

An Anxious Enquiry for a Beloved Son

(No. 1433)

Suggested by the loss of the "Princess Alice,"

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At the [Metropolitan Tabernacle](#), Newington

"And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe?" [2 Samuel 18:29](#).

THIS WAS SAID by David after a great battle in which many had been slain, and the hosts led by Absalom had fallen to the number of twenty thousand; perishing not only by the sword, but among the thick oaks and tangled briers of the wood, which concealed fearful precipices and great caverns, into which the rebels plunged in their wild fright when the rout set in. His father's anxious question concerned his wicked but still well-beloved son, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" He does not appear to have asked, "How have we won the victory?" but "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Not "Is Joab, the captain of my host, alive, for upon him so much depends?" but "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Not "How many of our noble troops have fallen in the battle?" but "Is the young man Absalom safe?" It has been said that he showed here more of the father than of the king—more of affection than of wisdom; and that is, doubtless, a correct criticism upon the old man's absorbing fondness. David was no doubt, in this case, weak in his excessive tenderness. But, brethren, it is much more easy for us to blame a father under such circumstances than for us quite to understand his feelings; I may add, it would be wiser to sympathize, as far as we can, than to sit in judgment upon a case which has never been our own. Perhaps if we were placed in the same position we should find it impossible to feel otherwise than he did. How many there are at this present moment who have, no doubt, other very weighty businesses, but whose one only thought just now is, "Is the young man safe? Is my son safe? Is my father safe? Is my wife safe?" A vessel has gone down in the river with hundreds on board, and weeping friends are going hither and thither from place to place, hoping and yet fearing to identify the corpse of some beloved one; longing to find one who has not been heard of since the fatal hour, and trembling all the while lest they should find him or her among the bodies which have been drawn from the cold stream. The one thought uppermost with scores to-night is this one—"Is my beloved one safe?" Do you blame them? They are neglecting business, and forsaking their daily toil, but do you blame them? A hundred weighty things are forgotten in the one eager enquiry: do you, can you, blame them? Assuredly not. It is natural, and it is therefore, I think, but right. Though, no doubt, David did afterwards show a measure of petulance and of rebellion against God, and is not altogether to be commended, yet who that has a father's heart within him would not rather undertake to justify than to censure the aged parent? When the old man asks concerning his son, "Is the young man

Absalom safe?" and, finding that he is not, cries, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" we would not, like Joab, go in to him and coarsely upbraid him, however much he might deserve it, but we would rather sit down and weep in sympathy with those that feel a kindred anxiety, and see if we may not learn something from their sorrow. If our own anxieties are free in that direction, let us turn them in some other direction which may be really useful, and tend to the glory of God.

Let us first, to-night, consider for a little *this question of anxiety*, then *think of occasions for its use*, and then, thirdly, *suggest answers which may be given to it*.

I. First, let us think of THIS QUESTION OF ANXIETY—"Is the young man Absalom safe?"

And the first remark is, *it is a question asked by a father concerning his son*. "Is he safe?" The anxieties of parents are very great, and some young people do not sufficiently reflect upon them, or they would be more grateful, and would not so often increase them by their thoughtless conduct. I am persuaded that there are many sons and daughters who would not willingly cost their parents sorrow, who, nevertheless, do flood their lives with great grief. It cannot always be innocently that they do this: there must be a measure of wanton wrong about it in many cases where young people clearly foresee the result of their conduct upon their friends. There are some young men, especially, who in the indulgence of what they call their freedom trample on the tender feelings of her that bare them, and frequently cause sleepless nights and crushing troubles to both their parents. This is a crime to be answered for before the bar of God, who has given a special promise to dutiful children, and reserves a special curse for rebellious ones. All parents must have anxieties. There is never a babe dropped into a mother's bosom but it brings care, labor, grief, and anxiety with it. There is a joy in the parental relationship, but there must necessarily be a vast amount of anxious care with it throughout those tender years of infancy in which the frail cockleshell boat of life seems likely to be swamped by a thousand waves which sweep harmlessly over stronger barques. The newly-lit candle is so readily blown out that mothers nurse and watch with a care which frequently saps the parental life. But our children, perhaps, do not give us most anxiety when they are infants, nor when we have them at school, when we can put them to bed and give them a good-night's kiss and feel that all is safe; the heavy care comes afterwards—afterwards when they have broken through our control, when they are running alone, and on their own account, when they are away from our home, when they are out of the reach of our rebuke, and do not now feel as once they did the power of our authority, and hardly of our love. It is then to many parents that the time of severe trial begins, and, doubtless, many a grey head has been brought with sorrow to the grave by having to cry, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." Many a father and many a mother die, murdered, not with knife or poison, but by unkind words

