

A CROWN OF LIFE FOR THE FAITHFUL

A SERMON

Preached on Lord's Day Morning July 3rd, 1859

By Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS

In aid of the "Christian Blind Relief Society."

Volume 1 Number 31

"Be you faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." Revelation 2:10

THERE is no person who is not at times somewhat concerned as to how matters will be with them in a dying hour. What scenes will meet them when they leave a world they do know, for a world which they do not know. How solemn then is the question as to where we are now, seeing the uncertainty of life, and the certainty of death, and seeing the solemn words that hang over each. "He that is unjust let him be unjust still. He that is filthy let him be filthy still." If we therefore die apart from Jesus Christ unjustified, unwashed in his blood, just as we die the soul must sink under the weight of its own sins, and the curses of a violated law. But on the other hand, if brought to know the Lord, if made one with Jesus, then the sweet sentence will fall upon the soul in a dying hour, "He that is righteous let him be righteous still." Grace has made him righteous; death cannot make him unrighteous. "He that is holy, let him be holy still," washed in a Savior's blood, prepared for the inheritance of the saints in light; being thus made holy, death cannot make you unholy; death cannot make the righteous unrighteous; death cannot make the holy unholy; and we find that when the soul leaves the body it returns to God who gave it, to meet him on law or else on gospel grounds. "Be you, faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." But how can that man be faithful that is not brought into the faith? Can that man be faithful that is not in possession of that faith which is of the operation of God? Can a man be faithful in the way indicated all the time he is dead in trespasses and sins? He may be faithful as a man, and faithful to all he knows, but the word of God speaks in this way, that "The Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel of his Son." It shall be to take vengeance. The words of our text were spoken to the church at Smyrna, spoken to persons who were converted by the Holy Spirit; and therefore, while they had to be faithful, they had many afflictions, many troubles. The Lord therefore spoke these words unto them to encourage them. "Be you faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." I will try this evening to describe to you first, *what we have to be faithful to*: for if we be saved, we must be faithful. Secondly, I will show *the way in which this faith must be tried*: and then lastly, *we will notice what is indicated in the promise here given* the crown of eternal life; and then I shall at the close of my discourse come back again to the first part of my text.

First: First, WHAT WE HAVE TO BE FAITHFUL TO. This is presented to the church of Smyrna in a four-fold form. First, the beginning and the last end, "He was dead and is alive." The Lord Jesus Christ is in the first place the first. What will this mean, Jesus Christ being first? It will mean two things; it will mean that he will stand first in the salvation of your soul, and secondly, that he must stand first in your affections. These are the two ideas that are united by his being called the first. Now he must be first in the salvation of your soul. What a solemn fact it is, until the Lord is pleased to teach us, we know not the salvation that we stand in need of. Let us see then, how the need of him is learnt. In the first place take sin; when a sinner is convinced of what he is as a sinner, then comes the great question, how am I to get away from sin? And then in addition to that, what is to be done with these heart sins that I carry with me? for out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts. Now when this matter in connection with eternity is laid home to a sinner's conscience the question is how is he to get away from sin? Then the answer will be this, before you can get away from your sins, before you can get away from your condemnation, there must be an atonement, and when that atonement is brought in then it is that sin loses its damning power, so that his atonement goes before you. He has by that atonement finished transgression. Only look at it, before you can be free before God as a transgressor, and free from transgression, that atonement must come in, and before you can arrive at the end of sin, and before you can have peace with God there must be a substitute to go before you. Hence Christ is the forerunner, and has gone before us, and put an end to sin. Do you feel your need of this wonderful person, who has put an end to sin, and has made reconciliation for iniquity and brought in everlasting righteousness? This in one of the senses in which Jesus Christ is the beginning; and then again, we by nature are under the sentence of God's eternal law, we are under that law, we are in oneness with it. But then, that law is spoken of in a relative form, and while a person lives a woman is bound to the husband, it is a law from which we have apostatized. It is a law that holds the sinner in everlasting shame, in everlasting contempt; it throws the sinner in eternal contempt upon the dunghill of eternal infamy, and before you can come from under that law, the demands of justice must be settled. The Lord Jesus Christ, then, is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes. Oh, how gladly then, does a poor sinner come in the words that you have been singing,

"The best obedience of my hands."

