

Seventh Anniversary of the Surrey Tabernacle – The Sermon given by James Wells on that Occasion

This was held on Wednesday the 7th of January, 1846, on which occasion three sermons were preached; Mr. John Foreman in the morning; Mr. James, of Hartly Row, in the afternoon; and Mr. Wells, in the evening. The opening discourse in the morning by Mr. Foreman, was certainly well fraught with gospel truth: and when we saw this champion for the doctrines of sovereign grace enter the pulpit, and read the third chapter of Paul to Titus — (" We ourselves were sometimes foolish, — living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another,")—we could not help feeling a little flow of love and gratitude to God; and we seemed to enter a little into the feeling of the Psalmist, when he said—" How good, and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." Ah, truly, " it is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments." That the reconciliation this day practically manifested may be for the glory of God, for the good of the church, and for the ingathering of sinners to Christ's fold, is our heart's desire:—Mr. Foreman took his text from the eleventh verse of the sixth chapter of the first of Corinthians, "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." "This text goes to declare, (said Mr. Foreman) what an awful state even the people of God are in by the fall; and it also shews forth the glorious change which is produced by the grace of God. A worse creature than sin has made man, cannot be found in the devil; a better creature than the grace of God will make a man, you cannot find in an angel. The text is not a pharisaical one: it does not contain the divinity of the present day. If I look into the magazines (said the preacher,) I there read memoirs of persons who began to manifest a spirit of piety as early as four or five years of age; but I can never find such people: those whom the grace of God brings in amongst us, come confessing what vile and wretched sinners they have been before." After some few remarks of a lively and striking character, Mr. F. proposed to notice the subject of the text in the following order. First: the state referred to. Secondly: the contrast exhibited. Thirdly: the order in which the change is brought about. Fourthly: the agency that is employed. The sermon was peculiarly spirited, and replete with sound gospel doctrine, argument, and illustration; in the course of which the author of Priscilla came in for a good thrashing. At the close, Mr. Foreman said there was to be no collection: it was an anniversary of commemoration, a song to call to remembrance.

In the afternoon, Mr. James, of Hartly Row, preached a lengthened discourse from the thirteenth verse of the second chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians. "But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." It is possible to give the people more in one sermon than their poor minds have either strength to receive, or patience to wait for: this was evidently the case with some at the Tabernacle in the afternoon: it was however, a very sober discourse; and we think no fault could be found either with the quantity or the quality of the matter.

In the evening, Mr. J. A. Jones, of Jireh Meeting, read and prayed; after which, Mr. Wells preached: the following is the substance of

Mr. WELLS's DISCOURSE

“And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.”—Deuteronomy v. 15.

I acknowledge that the words which I have selected by way of text, do not appear to bear upon the circumstance of our present assembling together; but the fact is, I have in my mind a very great objection to that spirit and tone which is too frequently exhibited on anniversary occasions; and it may have been observed by you (what I have too often witnessed) that Ministers have been led to express themselves in a way as if the Lord had only been blessing them and their people, and no others. I would therefore desire to look at the language of the text as having reference to that permanent provision in God's church, which shall be her satisfying portion through life, in adversity, affliction and death, and which is to be her continued portion to all eternity.

In our subject we have the three following circumstances presented:— First.—The servitude and state; “remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt”

Secondly.—The deliverance wrought out for them; “the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand, and a stretched out arm.”

Thirdly and lastly.—The command: “therefore the Lord thy God commandeth thee to keep the Sabbath-day.”

First.—The servitude: “thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt.” Observe, they were in a servitude of degradation, and those who were carnal really preferred the miserable bondage of Egypt to the privileges of the Promised Land; therefore they were ever wanting to turn to Egypt: ah! how true is it that our old nature is ever persuading us to be satisfied with the husks of this world! and of carnality, and that they are to be preferred even to the precious things of eternity; and nothing but divine love—free grace—sovereign mercy, can show the poor sinner to the contrary! —Yes, I said it was a state of degradation in which they were, and in which every un-regenerated soul is now placed—such are united to the devil; are united to the prince of darkness! and can there be anything more solemn—more terrific— more awful—more degrading than that I to be trending downward to the bottomless pit —to eternal perdition? That the precious blood of the dear Redeemer is as nothing? the illuminating influences of the Holy Spirit are as nothing? Certainly, the mind recoils at the idea—that these precious things should be considered by some even as offensive because they are opposed to the vain pursuits of men; I say, to think that his blessed operations in making the poor redeemed sinner acquainted with the counsels of eternity, should be treated as undeserving attention and unworthy of regard, such a degradation of the spirit of a sinner as brings him to prefer with awful avidity the damnable ways of sin—is awful indeed: but O, when the Lord opens the blind eyes of the poor sinner, though he appear yoked to Satan, deceived by sin, yet when his eyes are opened, surely he will, like Balaam's ass, drop before the sword of the Lord; he will be humbled in the dust, seeing his own vileness,—and yet at the same time, being permitted to see the preciousness of Jesus; he will be filled with humility, hope, reverence, love; and will prosper in his pursuits under the precious influences of the Holy Spirit, and in this union he shall have a sense of his interest in the atoning blood of Christ, and his whole soul shall be swallowed up in Jesus— he shall know there is a fountain opened for his sins and uncleanness; feel it effectual to the removing of all his guilt; and finding himself united to Christ —one with Jesus—he shall have hope, joy, peace, in believing, and divine strength