and cruel deeds of their own children. Many and many a grave may well be watered by the tears of sons and daughters, because they prematurely filled those graves by their ungrateful conduct. Let us all think, who still have parents spared to us, how much we owe to them, and let it be our joy, if we cannot recompense them, at any rate to give them so much of comfort by our conduct as shall show our gratitude. Let them have such joy in us that they may never regret the anxieties of past years, but may have their hearts made to rejoice that they brought into the world such sons and daughters. If we have had parents who did care for us, and anxiously said, "Are they safe?" let us be grateful to God, and let us never show that we undervalue his mercy by treating the boon with contempt.

Secondly, *this was a question asked about a son who had left his father's house.* "Is the young man Absalom safe?" As I have already said, we have not so much anxiety about our children when they are at home and when the nursery holds them as we have afterwards when they are beyond our reach. They have formed their own attachments, and have commenced life entirely on their own account. Even if they are in the same town, we are concerned for their welfare; but if they are in another land, we have still more anxious thoughts. Possibly some of you have your sons and daughters far removed from you, and I do not doubt that, if it be so, you often start at night with the question, "How fares it with my boy? How is it with my son?" He is far away there, an emigrant, or a sailor at sea, or in some distant country town engaged in earning his livelihood, and you wonder whether he is alive and well. If you know him to be on shore, you would fain know whether he goes regularly to the house of God on the Sabbath-day. You wonder where he spends his evenings. You wonder into what sort of company he may have fallen, what sort of master or shopmates he lives with, and what are the influences of his home. I am quite sure that such anxious questions frequently plough deep furrows across your minds. There are some young men here to-night, in London, come to live in our great city, and I want kindly to remind them of the tender thoughts about them at home—how mother and father, perhaps at this very hour, are thinking of them and praying for them. They would be glad, probably, to know that their son is where he is, but they might have sorrow if they knew where sometimes he wastes his evenings, and where he has begun to spend a part of his Sabbath-day. They would be grieved to know that he is beginning to forget the habits formed at home—that now in the room where there are others sleeping he is afraid to bow his knee in prayer—that the Bible in which his mother wrote his name, and concerning which the promise was given that there should be a portion read every day has not been read, but some book of very doubtful character has taken its place. Young friend, some of us who are a little older know your experience of leaving home, and we trust you will know our experience of having been followed by the prayers and tears of parents who have lived to rejoice that their prayers for us were abundantly answered. May it be so in your case, for, if not, you will go from bad to worse and perish in your sin. Yet it is very hard for a young man to go down to hell, riding steeple-chase over a

mother's prayers. It takes a great deal of energy to damn yourself when a father and a mother are pleading for your salvation, and yet there are some who accomplish it; and, when they come into the place of ruin and destruction, surely there shall be a heavier measure meted out to them than to those who were trained in the gutter and tutored in the street, and never knew what it was to be the subjects of parental prayer. O Lord Jesus, thou who didst raise the widow's dead son, save those sons who are dead in trespasses and in sins, who are even now being carried out to be buried in the tomb of vice and corruption.

"Is the young man Absalom safe?" may very readily remind us of the anxieties of Christian parents about their sons and daughters when they are away from home.