But precious faith, precious hope in Jesus, precious hope in his righteousness; precious faith can answer his demands by pleading what my Lord has done, that will cover all that I have done, that will hide all that I have done, so that all my wrongs are blotted out, and his righteousness comes in, that I may come after it. The Lord says, "Hearken unto me, you that follow after righteousness; you that seek the Lord, look unto the rock where you are hewn, and to the hole of the pit where you are dug." "Blessed is he" (or they), "that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." This righteousness goes before you at the throne of God. By his righteousness, then we came out from under the law; the law being dead to us, and we being dead to that, we are brought into fellowship with God, we are brought by the work of Christ into fellowship with God, and he becomes the God of peace, the God of love, the God of kindness, the God of mercy, and we are brought to love him with all our hearts, and with all our souls, and with all our minds, and with all our strength, and to love the brethren as ourselves; for where there is this oneness with the Lord, there will be a love to the brethren. "Be you faithful unto death." Now, then, poor sinner, if Jesus is your beginning, I pray that you may never do as the Galatians did, still hold fast the great fact that Christ was the beginning of your prospect for a vast eternity; there is no right beginning

without him. Now, then, my hearer, if you have not known enough of your own sinner-ship for the Lord Jesus Christ to become the only way by which you can begin to hope, you have no right to conclude that you are a Christian; a Christian is to be made one with Christ. I am, no doubt, speaking to some who know this part of the truth that I am now speaking on, and feel that they cannot part with it. He is, therefore, the Alpha and the Omega; he is their beginning, and he will be their end. But there is another place in which he must stand first, and that is in your affections. He is the lily of the valley. In the same chapter we read "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house and his banner over me was love." Let me just name a few things here, and then ask the question whether Jesus stands foremost above them all. We prize our natural life, but we love the Lord Jesus Christ more than our mortal life. The apostle was right upon this when he said, "Yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung and dross, that I may win Christ and be found in him, not having on my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ the righteousness which is of God by faith." Again, for unless "he hates his own life he cannot be my disciple." Then if you look at your relatives around, you love them, it is right you should; there cannot be too much affection between relatives; and if there are different kinds of affection, the one does not at all interfere with the other which belongs to eternity; you will see that however much you love them, there is an object that stands nearer than them all. Nothing can stand so near as the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, again, if we look at silver and gold; for it is no use to deny it friends, we all have a love for these things. But when we compare them with the Lord Jesus Christ, then we can join with the truth declared, "I make a man more precious than gold" We can join with the poet, and say.

"Jewels to you are gaudy toys,
And gold is sordid dust."

He will therefore, stand before life; stand before all its subjects; let them be whatever they may, nothing can equal the Lord Jesus Christ. Must it not be a very pleasant thing, friends, a very pleasant thought, that while friends and kindred near and dear must die, and everything under the sun must depart, but here is a friend that will never depart, and whether you believe it or not, you can never be more happy than when you have no other object to enjoy, but Christ in God, and God in Christ. "Be you faithful unto death," stand by the Savior as the beginning of your hope, and pray to the Lord that Jesus may be enthroned in your best affections, and reign there, and when you examine yourself you may be able to come to the conclusion, "Lord, you know all things you know that I love you."

But, again, Jesus Christ is the last as well as the first. It is a good beginning as I have shown; but "all is well that ends well;" he is the last as well as the first. There is a twofold sense in which he is the last: the first is, that by him you are eternally perfected, "He has by his one offering perfected forever them that are sanctified." We need not go forward, we need not fear the losing of time, or rather of time passing away. We need not fear to go forward, Jesus Christ is there to meet us, and to present us perfect to the Father. Everything is waiting for us. Look at the prodigal, the ring was waiting for him; the shoes were waiting for him; the music and dancing were waiting for him; and shall I say the house was waiting for him? So that Jesus Christ is the ultimate perfection of his