which will bear him up through every storm and tempest of life, and through the righteousness of Jesus he shall finally be exalted to the throne of God.

Secondly.—The deliverance wrought out for them. "The Lord thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand, and a stretched out arm."

The servitude in Egypt, was not only of a degrading character, but it was one of loss; it was to them loss of strength—loss of time—loss of their property—loss of liberty; indeed, to them, it was the loss of everything without the least gain. Pharaoh and the rulers in Egypt took good care that they should have no gain: and, what, indeed, can any gain by serving the devil? What did the cities of the plain gain? What did Pharaoh and all his hosts gain? What did any of the Lord's enemies ever gain under the Old Testament dispensation? What did Judas and the enemies of Christ ever gain? Yes, search the scriptures through, the world through—all history through—and you will find there has never been anything but loss—absolute loss; and no gain whatever in the servitude of sin and Satan; you may have thought while under the influence of carnal nature, that it must be otherwise—that surely it was not all loss—that surely there must be some gain in pursuing with avidity the gaities of life, the enjoyments of self-gratification and of worldly pleasure? but, ah! no! you—many of you—have found out the truth that in following the desires and dictates of your own un-renewed hearts—that it is all loss—entire loss—vanity of vanities, and vexation of spirit are written upon all things which come short of Christ and his precious salvation; for in him, and in those things which tend to glorify him, is to be found solid peace; lasting joy; eternal happiness—and without Him, all is loss; with Him, all is gain; gain in life, in affliction, in death, in the day of Judgment, and forever! and all who have been brought by the Holy Spirit to Jesus, sweetly to realize this; they find in Him their all in all; they find all else to have been as waste; all has gone; time has gone; their strength gone; tears gone; groans gone; and (with Paul) that which they counted gain, they now count loss—but as dung and dross compared to the excellency of Christ Jesus their Lord; and in the day of God's power they find that they are made willing to give up all for him; and then come what will, all is well—all is right—then everything is really gain:—if affliction comes, God gives us the advantage of it, in sanctifying it for our good, and for his own glory; if we have enemies (as in the case of Job) the Lord takes care rightly to bring the matter to an issue which shall appear (in after days) for our benefit, and to shew forth his praise, and the riches of his free sovereign grace; and indeed whatever the child of God may be engaged in—whatever he may have to suffer—or whatever he may be permitted to possess and enjoy—shall be well; for thus it is written," all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your's; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's!"

Is there not, then, a mighty difference between the servitude and degradation of sin and Satan, and of that enabling principle wrought in us by the grace of Jesus? O yes, bless the Lord! There is—a mighty difference; a glorious difference! and there is no loss—no final loss in the service of our Lord; it is true, you may, for a time, appear to have loss; you may even have loss of sensible enjoyment—of peace of mind, yet Jesus will make restitution for all apparent losses; and no doubt many of you are prepared to join me in joyous exclamation, "Serve the Lord with gladness, come before his presence with singing: know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture: enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and speak good of his name; for the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endureth from generation to generation!!!" "Remember thou wast a bondsman in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm; therefore the Lord thy God commandeth thee to keep the Sabbath-day." On the other hand, however, destruction awaiteth the impenitent sinner: at the end of Egypt's hard life, what indeed awaited them but death? yes—for though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished: the enemies of the Lord must

