

GOD'S KEEPING AND HOW TO MAKE SURE OF IT

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OUR subject this morning is God's keeping and how to make sure of it. How to enjoy or make sure of God's keeping will come out when we come to a consideration of whom God keeps. The Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, is full of passages on this important subject of God's keeping and we shall look at quite a number of these passages this morning, but no one of them can properly be considered the text of the entire sermon. I am going to give you a Bible reading rather than a sermon. Let us look first at John 17:11 (This comes nearer being the text of the whole sermon than any other,) "And I am no more in the world, and these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in the name which Thou hast given me, that they may be one even as we are." This was Jesus prayer. I am glad He offered it; for the Father heareth Him always, and I am sure of God's keeping because the Lord Jesus asked that I might be kept. Most wonderfully does this prayer of our Lord and Saviour bring out the security of those who belong to Him. In the next verse He goes on to say that while He was with His disciples He kept them in the Father's name. Yes, He says more than that, He says, "I guarded them, and not one of them perished. The son of perdition perished and he was one of the apostolic company, but he was never really one of those who belonged to Christ, he was not one of those whom the Father had given to Jesus Christ. Christ Himself declares that Judas was a devil from the beginning (John 6:70). But now our Lord was leaving His disciples and He turned their keeping over to the Father, and it is now the Father who keeps us, and it is this keeping which we are to study this morning. What the Bible tells us of God's keeping can be classified under five main heads: (1) Whom God keeps; (2) What He keeps; (3) From what He keeps; (4) How He keeps; (5) Unto what He keeps.

I. WHOM GOD KEEPS.

We look first at whom God keeps, and by discovering that we will discover how any one of us may be sure of His glorious keeping.

1. Whom He keeps we are told in the very verse that we have just been reading, John 17 : 11, 12. Here the Lord Jesus prays to the Father to keep those whom the Father Himself hath given to Christ, and says that He himself during His earthly life had kept these whom His Father had given Him. Those whom God keeps then are those who belong to Christ, those whom the Father has given to Him. The clear teaching of these verses is that there is a body of persons who belonged in a peculiar way to God, and whom God gave to His Son. This company of people, and their security and privileges, are frequently mentioned in the Gospel of John. Those whom God keeps are those who belong to this company. The way then to be sure of God's keeping is to make sure that we belong to this company whom the Father has given to Christ. But who are these, and how can any one of us tell whether or not we belong to this privileged company?

(1) This question is answered in John 6: 37 where Jesus is recorded as saying, "All that which the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." From this it is clear that all those who come to Christ belong to that elect company whom the Father has given unto Him. Every man who really comes to Christ, comes to Him as his Saviour, as his Master, as his Lord, and commits himself unreservedly to Him, for Christ to save and to rule, he is one of those whom God has given to Christ, and whom God therefore keeps. Are you one of this number? Have you come to Christ in this real way? If you are, God will keep you. If not, will you come to Christ to-day and thus make sure that you will be kept?

(2) We have still another description of those whom God has given to Christ, in John 17:6, He says, "I manifested Thy name unto the men whom Thou gavest me out of the world: Thine they were and Thou gavest them to me; and they have kept Thy Word." Here we are told that those whom the Father gave to the Son were those who kept God's Word. Every one who keeps God's Word may be sure that he belongs to the elect company whom God the Father Himself will keep. Notice carefully Christ's description of them: "they have kept Thy Word." That is to say, they not only hear God's Word, not only obey it, they keep God's Word, i.e., they treasure it, they regard it as their most precious treasure and they will not give it up for any gain that may be offered them in place of it. These are those whom God keeps. If we keep God's Words God Himself will keep us. Are you keeping God's words?

2. Isa. 26 : 3 also tells us whom God keeps. Here the prophet says in speaking to God, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee." God keeps the one whose mind is stayed upon Him, the one who looks not at self but at God, looks not at circumstances, but at God; the one who puts confidence in God. The keeping of this passage is a different one from that which is spoken of in John 17. There it is a keeping from perishing, here it is a keeping from all anxiety and worry. We shall see this more clearly when we come to speak of from what God keeps us.