people. You are complete in him. As in Solomon's song. "You are all fair, my love; there is no spot in you." And if I could discover one day towards the judgment day wherein Christ was not my perfection, though I had begun well, I should tremble to go forward, because I should not end well. But I can never come to a day, I can never come to a circumstance in life nor in death, wherein Jesus is not our justification; just hear the words, He shall present the church not only without wrinkle, but without spot, blemish, or any such thing. You know, friends, it is a common saying among men, I will forgive you, I will pass by it; but still I shall always blame you, that man is pardoned to a great extent, but he still says I shall always blame. Now God our Father will not blame us; Christ will not blame us; the Holy Ghost will not blame us; and to all eternity there is not a single soul who will be able to blame you. No. The glorious song shall rise to all eternity, "Unto him that has loved us and washed us from our sins in his blood, and has made us kings and priests to God, and his Father, be glory and dominion for ever and ever, amen." "Be you faithful unto death," in holding fast this blessed testimony, not only of Christ as the beginning, but also as the ending. But there is another sense, also in which the Lord Jesus Christ is the last; and that is in your eternal glorification; and if he be the last, there can be no successor; you will have no successor; no one will ever take you from your place. Now, among the Israelites in the land of Canaan, there was a succession of Israelites, a succession of kings; but not so here, those who are born of God have no successor; no, they are as the angels of God; neither can they die any more, being made the children of the resurrection. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever." That is, "He is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." He has obtained an eternal inheritance for us. He has obtained eternal redemption, and therefore, the redeemed of the "Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion and everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow, and mourning shall flee away."

Ah, then, let Jesus be my beginning, let Jesus be my ending, let him be the ultimate object you have in view. "Be you faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." Now, then, here are two more representations: the first is that of his death, the Lord Jesus Christ died. Remember that his death was a voluntary death, it was an atoning death; it was the act of an Incarnate God. The death of Christ was the work of his mysterious person; there was an omnipotence in his death; I wish to dwell for a few moments upon this. He did not die merely as an example; he died as a substitute in their room and stead; he died as a Surety of the covenant; and the Scriptures are clear upon this, "His own arm brought salvation." This Wonderful Person, in his death compassed your hell, and that which would have been hell to you to all eternity, he, by his omnipotence, compassed and accomplished, and agonized out in six hours. Consequently, his death, in its atoning power was deeper than hell, it was high as heaven, it is broader than the sea, and longer than the earth. It has, therefore, an eternal omnipotence in it. That man that thinks that some are in hell for whom Christ died, does not know what the death of Christ is; he does not know what the person of Christ is, he does not know what the Savior endured. No. "Feed the Church of God which he purchased with his own blood." Once give up Christ in the omnipotence of his death, and you reduce his death to something of a mere example of integrity of soul or faithfulness. But it was something infinitely beyond this; there was that bitter cup that we cannot understand; there were deep waters that we cannot understand, there was something to pierce his soul which made him exclaim, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" God so loved us that he sent his co-equal Son, to swallow up our everlasting hell, to swallow up the curse, to swallow up, as it were, your guilt according to his own prediction, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death" "Oh! death, I will be your plague; Oh! grave, I will be your destruction."