perish forever; it is indeed, in vain for the potsherd of the earth to strive with their maker. Ah! there is something very solemn in the thought that after a life of rebellion against God, the wicked are to be driven away in their wickedness; yes—for them there is to come death—judgment; eternal damnation: this is implied in the text:—"Thou wast a bondsman in Egypt." But on the other side, you need fear no evil.—No—for even the day of judgment shall be our coronation day—our ascension day—our day of glory:—for "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for those that love him;" and this, remember, is to be possessed and enjoyed by God's redeemed people for ever & ever; where they hunger no more—thirst no more—endure pain no more—subject to an alluring world and a tempting Devil no more—shall not possess a deceitful heart anymore; but, there God himself will wipe away all tears from off all faces; and there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve Him: and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads; and there shall be no night there, and they need no candle—neither the light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Thirdly.—I would notice the power by which the Lord brought them out; and by which he now brings poor sinners to know their Savior and the power of his resurrection; and these cannot forget that they were bondmen in Egypt; and they know assuredly that it is nothing less than divine love and Sovereign power which has affected their deliverance from the tyrant's yoke; and they see every day the debt of gratitude they owe to Jesus their Redeemer for the great salvation he hath wrought out for them; and they are led to exclaim, "this people shall be my people and their God my God:" yes they know in whom they have believed—they know who is their head—their elder brother—they are satisfied that he hath won for them the conquest—that it has not been by human might or human power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord, and that therefore they are willing to ascribe all their mercies to the sovereign pleasure of their Lord.

Fourthly.—another reason is; that they might continue with the Lord God. I fancy I see some prophet saying to the people; was it this or that image which had been set up, that has, or can deliver; that divided for you the Red Sea; that smote the rock for you when famishing in the wilderness; that caused Jordan's stream to roll back; that threw down for his people's deliverance the walls of Jericho; that led and fed his people for forty years in the wilderness; who did these mighty acts; who wrought those wonderful deliverances? Who did it? Do you now set up those images, as if they were your gods? as if they could, or had delivered you; but said God's prophets, renounce these images; remember the only true and living God; worship him; look to him; rely on his wisdom; his strength; his faithfulness; and all shall be well; and be not afraid to trust in Him; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength; and he is the same God yesterday, to day, and forever. He changeth not; with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning; faithful is He who hath promised; who will also perform; his covenant stands forever; and none ever trusted in Him and were confounded.

The Lord has revealed somewhat of the treasury of his grace, in order to shew you what he is, and what he can do for his people; and when we reflect upon the wondrous things that are to be revealed but which yet remain unexplored, then we feel we want a long eternity to explore one beauty after another, and that even eternity will not be long enough to explain the wonders of redeeming love; and yet sometimes the believer in Jesus is led to think he shall fail; yes; when God's promise fails; when his grace, wisdom, mercy, goodness and love fail; when his grace is insufficient; when he ceases to delight in doing his children good; but that will never be! The child of God may therefore yet hope on, and be undismayed; for greater is he who is for us than all that can be against us; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength; He is the same yesterday and today and forever—He has the keys of hell and of death, and is alive for evermore; and because he lives we shall live also; and most certainly none shall ever be able to pluck us

