

Heaven Made Sure

Thomas Adams (1583-1652)

Thomas Adams was called the “Shakespeare of the Puritan theologians” for his brilliant and eloquent prose. His ministry helped shape the theology of a young John Bunyan. Here Adams encourages us to seek and savor the sweet comfort of assurance of salvation, which whispers that his gracious presence is with us wherever we go, bringing the joys of heaven to warm our hearts and embolden us to march into any calamity cheerfully singing of Christ’s eternal love for us—ed.

“Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.”

—Psalm 35:3

The words contain a petition for a benediction. The supplicant is a king, and his humble suit is to the King of kings: the king of Israel prays to the King of heaven and earth. He doth beg two things: (1.) That God would save him. (2.) That God would certify him of it. So that the text may be distributed accordingly, into *salvation*, and the *assurance* of it.

The *assurance* lies first in the words, and shall have the first place in my discourse; wherein I conceive two things—the matter, and the manner. The matter is *assurance*; the manner, *how* assured: ‘Say unto my soul.’

I. From the matter, or *assurance*, observe:

A. *That salvation may be made sure to a man.* David would never pray for that which could not be. Nor would St. Peter charge us with a duty which stood not in possibility to be performed: 2 Peter 1:10, ‘make your election sure.’ And to stop the bawling throats of all cavilling adversaries, Paul directly proves it: 2 Corinthians 13:5, ‘Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?’ We may then know that Christ is in us: if Christ be in us, we are in Christ; if we be in Christ, we cannot be condemned; for, Romans 8:1, ‘There is no damnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.’

B. *That the best saints have desired to make their salvation sure.* David that knew it, yet entreats to know it more. Psalm 41:2, ‘I know thou favourest me,’ yet here still, ‘say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.’ A man can never be too sure of his going to heaven. If we purchase an inheritance on earth, we make it as sure, and our tenure as strong, as the brawn of the law, or the brains of the lawyers, can devise. We have conveyance, and bonds, and fines, no strength too much. And shall we not be more curious in the settling our eternal inheritance in heaven? Even the best certainty hath often, in this, thought itself weak. Here we find matter of *consolation*, of *reprehension*, of *admonition*: comfort to some, reproof to others, warning to all.

Of *consolation*. Even David desires better assurance: to keep us from dejection, behold, they often think themselves weakest that are the strongest. He calls himself the ‘chiefest of sinners,’ 1 Timothy 1:15, that was not the least of saints. Indeed sometimes a dear saint may want feeling of the spirit of comfort. Grace comes into the soul as the morning

sun into the world: there is first a dawning, then a mean light, and at last the sun in his excellent brightness. In a Christian life there is *professio, profectio, perfectio*. A profession of the name of Christ wrought in our conversion; not the husk of religion, but the sap: 'A pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.' Next, there is a profectio, or going forward in grace, 'working up our salvation in fear and trembling.' Last, a perfection or full assurance, that we are 'sealed up to the day of redemption.'

And yet after this full assurance there may be some fear: it is not the commendation of this certainty to be void of doubting. The wealthiest saints have suspected their poverty; and the richest in grace are yet 'poorest in spirit.' As it is seen in rich misers: they possess much, yet esteem it little in respect of what they desire; for the fullness of riches cannot answer the insatiable affection. Whence it comes to pass that they have restless thoughts, and vexing cares for that they have not, not caring for that they have. So many good men, rich in the graces of God's Spirit, are so desirous of more, that they regard not what they enjoy, but what they desire: complaining often that they have no grace, no love, no life.

This is the sweetest comfort that can come to a man in this life, even a heaven upon earth, to be ascertained of his salvation. There are many mysteries in the world, which curious wits with perplexful studies strive to apprehend. But without this, 'he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow,' Ecclesiastes 1:18. This one thing is only necessary; whatsoever I leave unknown, let me know this, that I am the Lord's. He may without danger be ignorant of other things that truly knows Jesus Christ.