Now, I ask you, my hearers, what know you of the greatness of Christ in his death? I had almost said, there is no part in which the power of the Savior appears more conspicuous than in the wondrous death he died. He has by his death placed underneath you his everlasting arms; he has by his death made the Eternal God your refuge; he has by his death thrust out the enemy front before you, to come in no more forever. "Therefore, said the Lord, awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion, for the enemy shall no more come unto you, for the Lord has cast out your enemy; the wicked shall not pass through you anymore." Oh, what a wondrous theme, what depths, what wonders dwell in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, then, friends, do we understand it in some humble measure? let us understand that in the death of Christ there is omnipotence, there is eternal power; and being omnipotence in his death, we ask the question, How can any man be lost for whom Christ died? And if there are any here who say so, do not say so again until you find a Scripture to prove it. Well, say you, some are lost, it is an evident fact. You say, Christ has died for the whole human race, and some are lost. for whom he died. But friends, that is looking at it logically. The Bible shows that he died for the sheep, and their eternal safety is united with the wondrous death he died. I am persuaded that amidst all the profession in the day in which we live, this wondrous death of Christ is little understood. Let me tell you then, friends, that that fire which to fallen angels is unquenched Christ did quench, and that pit which is bottomless, Christ has forded; Christ has the keys of hell and of death. Hell is there compared to a conquered city; the city is conquered and the governor of the city comes and gives up the keys, and the devil was obliged to give up his own territories; and the devil, the king of the bottomless pit, was obliged to give up the keys; Christ has so conquered death, that death itself has been obliged to yield to his power. "I am he that was alive and was dead: I am he that lives and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death." Ah, my hearer, if you are favored to lay your soul at the Savior's feet; if you are favoured to lay hold of his wondrous death, then will you not be surprised at the confidence of the woman when she said, "If I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be healed." You will not be surprised at any of those confidences expressed in the Bible, "Be you, then, faithful unto death." **Make light of the death of Christ, trifle with it, look at it as a mere common death, look at it as something merely human, and you are not building on the rock. The Lord help you to dig deep into this matter, the eternal glories and wonders of his death. I make no hesitation in saying that it is the death of Christ that will light up eternity to eternity with glory.** Wherever the blood of Christ does not reach, there the sinner cannot come. Be you faithful unto the death of Christ; hold the testimony thereof fast by which you are eternally, infallibly saved; these are the things of being faithful. You talk of being faithful, are you in the faith? Is Jesus Christ your beginning? Is he your end? And is his death something wonderful to you? Can you see that there is something in sin that burns to the lowest hell, and that nothing but his wondrous person can swallow up death in victory, and give you an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? But there is another thing to be faithful to, and that is, that he is alive, and alive for evermore. The apostle gives us a beautiful idea upon this in the 5th of the Romans, "if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life." Do you understand, my hearers, that the Savior's life is to carry out all the characters of his death? If you look at the different characters or relations in which he died, you will see that the life he now lives is the carrying out of all these characters. Did he die as a Shepherd? His life as a Shepherd is to search out the sheep in the cloudy and dark day, wherever they have been scattered, to carry them on the shoulders of his power and bring them to himself: "Other sheep have I, which are not of

this fold, them also must I bring.” He does not ask men to bring them; he does not ask them to come themselves. No, no, no; and he does not ask men to exhort them to come, but he says “I must bring them.” He finds them out, and lays them on the shoulders of his power, and takes care of them! They shall find release nowhere else than by what the Good Shepherd has done. Again, did he die as a sacrifice? He lives to plead the cause of all for whom he died; he lives to bless those for whom he died, he lives to represent those for whom he died; and he represents his people under a three-fold form as the priest under the law was to be perfect, so was the Savior. Christ represents his people in heaven, first by what he himself is, he is the pattern and they are ordained to be conformed to his image. Secondly, he represents them in heaven by his blood, in order that they may have whatever that atonement can bring them to. Thirdly, there were twelve names on the priest’s breast-plate, but none of these were alike. So, it is now; you will never meet with two children of God alike in their experience: some are favoured with more communion than others; some with more light, and some with more of the enjoyment of gospel liberty than others. You be faithful, then, holding fast the great truth that Christ as the beginning, Christ as the ending, Christ in his death, Christ in his exaltation.

Second. But then this faithfulness, I now go on to show, is TO BE TRIED. Hence, the Lord says to the church at Smyrna, “Fear none of these things which you shall suffer; the devil shall cast some of you into prison and you shall have tribulation ten days. But be you faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life.” Now this is to try the faith; first, fear none of these things which you shall suffer, and the devil shall cast some of you into prison. In our happy land we are not, at least, I hope not, in any fear of being cast into prison for the truth’s sake; but if he cannot cast our bodies into prison there are other ways in which he does it. If we be one with Jesus Christ, he will cast us into prison. The Pharisee is never in bondage. The free-willer is always free. The duty-faith man is always free. Hence, they laugh at us poor things, these high Calvinists, when they get into bondage, and say they fear they cannot belong to the Lord, and so they laugh at us, and despise us, and I should like it uncommonly well if they could laugh me out of my troubles, but they cannot. But where is the secret? The enemy fights against none but those he has lost, and he will throw your soul into prison, O Christian; he will fetter you; he will come in like a flood on you in a variety of ways; he will go with you to the house of God. When the real sons of God meet together, Satan always appears among them and it was Satan’s design with poor Job to have him as his own, and that made the devil so enraged. So, the devil said, “If I could get him to give up the truth, and if I could get him to deny that truth which he loves, I should gain my end;” and the Lord suffered Satan to go on so far as to cast his soul into prison, that he cursed the day of his birth. His soul was in bondage, circumstantial bondage, and affliction; Job was still faithful; he stuck with the truth, “He is of one mind and none can turn him.” Now then, my hearer, if you are of the world you are a stranger to this. If you are a free-willier you are a stranger to all this. If you are a duty-faith man, you are a stranger to all this: And if you are without this chastisement, the word of God declares “Then are you bastards and not sons.” Now then, “Be you faithful unto death;” what do you say to these things, do your troubles make you rebel? and while they bring you down and while they discover to you your many wants, they will end in endearing the truth, to your soul more than ever. Job shall have twice as much as he had before, and so far from Job not living any longer, he will live a hundred and forty years. The devil shall through some of you into prison. I know he casts me into prison very often. I come to the house of God sometimes; he says, “Ah! it is no use for you to preach any more, there will be no good done.” And so, it is with you in providence, he will try and make you believe that the Lord will not appear for you. “But blessed is the man that abides