out of his hands. There are then four reasons assigned; first the servitude. "Remember thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt." So it was with many of you; but the chain did not set easily upon you; you were made to feel it to be a yoke not easily to be borne; but if we come to the heavenly place, is there, think you, one dissatisfaction that can ever arise there? O no! And be assured that vital godliness is everything; I had almost said, more than everything; yes; being blessed with that you possess all things; and, praised be the Lord, that he has brought within these walls such a goodly number who can testify to the truth of these things from heart-felt experience—knowing in whom they have believed, and realizing, indeed, that "Christ is precious!" Now notice, secondly, therefore, the deliverance "The Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand, and a stretched out arm." And you know it is the Lord, and him only, who can bring the poor sinner out of worse than Egyptian bondage: you are aware that service of Egypt was most cruel—most intolerable, but—" And it came to pass in process of time that the King of Egypt died, and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried; and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage; and God heard their groaning, God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them: and the Lord said I have surely seen the affliction of my people, which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for, I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians:" therefore, you see when sin is at its greatest height—when guilt's awful gloom envelopes the soul—when the poor self-condemned sinner is tossed to and fro, and sometimes goes down into the very depths, apparently to rise no more—when he feels he needs a friend—but thinks he has none—when he experiences that he is undone—that he has no strength, no wisdom, no, refuge —when he is thus brought to feel than none but Jehovah can yield him any succour and support; then it is that the Lord appears and shews him that he has wrought out deliverance; that he has provided salvation—that he can pardon iniquity—that he can cleanse from guilt and impurity, that he can redeem the soul enslaved by sin and Satan, even when thus situated—when thus apparently shut up—when the poor sin-sick-burdened soul has no strength—when thus in the furnace—when sin and the devil are intolerable, the Lord will be found; his mercy shall appear—his salvation shall be nigh. "The Lord thy God brought thee out thence by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm." And I don't believe it possible for us to be too confident in the Lord; but then it is neither right nor proper that we should attempt to lay down any settled way which the Lord should take; though I know it is too frequently that the enemy will assail us by—'Ah! if you were the Lord's, he would have heard your prayer, and would 'ere this have delivered you from the bondage of sin and Satan; for assuredly the Lord's blessing consists not only in granting us the desire of our prayers, but also, and as much, in denying our requests, and in withholding his favors for a time; we have thought that if we could get this and that; if we could be situated here or there, and so on, that all would be well—surely all would go on more smoothly; but "should it be according to thy mind ?"—No—but it is well for us that we are in his Sovereign hands; and being so all shall be well; he is too wise to err; too good to be unkind; his way is in the whirlwind; his judgments are past finding out; but he will bring it to pass; he will give grace here, and glory forever; commit thy ways unto him, and he will direct thy path; be of good courage and he will strengthen thy heart. Now here is a command, "The Lord thy God commandeth thee to keep the Sabbath-day." We have an account in the old testament of a man gathering sticks and kindling a fire therewith on the Sabbath day contrary to divine command. Now this was a two-fold violation of the Sabbath day; it was indeed a practical and intentional rejection of that which the Lord had ordained—the one in gathering of the sticks; the other in lighting the fire on that day which God had positively prohibited. Many persons may have thought that the punishment inflicted was greater than the crime merited; but if you look at the aggravation and greatness of the crime, you may become of different opinion: we should do well to remember that there was no Sabbath needed before the fall took place; because every day was a Sabbath; it could not be said that a day of rest was needed, because every day was a day of rest—for, indeed, it was all rest:—to violate, therefore, the Sabbath-day was to deny the need of the Sabbath and of rest; and not only so, but it was

also denying the fall of man; and as it is now—he who denies the fallen state of man, is an awful enemy against God; it implies too, a denial of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a crime must that be, and what a punishment must it deserve? Ah, it is not a slight thing to deny our need of rest, and of the finished work of Jesus the Redeemer who alone giveth rest—who hath declared, "Behold, I make all things new," even the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness; to attempt therefore to set aside the Sabbath-day is to say we have no need of him nor of his rest: thus may you see what an awful state the mind of man is naturally in. Darkness (indeed) hath covered the earth, and gross darkness the minds of the people; and it is not until God unmasks sin that we behold it in its true colors— in its hideousness—in its deformity; but let us be brought to Jesus; let us be led by the Spirit, and then all will be well, and all will end well. The violation, too, of the Sabbath, severs God from man and man from God; he therefore who would set aside the gospel rest gives an evidence that he has no union or fellowship with Jesus, but is far from God, and without hope in the world; and nothing but the precious blood of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit can bring us nigh to him, and into the enjoyment of his salvation; but to them who believe he is precious—most precious—the fairest among ten thousand—the altogether lovely. And again it was a denial of the delight the Lord had in his people (read Xlvi Isaiah, from first to the seventh verses included) also (read Isaiah Xlviii the 13 and 14 verses). Observe it was not the modern way of keeping the Sabbath, like our present Pharisees going along the streets with a prayer-book under their arms as if they were going to the gallows; and when they arrive at the place, are glad when the minister has concluded; they having had no delight in the Sabbath, nor the Lord any delight or pleasure in them ; but that in which the Christian delights, is the eternal Sabbath which God has provided for his children; and if the violation of the Jewish Sabbath implied all, and more than we have stated, what is to be said of those who are regardless of the Christian Sabbath (though I am aware some don't like to call it the Sabbath)? But further it implied also that as the Lord had commanded his people to keep the Sabbath day 'so would he have us to understand that he who gave the command, would bring his children into a condition by which they should be able and willing to do it; and so it is with the Christian, he shall enjoy a spiritual Sabbath; shall have rest—even eternal rest: but you and I don't know what we need rest from; but the Lord knows, and he also can give rest—and will give rest to all his blood-bought ransomed ones; he assuredly will give grace—all sufficient grace for every state, for every trial, for every conflict; he will guide us by his council and be our portion forever!!!

Note: Take from the Earthen Vessel 1846 Page 25ff