is David, and he is going up against his own people, to fight against his own king, to do mischief against God's own chosen land! It is true that God interposed and prevented it; but this was no credit to David, for you know, brothers and sisters, we are guilty of a sin, even if we do not commit it, if we are willing to commit it. And so was it in this case; no, we are sorry to have to say it, even when the lords of the Philistines interposed, and said, “Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which you have appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us.” And David said unto Achish, “But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant so long as I have been with you unto this day, that I may not go fight against the enemies of my lord the king?” David was still professing a kind of unwillingness to depart, while God knows he was glad enough to get off so evil an errand. What a mercy it is we have some enemies, for God makes our enemies often our best friends. I forget who it is, but I think it is old Bishop Hall, in his meditations, who says, “When the Lord's people have a deadly cancer, there are many of their friends who are too dainty to let the lances in, but their foes will do it out of spite, and then they get cured thereby; for often does the Lord let our enemies pierce us in some sore which would have gathered and destroyed us, if it had not been that their cruel wound becomes life to us from the dead.” So these lords of the Philistines were David's best friends!

To conclude. The last effect of David's sin—and here it blessedly came to close—was this—*it brought him into great trial*. Let me tell the story briefly, and I have done. While David was away with king Achish, the Amalekites invaded the south and attacked Ziklag, which was David's town. For some reason or other, they did not put to death any of the inhabitants, but they took away the whole of the men, the few who were left, the women and children, all their household goods, and stuff, and treasures; they took away everything. And when David came back to Ziklag, there were the bare walls and empty houses, and Ahinoam and Abigail, David's two wives, were gone. And all the mighty men who were

with him had lost their wives and little ones. And as soon as they saw it, they lifted up their voices and wept. It was not that they had lost their gold and silver, but they had lost everything! That exiled band had lost their own flesh and blood, the partners of their lives. Then, they mutinied against their captain, and they said, “Let us stone David!” And here is David, a penniless beggar, a leader deserted by his own men, probably suspected by them of having traitorously given up the town to the foe. And then, it is written—and O how blessed is that line!—“And David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” Ah, now David is right; now he has come back to his proper anchorage. Blessed afflictions that drive him back to where he ought to have been all the time! Sin and smart go together; the child of God cannot sin with impunity. Other men may. You who do not fear God may go and sin as you like, and often meet with very little trouble in this world as the consequence of it; but a child of God cannot do that. “You only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities.” And so, David had the rod more sharply than he had ever had it before, because he had doubted his God. And what are we? Many of us believe in Christ; but what are we if God should leave us? Let us heartily join in the prayer, “Lord, increase our faith; hold You us up, and we shall be safe!”

As for you who have no faith in Christ, this last word. If temporary unbelief is so dreadful, what must habitual unbelief be? “He who believes not shall be damned.” “He who believes not is condemned already, because he believes not.” God help you, Unbeliever, to trust Jesus! It is life to you. It will be life to you in this world, and in the world to come. Trust Him with your soul, and He will never forsake you, but to the end He will keep you! And in the end, He will bless you, and without end, He will glorify you to be with Himself forever! May the Lord bless the words we have uttered and make us faithful, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

*“It is Jesus speaks, the sinner’s friend,  
Dejected saint, today.  
Lift up your head, nor downward bend,  
But sing your fears away!  
Why do you, like the turtle, grieve?  
Cast all your cares on Me;  
My grace is sufficient, believe,  
In every state for thee.  
To guard you from ten thousand ills,  
And make your standing sure,  
Sufficient are My shalls and wills,  
That must and shall endure!  
At every time, in every place,  
In safeguard you shall be,  
And find My everlasting grace  
Sufficient still for thee!  
Jesus, assist us to believe,  
For slow of heart are we,  
grace from Your fullness to receive,  
And thus to honor Thee.”*

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