

DAVID WHO RESEMBLED HIS DISTANT COUSIN, PETER

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What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee (Ps. 56:3).

In the year 1799 when the armies of Napoleon were sweeping across Europe, his general, Massena, suddenly appeared with 18,000 men on the heights above Feldkirch on the Austrian border. It was Easter Sunday morning, and as the rays of the rising sun shone on the banners and shields of the soldiers, the town council met in an emergency session to decide what action should be taken. Should they send a deputation seeking peace terms with the enemy or defend their town? The aged Dean of the church stood up to remind his parishioners that it was Easter morning, and they were commemorating the resurrection of the Savior. He advised that they should proceed with their celebration. He said, "Let us ring the bells and trust God." The council accepted his advice, and soon the bells of three or four churches were heard all over the countryside. Massena, the French general, listened and came to the conclusion that during the night the Austrian army had arrived to defend the town. He gave orders to break camp and prepare to leave. The town was preserved, and the worshipers had special reasons to remember that glorious Easter deliverance.

The story introduces a text. David said, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee." The psalmist offers advice to everyone. There are occasions when even the strongest people tremble and become afraid. Sickness, pain, and the fear of impending surgery bring to our minds all kinds of questions and dread. Financial difficulties and desperation sometimes bring increasing distress. Unsympathetic partners and domestic strife increase tension in homes and offices. Then it becomes easy to doubt, and fear of the future can oppress even the most faithful of God's children. Fear is the enemy of faith, and sometimes our spiritual eyesight grows dim. David said, "When I am afraid, I will trust in Thee." That text is even more attractive when seen in its biblical setting.

First Samuel 21 describes a most dramatic scene when David's life was threatened. Surrounded by enemies and fearing imminent decease, he pretended to be insane, and the spectacle that followed was amazing. The Philistines were watching, and if the king of Gath granted their request, they would have slain the

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man they did not trust. David saw the animosity in their eyes and desperately wondered what could be done. Suddenly his entire appearance changed as he assumed the role of a maniac. His fingers became as the claws of a great eagle frenziedly trying to climb the city gate. His spittle and saliva trickled down upon his beard, and wild behavior suggested he was a man controlled by demons. The watching king instinctively moved away as David produced a most astonishing display of make-believe. He appeared to be a soul in eternal torment, and the audience became uneasy: they feared the demons might attack them. They believed that every form of mental illness was caused by evil spirits. David was not an actor, and his performance that day bordered on the miraculous. He had been a fugitive running from Saul and finally, fearing for his life, had taken his small company of soldiers to the city of Gath to ask for protection. His desire was granted, but the Philistine lords did not trust the newcomer. They said, "Is not this David, the king of the land? Did they not sing one to another of him, in songs and in dances, saying, Saul hath

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slain his thousands and David his ten thousands?"

When David perceived his enemies were determined to kill him, "he changed his behavior before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate. and let his spittle fall down upon his beard" (1 Sam. 21:13. Horrified, the king watched the spectacle and, believing David was possessed by demons, expelled him from the country. `And David came to the cave of Adullum." Within the stillness of the mountain sanctuary, David reminisced and, writing Psalm 56:11, said: "In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me." Then certain facts became obvious.

David's Difficulties Did Not Mean God had Forsaken Him

The unrehearsed performance of playing the role of a madman was amazing, for the fugitive was not a professional actor. There is evidence that God imparted that ability to David in order to fulfill His own purposes. Even clever men would have needed training to provide such an exhibition. When adverse circumstances threaten the serenity of a Christian, it should never be assumed God has forsaken His child. God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.

David's Distress Had Driven Him to Seek Help Outside of the Will of God

Solomon said: "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe" (Prov. 29:25). He was probably taught this truth by his father. David temporarily forsook the prophets. lost sight of the mighty power of Jehovah, and relying upon himself, sought assistance from a pagan monarch. Such actions could not be pleasing to the Almighty. Believers should abide in God's country where access to the divine presence is always possible. That fact has never changed. The Lord permitted the difficulties to overwhelm His servant because He was trying to bring a wanderer home. Fear and faith cannot live together: one will kill the other.