But there is a touching point about this. *It is the question of a father about his rebellious son.* Absalom—the young man Absalom—why should David be concerned about him? Was he not up in arms against him? Did he not thirst for his father's blood? Was he not at the head of a vast host, seeking anxiously to slay his father, that he might wear his crown, which he had already usurped. Why, methinks, he might have said, "Is the young man Absalom dead? for if he is out of the way there will be peace to my realm, and rest to my troubled life." But no, he is a father, and he must love his own offspring. It is a father that speaks, and a father's love can survive the enmity of a son. He can live on and love on even when his son seeks his heart's blood. What a noble passion is a mother's love or a father's love! It is an image in miniature of the love of God. How reverently ought we to treat it! How marvelously has God been pleased to endow, especially godly people, with the sacred instinct of affection towards their children, an instinct which God sanctifies to noblest ends. Our children may plunge into the worst of sins, but they are our children still. They may scoff at our God; they may tear our heart to pieces with their wickedness; we cannot take complacency in them, but at the same time we cannot unchild them, nor erase their image from our hearts. We do earnestly remember them still, and shall do so as long as these hearts of ours shall beat within our bosoms. I have now and then met with professing Christians who have said, "That girl shall never darken my door again." I do not believe in their Christianity. Whenever I have met with fathers who are irreconcilable to their children, I am convinced that they are unreconciled to God. It cannot be possible that there should exist in us a feeling of enmity to our own offspring after our hearts have been renewed; for if the Lord has forgiven us, and received us into his family, surely we can forgive the chief of those who have offended us; and when they are our own flesh and blood we are doubly bound to do so. To cast off our own children is unnatural, and that which is unnatural cannot be gracious. If even publicans and sinners forgive their children, much more must we. Let them go even to extremities of unheard-of sin, yet as the mercy of God endureth for ever, so must the love of a Christian parent still endure. If David says, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" we have none of us had a son that has acted one half so badly as Absalom; and we must, therefore, still forgive and feel a loving interest in those who grieve us.

At this time I would address any young person who has been a great grief to those at home? Do you treat this matter lightly? Do your parents' anxieties seem to you to be foolishness? Ah, let me remind you that though your course of life may be sport to you, it is death to those at home. You may dry up your heart towards your mother, but your mother's heart still overflows with love to you. You may even count it a joke that you have caused her tears; but those tears are sincere, and reveal her inward agony of soul. Can you ridicule such tender affection? I have known some young people who have fallen so low as to have made mockery of their parents' piety. It is a horrible thing to do, and woe unto those who have been guilty of it. Yet many Christian parents only return prayers and greater affection for such unkindness as this, and still go on to lay their children's case before God, and beseech him for his mercy's sake to have mercy upon them. Now, erring young man, since there is something human remaining in you, I appeal to your tenderer nature that you will not continue to offend against such marvellous love, and will not wantonly go on to trample on such patient forgiveness. Absalom, if he could have heard his father ask the question, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" was, I doubt not, bad enough still to have rebelled against him; but I hope it is not so with anyone here; nay, I trust that when the most wilful shall see the deep and true love of their parents' hearts they will hasten to be reconciled to them, and spend the rest of their lives in undoing the ill which they have done.

The question of my text is the question of a parent concerning *a son who, if he were not safe, but dead, was certainly in a very dreadful plight*. "Is the young man Absalom safe?" said David, with all the deeper earnestness because he felt that if he was not alive he was in an evil case. He has died red-handed in rebellion against his father—into what shades must his guilty soul have descended? O beloved, that is a very serious question to ask about any departed person. Where is he? Is his soul safe? I could almost pray that, when any die by sudden death, they might be God's people, and that the sinners might escape till they have found Christ. We admire that Christian man who, finding himself with another at the bottom of a coal pit, was about to ascend in the cage. There was only a chance for one, for the basket would hold no more. He had taken his place, but he left it, and said to the other miner, "My soul is saved; I am a believer in Christ. You are not. If you die you are a lost man. Jump into the cage." Thus he allowed his unconverted companion to escape. and ventured his own life in his stead. If we are ourselves in Christ, it would be Christlike to be ready to die instead of the unsaved; then should we carry out David's wish—"Would God I had died for thee." To die—the bitterness of death is passed where there is a good hope through grace; but for those to die who have no hope, no Christ, no heaven—this is death indeed. I can very well imagine any of you asking very seriously about your sons and daughters, "Are they safe?" when you know that if they have been suddenly taken away they were altogether unprepared. If men and women are unconverted when they die they will die twice, and the second death is the most to be feared. Are not some of you, my hearers, in such danger? Dear friends,

where would you be suppose at this moment the blast of death were to pass through this house and chill your very marrow? If, now, the secret arrow must find a target in some one bosom, where would you be if it should be ordained for you? Do ask yourself the question, and, if you have no hope in Christ, God help you to seek and find forgiveness by the precious blood of Jesus.