II. WHAT GOD KEEPS.

Now let us look at what God keeps. Paul tells us in 2 Tim. 1:12 just what God keeps. He says, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep (guard) that which I have committed unto Him against that day." The word translated "keep" in this passage in the Revised Version is rendered "guard," but it is the same word that is used in John 17 : 2, though not the same word that is used in John 17:11. Here we are taught that God keeps (or guards) that which is committed unto Him. Some commit more unto God, some less, but what is committed unto Him He keeps. Some commit the keeping of their souls unto God (1 Pet. 4:19), some commit their temporal affairs unto Him, some commit their health unto Him, some more, some less, but whatever is committed to Him He keeps. Dorothea Trudel, a German woman, tells how her mother was a woman of great faith in prayer, and though her father was a drinking man who made little or no provision for the family, and the children numbered eleven, and their straits were sometimes great, they always were saved from suffering. She says: "There were times when we had not a farthing left in the house. None but God knew of our condition, and He who feedeth the young ravens when they cry was not unmindful of the petitions of His faithful child. He ever helped us in our time of need. It was on this account that our mother's favorite motto, 'Pray, but do not beg!' has been so impressed upon our minds. When one of the children was asked on what her mother relied in her poverty, the child said, On God alone. She never tells us how God is going to help, but she is always certain His aid will come at the right time." The experience of this German woman could be duplicated in the experience of thousands in our own land and other lands. It was related of Mrs. Jane C. Pithey, a member of the Centenary Methodist Church in Chicago, that for years she was disabled by the shaking palsy and received all her supplies in answer to prayer. When her husband died he left in his pocket-book two silver quarters. Besides the little cottage, this was all that she had to support herself and a bedridden mother of nearly ninety years of age. It is said "she went to God in prayer and day by day each want was met. Each needed article was asked for by name until her hired girl was astounded at the constant answers given. One morning as Mrs. Pithey was rising from her knees at the family worship, the girl burst out, You have forgotten to pray for coal and we are entirely out! So, as she stood, she added a petition for the coal. About an hour after, the bell rang, she went to the door and there was a load of coal sent by a man who knew nothing of her want, and who had never sent anything before, nor ever has since." Many other instances are related regarding her of God's keeping and supplying all her needs. Some commit their work to God, some commit everything. His keeping will be just in proportion to our committing.

III. FROM WHAT GOD KEEPS.

1. First of all, God keeps those who belong to His Son Jesus Christ from perishing. This comes out very plainly in the passage with which we started, John 17:11, 12. Our Lord prayed, "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, which Thou hast given me, that they may be one even as we are." Then He goes on to say, "While I was with them, I kept them in Thy name which Thou hast given me : and I guarded them, and not one of them perished, but the son of perdition." The one who truly comes to Christ, the one who enters with his whole heart in the fellowship of Christ, the one who fully receives Christ as his Saviour from the guilt and power of sin, the one who whole-heartedly and unreservedly surrenders to Christ as his Master, God keeps from ever perishing. No matter how numerous, how subtle, how mighty the assaults of Satan, of sin, and of error may be, God will keep him. As the Lord Jesus puts it in another place (John 10:28, 29), "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father which hath given them unto me, is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." This is the position of the one who belongs to Christ, the almighty hand of Jesus Christ the Son underneath him, the almighty hand of God the Father over him, and there he is, in between those two almighty hands, perfectly sheltered, and no person and no power in heaven or earth or hell can ever get him.

2. But it is not only from perishing that God keeps, He also keeps from falling. As we read in Jude 24, He "is able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." The word translated "falling" in this passage is translated "stumbling" in the Revised Version and this is the exact force of the word. One may fall without perishing, but one need not even fall, indeed he need not even stumble. God can keep us from even this, and will keep us from this if we look to Him and trust Him to do it. But when we get our eyes off from Him down we go, but He still keeps us from perishing. He sees to it that we get up again even if we do stumble. Though we stumble we are still kept, just as Peter was, from making utter shipwreck. Peter was in Satan's sieve, but nevertheless he was still kept by God in answer to Christ's intercessory prayer, and Christ always lives to make in tercession for us and so "is able to save to the uttermost" (Heb. 7:25). "What comfort there is in this verse to

the one who hesitates to begin the Christian life because he knows his weakness and is afraid that he will stumble and fall. If you will only put yourself wholly in God's hands He is able, no matter how weak you may be in yourself, to keep you even from stumbling.

3. But it is not only from perishing and from stumbling that God keeps, He keeps the one whose mind is stayed upon Him in perfect peace. This glad gospel we find in that book in the Old Testament which is so full of the gospel, the prophecy of Isaiah. We read in Isa. 26 : 3, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee." Then Isaiah goes on to say, "Trust ye in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." God keeps from all anxiety those who may stay their minds upon Him. If we will only take our eyes off from ourselves and off from men, and off from circumstances, and stay our minds upon God and upon Him alone and upon His sure promises, He will keep us in perfect peace. These are precious words for such a time as that in which we live, where one does not know any morning when he takes up his paper what he may read. No matter how perilous our position may seem, no matter how unlooked for and how unwelcome our surroundings may be, if we stay our minds upon the Lord Jehovah He will keep us in perfect peace. We have an illustration of this in Caleb and Joshua in the Old Testament (Num. 13:17, 26, 28, 29, 30; 14:1, 3, 7-9). The ten spies that accompanied Caleb and Joshua into the land looked at circumstances and were filled with dismay. Caleb and Joshua looked away from circumstances, they looked right over the heads of the giants, they looked at God and His Word. They stayed their minds on Him and He kept them in perfect peace. It was so with Paul also in the awful storm and impending shipwreck on the Mediterranean. The crew and soldiers were cowering with fear as they heard the howling of the wind and saw the fierceness and force of the dashing waves, but Paul looked over the waves and over the storm at God and His Word, and stayed His mind on Him, and God kept Him in perfect peace so that Paul could say to his cowering companions, "Sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God that it shall be even so as it has been spoken unto me" (Acts 27:25). Oh, we need men and women of just such imperturbable calm as that in such days of stress and storm as those in which we are now living. If we would only stay our minds upon God, if we would only really trust Him, if we would only really believe His Word that it will be even as it has been told us, we would never have a single ruffle of anxiety. There is one passage in the Word of God which taken alone would be able, if we would only bear it in mind and believe it, to banish all fears and all anxiety for ever, that passage is Rom. 8: 28, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Whatever comes to us must be one of the "all things" and if we believed this passage we would know that however threatening it may appear, and however bad in itself it may really be, that it must work together with the other things that God sends into our lives, for our highest good. How then can we ever have a moment's worry?