There is no potion of misery so embittered with gall but this can sweeten it with a comfortable relish. When enemies assault us, get us under, triumph over us, imagining that salvation itself cannot save us, what is our comfort? 'I know whom I have believed,' I am sure the Lord will not forsake me. Thou wantest bread; God is thy bread of life. We want a pillow; God is our 'resting-place,' Psalm 32:7. We may be without apparel, not without faith; without meat, not without Christ; without a house, never without the Lord. What state can there be wherein the stay of this heavenly assurance gives us not peace and joy?

Are we clapped up in a dark and desolate dungeon? There the light of the sun cannot enter, the light of mercy not be kept out. What restrained body, that hath the assurance of this eternal peace, will not pity the darkness of the profane man's liberty, or rather the liberty of his darkness? No walls can keep out an infinite spirit; no darkness can be uncomfortable where 'the Father of lights,' James 1:17, and the 'Sun of righteousness,' Malachi 4:2, shineth. The presence of glorious angels is much, but of the most glorious God is enough.

Are we cast out in exile, our backs to our native home? All the world is our way. Whither can we go from God? Psalm 139:7, 'Whither shall I go from thy face? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?' That exile would be strange that could separate us from God. I speak not of those poor and common comforts, that in all lands and coasts it is his sun that shines, his elements of earth or water that bear us, his air we breathe; but of that

special privilege, that his gracious presence is ever with us; that no sea is so broad as to divide us from his favour; that wheresoever we feed, he is our host; wheresoever we rest, the wings of his blessed providence are stretched over us. Let my soul be sure of this, though the whole world be traitors to me.

Doth the world despise us? We have sufficient recompense that God esteems us. How unworthy is that man of God's favour that cannot go away contented with it without the world's! Doth it hate us much? God hates it more. That is not ever worthy which man honours; but that is ever base which God despises. Without question, the world would be our friend if God were our enemy. The sweetness of both cannot be enjoyed; let it content us we have the best.

II. Thus much for the matter of the assurance, let us now come to the manner: 'Say unto my soul.'

'Say.' But is God a man? Hath he a tongue? How doth David desire him to speak? That God who made the ear, shall not he hear? He that made the eye, shall not he see? He that made the tongue, shall not he speak? He that sees without eyes, and hears without ears, and walks without feet, and works without hands, can speak without a tongue. Now God may be said to speak divers ways.

A. *God speaks by his Scriptures*: Romans 15:4, 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.' *Scripta sunt*, they are written. Things that go only by tale or tradition meet with such variations, augmentations, abbreviations, corruptions, false glosses, that, as in a lawyer's pleading, truth is lost in the *quaere* for her. Related things we are long in getting, quick in forgetting; therefore God commanded his law should be written. *Litera scripta manet*.

Thus God doth effectually speak to us. Many good wholesome instructions have dropped from human pens, to lesson and direct man in goodness; but there is no promise given to any word to convert the soul but to God's word.

Oh that we had hearts to bless God for his mercy, that the Scriptures are among us, and not sealed up under an unknown tongue! The time was when a devout father was glad of a piece of the New Testament in English; when he took his little son into a corner, and with joy of soul heard him read a chapter, so that even children became fathers to their fathers, and begat them to Christ. Now, as if the commonness had abated the worth, our Bibles lie dusty in the windows; it is all if a Sunday-handling quit them from perpetual oblivion. Few can read, fewer do read, fewest of all read as they should. God of his infinite mercy lay not to our charge this neglect!

B. *God speaks by his ministers*, expounding and opening to us those Scriptures. These are *legati à latere*, dispensers of the mysteries of heaven, 'ambassadors for Christ, as if God did beseech you through us: so we pray you in Christ's stead, that you would be reconciled to God,' 2 Corinthians 5:20. This voice is continually sounding in our

churches, beating upon our ears; I would it could pierce our consciences, and that our lives would echo to it in an answerable obedience. How great should be our thankfulness!