Yet, once more, *this was a question, alas! which was asked by a father about a son who was really dead at the time when the question was asked.* It was late in the day to enquire for Absalom's safety; for it was all over with that rebellious son. The three darts of Joab had gone through the very heart of Absalom, and there, hanging by its hair in the oak, his body dangled between earth and heaven. He had already been justly executed for his crimes, and yet his father asked, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" It is too late to ask questions about our children when they are dead. I should think that David's heart must have been pierced with many sorrows at the thought of his own negligence of his children, for there are hints in his life which lead us to fear that, if not altogether an Eli, he was far too negligent in the matter of household management. We read of one son of his that his father had never denied him anything, and I can hardly imagine a man to be a good father of whom that could be said concerning any one of his sons. The practice of polygamy is altogether destructive of proper family discipline, and David had erred greatly in that respect; besides which he was so occupied with public affairs, that his sons were allowed too great a liberty. And now he is vainly asking "Is the young man Absalom safe?" The question is too late. It is of no use to wring your hands if your boy has grown up to be a debauchee and a drunkard: train him while he is yet young, and bring him with your prayers and tears to Christ while yet a child. Mother, it will little avail you to tear your hair because of a daughter's dishonor if you have permitted her to go into society where temptations abound. Let us do for our children what we can do for them while they are little ones. While the warm metal flows, as it were, soft and plastic, let us try to turn it into the right mould: for if it once grows cold, we may beat it in vain, it will not take the desired image and superscription, Oh that those of us who have little children about us may have grace to train them up in the way they should go, for when they are old they will not depart from it. You cannot bend the tree, but you can twist the sapling: look ye well to it. Snatch the opportunity while yet it is before you, lest, when your children have plunged into sin, or may even have plunged into the pit, you vex your souls in vain and cry, "Woe is me." I shall never forget the anguish of a poor illiterate woman whom I had been the means of leading to Christ. She was rejoicing in Christ when I had seen her before, but when I saw her next she was in great sorrow and bondage of spirit, and I said to her, "What aileth thee?" She replied, "My children! my children! They are all grown up, and they are all ungodly. My husband died and left me a widow with five or six of them. I worked hard morning and night, as you know I must have done, to find them clothes and food; and I brought them up as well as I could; but, woe's me, I never thought about their

souls. How could I?" said she, "for I never thought about my own; and now I am saved, but they are all worldly and careless. and I cannot undo the mischief." She told me that, touched with a feeling of love to her children, she had resolved to go and speak to each of them about their eternal state; and she made her first visit to her eldest son, who had a family of children around him, and when she began to tell him about her conversion and her salvation and joy in the Lord, he so cruelly laughed her to scorn that it broke her heart. I did all I could to cheer and comfort her; but I can only say to younger persons, who are converted whilst still they have their little ones about them, never let the occasion go, lest you have to cry out at last, "O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son! for thou hast fallen in thy iniquity, and it may be thy blood will be required at thy parent's hands." God grant that this question of anxiety may be asked in time by wise parents, and not left till its answer shall smite as doth a dagger.

II. Secondly. You have had the question; we are now to speak upon SOME OCCASIONS WHEN THAT QUESTION WOULD VERY NATURALLY BE USED. "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

The question would be used, of course, in times, like the present, *in reference to this mortal life*. When a fearful calamity has swept away hundreds at a stroke such an enquiry is on every lip. On Wednesday morning how many families must have looked down those fearful lists, having been up all night watching and waiting for some one who did not come home. What a dreadful night to spend in watching for son or father, or daughter or mother; and how awful the tidings of the morning! In the case of a family near my own house, the servant was left at home with one little babe, and all the rest of the family went out for a day's pleasure and health-seeking. Nobody has ever come home! Nobody has come to relieve the servant and embrace the child! You may imagine the anxiety of that servant with her little charge, to find master and mistress and the rest never coming home. There is also a case of a mother upstairs with a new-born little one at her side, and her husband and her other children, who had gone out, never returned. May we never know such sorrow! Then is the question asked in accents of terror, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

Times of disease, also, raise such enquiries. Well do I recollect some four-and-twenty years ago, when first I came to London, it was my painful duty to go, not only by day, but by night, from house to house where the cholera was raging; and almost every time I met the beloved friends at Park Street it was my sorrow to hear it said, "Mr. So-and-so is dead. Mistress A. or B. is gone," till I sickened myself from very grief. It was then most natural that each one should say concerning his relative at a little distance, "Is he still alive? Is he still safe?"