in the truth, for he shall receive the crown of life which, the Lord has promised to them that love him” But I must hasten over the other parts. He shall put your soul into prison, not into hell; no! no! he can’t do that. The devil may cast you into many troubles by his temptations, and by the evils of your nature. But he can’t cast you into hell, not if you are a lover of Christ in the way that I have stated; you shall have tribulation but not condemnation. The Lord’s people are apt to take tribulation for condemnation. All these things are given me, but it is only trouble. Notice the language, it is limited: “You shall have tribulation ten days;” but, my friends, the Lord is not limited; your sorrows and griefs are limited but your joys and glories are not limited. The one must end; the other must endure forever. “Be you faithful.” Now the question arises, how shall I be faithful? I will just name before I close, two or three evidences whether you possess that faith that will suffer. If that be the case now, it will more and more be the case as you go on, and you will arrive at the end safely. Secondly, do those troubles of which you are the subject, are they the means now, do they discover to you your vileness? do they show you the adaptation of the mercy of God by Christ Jesus? Thirdly, do these troubles make you prize more and more the immutability of the blessed God? Then you may trust that no man will take your crown. You shall never fall, but an abundant entrance shall be administered unto you into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; and then what shall we understand by this crown of life? Not only in contrast to death, but the crown of life is to denote the dignity of the life? Adam before the fall had a holy life; but that life was but a creature life; but the life of the saints of God is the life of God himself. Christ, he is their life, and Christ is God, and “when Christ who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear in glory with him.” “In the beginning the word was with God, and the word was God.” In him was life, and he is the life of the saint, who is born of an incorruptible seed that lives and abides forever, a life which can no more terminate than the life of the blessed God. “He is the strength of their heart and their portion forever.” Then it will imply as to the characteristics of this life, everything under this figure. The priest under the law was crowned with a holy headdress. “With holiness unto the Lord.” Again, “He crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies;” and therefore, it is a life of love. And again, it is a crown of life that fades not away. And again, it is a crown for righteousness, and therefore, it is a crown that fades not away; a glory that fades not away; I told you in the beginning that I should refer back again in conclusion to the first part of my discourse, namely what we are to be faithful to. What did the Savior do when he was on earth? Why, he went about doing good, for God was with him. When he saw us hungry, he gave us food, seeing us thirsty he has given us drink; seeing our souls naked, he has clothed us; seeing us strangers he has received us; and seeing us sick he has visited us; seeing us in prison he brings us out. I speak now of those who are brought to know their need of the Savior, and to receive his blessed truth. Well, then, if we are to be faithful unto death. The Lord give us grace to follow his example, that he may say to us, “I was hungry and you gave me meat; thirsty and you gave me drink; naked and you clothed me; I was a stranger and you have received me, I was sick and in prison and you visited me.” But the Lord forbid that we should set up these doings in the place of the Savior. If we are rightly taught, we shall do these things; but when done we shall say, “Not unto us, not unto us, but unto your name be all the glory,” and the language of the righteous shall be “Lord, when did we see you hungry and gave you meat, thirsty and give you drink, naked and clothed you; or sick and in prison and visited you.” Ah! “In as much as you did it unto the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me.” Come, then, (you have proved the reality of your religion by these acts of Christian and brotherly love,) Come then, “Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Be you faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.”