God hath dealt with us as he did with Elijah: 1 Kings 19:11-12, 'The Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: after the wind came an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still voice,' and the Lord came with that voice. After the same manner hath God done to this land. In the time of King Henry the Eighth, there came a great and mighty wind, that rent down churches, overthrew altars, and impropriated from ministers their livings, that made laymen substantial parsons, and clergymen their vicar-shadows. It blew away the rights of Levi into the lap of Issachar. A violent wind; but God was not in that wind. In the days of King Edward the Sixth, there came a terrible earthquake, hideous vapours of treasons and conspiracies, rumbling from Rome, to shake the foundations of that church, which had now left off loving the whore, and turned Antichrist quite out of his saddle. Excommunications of prince and people; execrations and curses in their tetrical forms with bell, book, and candle; indulgences, bulls, pardons, promises of heaven to all traitors that would extirpate such a king and kingdom. A monstrous earthquake; but God was not in the earthquake. In the days of Queen Mary came the fire, an unmerciful fire, such a one as was never before kindled in England, and, we trust in Jesus Christ, never shall be again. It raged against all that professed the gospel of Christ; made bonfires of silly women for not understanding that their ineffable mystery of transubstantiation; burnt the mother with the child. Bonner and Gardiner were those hellish bellows that set it on flaming. A raging and insatiable fire; but God was not in that fire. In the days of Queen Elizabeth, of blessed memory, came the still voice, saluting us with the songs of Sion, and speaking the comfortable things of Jesus Christ. And God came with this voice. This sweet and blessed voice is still continued by our gracious sovereign. God long preserve him with it, and it with him, and us all with them both!

'To my soul.' *Mine*. I might here examine whose this *meae* is. Who is the owner of this *my*? A prophet, a king, a man after God's own heart; that confessed himself the beloved of God; that knew the Lord would never forsake him; holy, happy David owns this *meae*: he knows the Lord loves him, yet desires to know it more, 'say to *my* soul.'

But let this teach us to make much of this *my*. Luther says there is great divinity in pronouns. The assurance that God will save some is a faith incident to devils. The very reprobates may believe that there is a book of election; but God never told them that their names were written there. The hungry beggar at the feast-house gate smells good cheer, but the master doth not say, 'This is provided for thee.' It is small comfort to the harbourless wretch to pass through a goodly city, and see many glorious buildings, when he cannot say, 'I have a place here.' The beauty of that excellent city Jerusalem, built with sapphires, emeralds, chrysolites, and such precious stones, the foundation and walls whereof are perfect gold, Revelation 21, affords a soul no comfort, unless he can say, 'I have a mansion in it.' The all-sufficient merits of Christ do thee no good, unless *tua pars*

et portio, he be thy Saviour. Happy soul that can say with the Psalmist, 'O Lord, thou art my portion!' Let us all have oil in our lamps, lest if we be then to buy, beg, or borrow, we be shut out of doors, like the fools, not worthy of entrance.

To conclude. It is salvation our prophet desires; that God would seal him up for his child, then certify him of it. He requests not riches; he knew that man may be better fed than taught, that wealth doth but frank men up to death. He that prefers riches before his soul, doth but sell the horse to buy the saddle, or kill a good horse to catch a hare. He begs not honour: many have leapt from the high throne to the low pit. The greatest commander on earth hath not a foot of ground in heaven, except he can get it by entitling himself to Christ. He desires not pleasures; he knows there are as great miseries beyond prosperity as on this side it. And that all vanity is but the indulgence of the present time; a minute begins, continues, ends it: for it endures but the acting, and leaves no solace in the memory. In the fairest garden of delights there is somewhat that stings in the midst of all vain contents.

In a word, it is not momentary, variable, apt to either change or chance, that he desires; but eternal salvation. He seeks, like Mary, 'that better part which shall never be taken from him.' The wise man's mind is ever above the moon, saith Seneca: let the world make never so great a noise, as if it all ran upon coaches, and all those full of roarers, yet all peace is there. It is not sublunary, under the wheel of changeable mortality, that he wishes, but salvation. To be saved is simply the best plot: beat your brains, and break your sleeps, and waste your marrows, to be wealthy, to be worthy for riches, for honours; plot, study, contrive, be as politic as you can; and then kiss the child of your own brains, hug your inventions, applaud your wits, dote upon your advancements or advantagements; yet all these are but dreams. When you awake, you shall confess that to make sure your salvation was the best plot; and no study shall yield you comfort but what hath been spent about it. What should we then do but work and pray? Work, saith Paul: Philippians 2:12, 'Work up your salvation with fear and trembling,' and then pray with our prophet, 'Lord, say to our souls, thou art our salvation,' with comfort and rejoicing.