Now, if in any future day the shadow of a disaster should cross your path, and you should be in fear that your beloved ones are lost, I pray you, if you are Christian people, exercise faith at such a time, and stay yourselves upon God. Recollect, if you become so

anxious as to lose your clearness of mind, you will not be fit for the emergency. It may be that by retaining calmness of soul you will be of service; but by giving up the very helm of your mind, and allowing yourself to drift before the torrent of anxiety, you will become useless and helpless. In patience possess your souls. The world is in God's hand after all. The young man Absalom will not die without the appointment of heaven. Your children are not out of the keeping of the Most High. However dear they are to you, and however great their peril, there is One that ruleth and overruleth; and quiet prayer has more power with him than impatient fretfulness. If your dear ones are dead you cannot restore them to life by your unbelief; and if they still survive, it will be a pity to be downcast and unbelieving when there is no occasion for it. "Your strength is to sit still." Remember that you are a Christian, and a Christian is expected to be more self-possessed than those who have no God to fly to. The holy self-composedness of faith is one of the things which recommend it to the outside world, and men who see Christian men and women calm, when others are beside themselves, are led to ask, "What is this?" and unconsciously to own, "This is the finger of God." So when you ask the painful question before us, ask it still with faith in God.

But, dear friends, sometimes we have to ask this question about friends and children, *with regard to their eternal life*. They are dead, and we are fearful that they did not die in Christ, and therefore we enquire, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" It is very painful to the Christian minister when that question is put to him, and it is not for him to answer it in most cases. As a rule he knows too little of the person to form a judgment. He may, perhaps, have paid a visit or two, and he may have been encouraged by a few hopeful words: but what can we judge from a dying-bed? It is very easy for a dying person to be deceived and to deceive others, and we had better leave judgments and decisions in the hand of God. Those who know all about the person's life, and have been in the chamber all the time of his sickness, and know more, how should they judge? I answer, where there has been no previous godly life, where the conversion must have been a very late one, and the signs and marks of it are feeble—*judge hopefully, but judge honestly*. You are allowed to hope, but still be honest, and avoid, above all things, the un wisdom I have seen in some people of holding up a son or a daughter or a friend for an example, when the individual has lived an ungodly life, and never showed the slightest sign of grace while in active life, but merely used a pious expression or two at the last. Hope if you dare, but be very careful of what you say. To parade the few last words as if they had more weight in them than a long life cast into the other scale is very unwise. It is most injurious to the rest of the family, and is apt to make them feel that they may live as they like, and yet be considered saints when they die. I rather admire, though I might not imitate, a father who, on the contrary, when his ungodly son died, said to his sons and daughters, "My dear children, much as I wish I could have any hope about your brother, his whole life was so inconsistent with anything like that of a Christian, that I fear he is lost for ever. I must warn you earnestly not to live as he lived, lest you should die as he died."

There was honesty in such dealing, honesty to be admired. If you must judge and answer the question, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" be not so hopeful as to deceive yourselves and others, and be not so severe as to constitute yourselves judges upon a matter in which you can know, after all, but little, unless the whole life has been before you. In that case you may judge with some degree of certainty, for it is written, "By their fruits shall ye know them."

"Is the young man Absalom safe?" is a more practical question when we put it about young people and old people, when they are still alive, and we are anxious about *their spiritual condition*. "Is the young man Absalom safe?" That is to say, is he really safe for the future?—for this world and for the world to come. We saw him in the enquiry-room, we heard him speak out his anxiety, and we marked his tears; but is he safe? Not if he stops there. We have seen him since then at the house of God amongst the most earnest hearers. He leans forward to catch every syllable: he is evidently in earnest; but is he safe? Not if he stops there. He is a seeker: there can be no doubt about it. He has now begun to read his Bible, and he endeavors to draw near to God in prayer. Is he safe? Not if he stops even there. He must come to faith in Jesus Christ and really cast himself upon the great atonement made by the redeeming blood, or else he is not safe. The question for you Sunday-school teachers to ask about your children is, Are they *safe*? Have they reached the point in which they turn from darkness to light?—from the power of Satan to the power of Christ? "Is the young man Absalom *safe*?" Is he *saved*? That is the point.