The Darkest Hour Precedes the Dawn

This was true in the life of David. The darker the night, the more easily are stars seen. When everything goes wrong with Christians, they should look beyond the gloom and ask what God is suggesting. It is important to remember that the Lord not only delivered David from the danger in Gath: He continued to bless His servant and. ultimately. set him upon the throne of Israel. When God has a purpose for His children, He will complete what He has commenced. David and Simon Peter shared similar experiences.

The New Testament describes how the fisherman from Galilee was often overwhelmed by fear and shame. Yet. in his darkest hours, the Light of the World shone into Peter's soul.

Peter Sinking

And in the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went unto them. walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying. It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; It is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous. he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him,

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and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou

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doubt? (Matt. 14:25-31).

When Simon Peter ceased looking at Jesus, he began to sink. Yet, to his credit it must be remembered that for a while, at least, he did walk on the water. The poet offered great advice when he said, "Never lose sight of Jesus."

#### Peter Slipping

Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not (Luke 22:54-57).

Poor Simon! He, like David, had also ceased looking at the Lord and was swiftly becoming afraid. He who had been 50 boastful and self-confident was trembling. Peter should have avoided that fire; it belonged to the enemies of the Savior. He was destined to remember that awful experience throughout the rest of his life. Three times he denied the Lord, and then the sound of a cock crowing brought him face-to-face with reality. Instinctively he turned toward Jesus. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly (Luke 22:61-62).

Simon did not fall in a moment; he slipped gradually until finally his soul seemed to be plunging into oblivion.

#### Peter Shamed

And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were afraid. And he saith unto them, Be not afraid: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: He is risen; he is not

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here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way: tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you (Mark 16:5-7).

It was significant that after the risen Christ had appeared unto the Emmaus travelers, they returned to share their good news with the brethren in Jerusalem. "And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon" (Luke 24:33-34). It was significant that special mention was made of Simon. The disciple surely received that invitation, but apparently had no intention of going anywhere to meet Christ. He was so ashamed of his conduct at the fire, he could not meet the Lord again. Therefore it became necessary for the Good Shepherd to go in search of His lost sheep. What happened at that meeting, and what was said by the Savior remains a mystery. Yet it is evident that the healing touch of Christ cured Peter's ills and restored the fisherman to newness of life. As David was elevated to the throne of Israel, so Simon Peter became God's chosen servant on the day of Pentecost. The apostle, who had been afraid of his enemies,

DAVID WHO RESEMBLED HIS DISTANT COUSIN, PETER later wrote: "If ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and lie not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled: but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts" (I Peter 3:14-15).

A delightful story has come from Canada where a very despondent minister received help from a story published in a local newspaper. The local parks committee had been ordered to remove a line of trees from a certain street that needed widening. As the workmen were about to begin, the foreman noticed a bird had built its nest in one of the condemned trees. Seeing that the mother bird was sitting on the nest, the foreman ordered his men to leave that particular tree until later. When they returned, they found the nest filled with wide-mouthed baby robins. Once again they postponed felling the tree, and the mother robin was able to tend her family. Later, the foreman discovered the babies had flown; the nest was empty. When he removed the nest, he saw something white woven into the nest. Carefully wiping away the dirt, he discovered the white object was a part of a small card from a Sunday School. Printed on it were the words: "We trust in the Lord our God." That story was printed in a newspaper, and a very

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discouraged clergyman believed it to be a message sent by God specially for him. If God could protect the nest of a small Canadian robin. He would surely care for his child. Civilia D. Martin was correct when she wrote:

Be not dismayed whate'er betide,  
God will take care of you;  
Beneath His wings of love abide,  
God will take care of you.

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