IV. HOW GOD KEEPS.

Now let us turn to the question of how God keeps.

1. We are told in Deut. 32 : 9, 10, that Jehovah keeps His people "as the apple of His eye." The eye is the most wonderfully protected portion of the body, and "the apple" or pupil of the eye is the most important part of the eye, the lens, and is especially provided for and protected. The mechanism of the eye and the provision for its welfare that God has made has always awakened the wonder and admiration of men of science. It is shielded and guarded in every conceivable way, and just so God guards His people with the utmost care, with every conceivable and inconceivable safeguard against their injury. Each year brings into view some new provision God has made for our safety.

2. We are taught in Gen. 28:15 that God keeps those who trust and obey Him "in all places whithersoever they go." He kept Joseph in his father's house; He kept him in the pit in the wilderness; He kept him in Potiphar's house; He kept him in the Egyptian prison; He kept him in the palace. God kept David from the fury and power of the lion and the bear as he watched the sheep in the wilderness; He kept him in security through all the years that Saul hunted him like a partridge in the mountains (1 Sam. 26:20); He kept him in the face of the many foes that arose against him when he became king; He kept him everywhere, so that David could write, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." And so God keeps us if we trust and obey Him, in all places whithersoever we go.

3. In Ps. 121 : 3, 4 we are taught God keeps His people at all times. He that keeps us never "slumbers nor sleeps." We are not only kept in all places, but also at all times. God is never off guard, He never sleeps at His post. Satan can never catch one of God's children when their watchman is sleeping. I am glad of this. You and I are often off guard. Satan can often catch us napping, but he can never catch us when our Watchman is napping.

4. But there is another thought about God's keeping which, if possible, is even more precious, and that is He keeps to all eternity. Here again we think of John 10 : 28, "I give unto them eternal life : and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand." Those who trust in Christ shall "never perish." This is one of the most precious facts about God's keeping, it never ends. We may prove unfaithful but He ever abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2: 13). He keepeth to the end. We shall never perish, or, to translate more literally as well as more expressively, "in no wise (shall we) perish, for ever." We stand to-day and look forward into the never-ending future. If we know ourselves well and look at ourselves alone we may well tremble at the thought of how utterly we may fail some time in those ever rolling years; but, if we look up to God and know Him, we will not tremble, for He never faileth, and we have His Word for it that He will ever keep us. He keeps me to-day "as the apple of His eye," He will keep me in all places, He will keep me at all times, He will keep me to all eternity.

V. UNTO WHAT GOD KEEPS.

We have seen whom God keeps ; we have seen what God keeps; we have seen from what God keeps; we have seen how God keeps; one thought remains, unto what does God keep? This question is answered in 1 Pet. 1 : 5, We "are kept by the power of God unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Upon this we have no time to dwell. Simply let me say this, that the salvation that we have to-day, no matter how complete it may seem, even though we know not only the forgiveness of sins and adoption into the family of God, but also deliverance from sin's power, a life of daily victory, is not the whole of salvation. Completed salvation lies in the eternal future. It includes not merely the salvation of the spirit and the soul, it includes the salvation of the body, that "salvation ready to be revealed in the last times," is the salvation that we shall possess when the wondrous promises about our being transformed into the perfect likeness of Jesus Christ, not only spiritually and morally and mentally, but also physically, have their fulfilment, and unto that salvation God keeps us.

Beloved fellow believer in God and in Jesus Christ His Son, have you realized fully what God's keeping means? Have you enjoyed the security that is yours, and the rest of mind that might be yours? Have you put as much into His hands to keep as He is willing to keep? Are you letting Him keep you in perfect peace in the midst of the trial and uncertainty and travail and turmoil and storm and stress of these trying days? If not, will you do it to-day? And friends, you who are not Christians, do you not see how precious a thing God's keeping is? Is it not immeasurably better than anything this world has to give? Some trust in riches, some in their own abilities, some in powerful friends, some in national leaders and "preparedness," but better, infinitely better to trust in God, for "He will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon Him, because he trusteth in Him." Will you not put your trust in Him and have a share in this wondrous prayer of the Saviour, "Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me."