I believe there is a denomination of Christians who receive into membership those *who desire to be saved*. I will not judge such a plan, but I dare not follow it. To *desire to be saved* is a very simple matter, and means little. The point is to *be saved*. That is the question, and over it all our anxiety should be expended. "Is the young man Absalom" —not hopeful, not aroused or convicted, but is he "safe"? Is he saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation? Hear it all of you, and answer for yourselves.

III. The third point is to be THE ANSWERS WHICH WE HAVE TO GIVE TO THIS QUESTION—"Is the young man Absalom safe?"

This question has often been sent up by friends from the country about their lads who have come to London—"Is my boy Harry safe! Is my son John safe?" Answer, sometimes: "No, no. He is not safe. We are sorry to say that he is in great danger." I will tell you when we know he is not safe.

He is not safe if, like Absalom, he is at enmity with his father. Oh, no. He may attend a place of worship, and he may profess to pray, and he may even take upon himself the name of a Christian; but he is not safe if he is at enmity with his parents. That will not do at all. Scripture saith, "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" The words are quite as forcible if we read father instead of brother.

If a man love not his own parents on earth, how can he love his Father who is in heaven? No, no; he is not safe.

"Is the young man safe?" Well, no. We have seen him lately in bad company. He has associated with other young men who are of loose morals. He prefers to spend his evenings where there may be bare decency in the songs and the conversation, but scarcely more. No, the young man Absalom is not safe there. He may be very moral himself, but he will not long remain pure if he goes into such society. If you sit among coals, if you do not burn yourself, you will blacken yourself. If you choose bad company, if you are not absolutely made to transgress as they do, yet you will damage your reputation. No, the young man Absalom is not safe.

And he is not safe, because he has taken to indulge in expensive habits. "Absalom prepared him," it is said, "chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him." This extravagance was a sign of evil. A youth who lavishes money upon needless luxuries is not safe. Certain young men of London, with small salaries, manage to cut a superb figure, and we fear that something wrong lies behind it. Their plain but honest and respected fathers certainly would not know them if they were to see them in full array. It is a bad sign when young men go in for dash and show beyond their position and means. Of course, every man's expenditure must be regarded with reference to his income and station in life. I am not touching upon the style of men of rank and fortune, though even there a vain-glorious appearance is the index of evil; but there are some young fellows scarcely out of their teens, or who have scarcely ended their apprenticeships, whose pocket-money must be easy to count, who nevertheless indulge themselves in all sorts of extravagances, and when I see them doing so I feel sure that the "young man Absalom" is not safe.

Another thing. The young man Absalom is not safe, as you may see, if you look at his personal appearance. We read, "But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he polled his head, (for it was at every year's end that he polled it: because the hair was heavy on him, therefore he polled it:) he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels after the king's weight." When young people are taken up with their own persons, and are vain of their hair, their looks, and their dress, we are sure that they are not safe, for pride is always in danger. Let young men and women dress according to their stations; we are not condemning them for that. I recollect Mr. Jay saying, "If you ladies will tell me your income to a penny, I will tell you how many ribbons you may wear to a yard"; and I think that I might venture to say the same. But I do notice that when young people begin to be vain of their beauty and fond of dress they are in great peril from various kinds of temptations. There is a canker-worm somewhere in their brain or their heart that will eat up their good resolutions and fair characters. No, the young man with his boasted beauty is not safe.

And we are sure the young man Absalom is not safe, when he has begun to be vicious. You recollect what Absalom did: I need not go into particulars. Now, many a young man, albeit he is not reckoned a bad fellow, has still gone astray in private life, and if all secrets were laid bare, he would be almost ashamed to sit among respectable people who now receive him into their society. No, he is not safe.

"Is the young man Absalom safe?" No, David, he is not, for the last time we saw him he was in a battle, and the people were dying all around him, and therefore he is not safe. How can he be safe where others fall? Yes, and I saw the young man come out of a low place of amusement late one night, and I thought, "No, the young man Absalom is not safe," for many perish there. I heard of his betting at the races, and I thought, "The young man Absalom is not safe, for multitudes are ruined there." I saw him in loose company one evening, and I said, "No, the young man Absalom is not safe: he is surrounded by those who hunt for the precious life." It is never safe for us to be where other people fall; because if they perish, why should not we? The youth did not see this but answered me fiercely when I pointed out his danger. He said that he knew how to keep himself: it was not to be taken for granted, because he was going in for amusements, that he would become vicious. "Of course," said he, "there are young fellows who cannot take care of themselves, but I am quite able to look after myself. I can put on the drag whenever I please; I am gay, but I am not bad; I am free, but not vicious." Yes, but I wrote down, "The young man Absalom is not safe" — not half so safe as he thinks he is — and all the less safe, because he thinks so much of himself, and is so particularly sure that he can conquer where other people perish. No, the young man Absalom is not safe.

Now, the young man is here to-night who will answer to the next description. He is a very nice young fellow. All of us who know him love him and are right glad to see him among us. He is a great hearer and lover of the gospel word, *but he is not decided*. He has never taken his stand with God's people, confessing Christ as his Lord. "Almost thou persuaded me to be a Christian," he has often said; but he is not quite persuaded yet. Is the young man safe? Oh, no. He is very hopeful, God bless him! We will pray him into safety if we can; but he is not safe yet. Those people who were almost saved from the wreck of the *Princess Alice* were drowned; and those persons who are almost saved from sin are still lost. If you are almost alive you are dead; if you are almost forgiven you are under condemnation; if you are almost regenerated you are unregenerate; if you are almost a Christian you are without God and without hope, and if you die almost saved you will be altogether lost.

O my dear young brother, I wish that I could answer and say, "Yes, the young man Absalom is safe: he has taken the decisive step, he has resigned himself into the hands of Jesus, and Jesus will keep him to the end." May the Holy Ghost lead you to this.

A pleasant task remains, I will now answer that question with a happy "Yes." Yes, the young man Absalom is safe.

Why? Well, first, because he is a believer in Christ. He has cast himself upon Jesus. He knew that he could not save himself, and so he came to Christ that Christ might save him, and he has left himself entirely in the hands of Jesus to be his for ever and ever.

The young man is saved, for he loves the gospel. He will not go to hear anything but the gospel. He sticks to the truth, he knows the unadulterated milk of the Word, and he cannot be deceived and led astray with false doctrine, for that he hates. He does not gad about to go and hear this and that, but he knows what has saved his soul, and he holds fast the form of sound words. The young man is safe.

I know he is safe, for he is very humble. He is not perfect yet: he does not say that he is, nor boast of his attainments. He does not want to be the forehorse of the team, he is willing to be placed anywhere so that he can be useful. He often wonders that he is a Christian at all, and ascribes it all to divine grace. He is a lowly young man, and therefore he is safe enough, for such the Lord preserveth.

Moreover, he is very diffident of himself. He is afraid sometimes to put one foot before another for fear he should take a wrong step. He is always going on his knees to ask for direction; he waits upon God for guidance, and does not dare to do anything without the direction of the word and the Spirit. He is a prayerful man, and therefore he is safe; for who can hurt the man who dwells at the mercy-seat? He is also a very careful man in his daily walk. He labors to be obedient to the will of God, he aims at being holy, and to be holy is to be safe.

Worldlings say that he is a cant and a hypocrite, and thus they have set their stamp on him, and marked him as a follower of the despised Redeemer. He is a genuine character, or else they would not persecute him. The people of God love him, and he loves them, and he dwells among them, and says of the house of God,

"Here my best friends, my kindred dwell, Here God my Savior reigns."

Write home to his father and all his friends, and say, "The young man is safe." He is in Christ, and he is in Christ's church, and he is seeking to serve God. He is beginning to work for the Master, he is trying to bring souls to Jesus; the Holy Spirit is working in him and by him to the glory of God. Yes, he is safe enough, for he is "Safe in the arms of Jesus."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON [Psalm 90](#).

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" [90](#), 566, and "Safe in the arms of Jesus" (25 "Flowers and Fruits.").