

GOOD NEWS FOR LITTLE ONES

A SERMON

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By Mister JAMES WELLS

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“Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” Matthew 18:14

FIRST, we have in these words, *distinction of character*; “Little ones;” secondly, *the will of God concerning them*; that “It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”

First: I scarcely need say that the *little ones* here spoken of will mean little ones spiritually; we are to understand, of course, persons who are born of God; called “Newborn babes;” and they are called “Little ones” because of that state into which, by converting grace, they are brought. Hence, the Savior says, “Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Now what then, are we to understand by being converted, and becoming as little children? Because, in the first place, all that are children of God, are children of God by adoption; that is the real origin of their sonship; and, therefore, if they are thus to be converted, they must be converted to that adoption, they must be converted to him who has adopted them in that order in which he has adopted them. This is a self-evident truth. If you take the matter as alluding to a man adopting a child, that child, in order to be happy, must have the spirit of adoption; it must have a heart, a spirit, a mind reconciled to the person who has adopted it, and to the order after which it is adopted, and to the end and purposes for which it is adopted. This, therefore, I think, will convey a clear idea of what is meant by becoming little children.

The first idea of a little child is that of dependence; and therefore, the Savior places here the dependence of a child upon its parents as a figure of that dependence upon him, into which conversion is sure to bring the soul. Now let us look at this matter; let us hear the Lord's own account of it in other parts of the word before we notice what is said in this selfsame chapter. Now, first, it will mean, then, dependence; dependence upon him as to whether they shall be his children or not. Hence, “He has predestinated us,” said the apostle, “unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself.” Here then, at the very onset, is the sovereignty of God. “He has predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself.” Now, when the Lord takes hold of a poor sinner, he convinces that sinner of two things, namely, what he is as a law-sinner, and what he is as an Adam fallen-sinner; and brings that sinner to feel that it lies entirely with the Lord as

to whether he is to be one of his children or not. Do we know enough of what we are as law sinners? to feel that we there stand condemned in our nature, going no further than that, from the first commandment to the last; and if we know something of ourselves as Adam fallen-sinners, that we inherit from Adam's fall, sin, and all that corruption by which "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" if we know and feel something of this, it will bring us down so low as to acknowledge that if we are among the people of God, God himself must have placed us there by gracious adoption. "He has predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself." Here you will say, How am I to know this? Well, the first evidence of it is feeling your need of it; whether you are brought to feel, that if your name be in the book of life, whether you are brought to feel that if you are one with Christ; whether you are brought to feel and see that if at the last great day you are found on the Savior's right hand, there will not be one particle of praise on that account, from first to last, due to you; but that the Lord was pleased to give you to his dear Son; and that nothing else could thus place you as one of his children, place you among his children; being brought to feel that by the law and by sin you are so completely cut off, that nothing but his predestinating favor could save you; mark the language, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the Beloved." Now this will make a man very little in his own eyes, when he is brought to feel indebted to the good pleasure of God in ordaining him to the adoption of a son; when he is brought to feel indebted to that mediatorial perfection which the apostle connects beautifully with this, "Wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved." Accepted in Christ! Why, if I am brought to feel my need of acceptance there, what is to hinder that acceptance? There is not anything to hinder. The Lord Jesus Christ is God eternal, God omnipotent; "the same yesterday, today, and forever;" and therefore, my sins, were they ten million times more than they are, internally and externally; if I am brought to feel my need of the greatness of that price that he has paid, brought to feel my need of the eternal virtue of his atonement, there is nothing to hinder my acceptance there. Why, the very purpose of his atonement, the very purpose of his work, was to swallow up sin; and surely there must have been great sins, and there must have been innumerable sins, there must have been sins of a crimson dye somewhere; there must have been something in sin, and in its demerits, that we are not much acquainted with, to need the death of an incarnate God, in order to atone for sin. Therefore, acceptance is in Christ Jesus, by his atonement and by his righteousness, without one work of ours whatever. My acceptance in Christ is just the same as that of the thief upon the cross; just the same as that of the infant that has done practically neither good nor evil.

These are the little ones, that are so humbled down, brought down so low as to acknowledge that if the Lord had not been pleased to give them to his dear Son, constitute them his children, there is not anything they can do that can help forward the matter.

Now in this same Person in whom they are adopted, namely, in Christ; and in this same Person in whom they are accepted, namely, in Christ, they have "redemption, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." So, it still goes on, dependence upon him. Unless you are converted to God in this order of eternal adoption; unless you are converted to God in this order of eternal acceptance, unless you are converted to God in this order of eternal redemption, in this order of entire forgiveness; for there is no more sacrifice for sin; and there is but one reason why there is no more sacrifice for sin; and all the wise men in the world can never find more than one reason why there is no more sacrifice for sin; there is but one reason, and that reason is that no

more is needed; "He has perfected forever all them that are sanctified;" unless you are converted to God in this order of things, you cannot be converted to God at all. Then, again, the apostle traces out this matter in that same chapter; "In whom," that is, Christ Jesus, "we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated thereto." If he had not predestinated us thereto; I say, if he had not predestinated us thereto, we could not have it, "Being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will." We can have this eternal inheritance only in the same way in which that inheritance has us; we can come into everlasting possession of that inheritance only in the same way in which that inheritance comes into possession of us; in a word, the Lord our God can become our all in all only in that way in which we become his all in all; for in that very same chapter, Ephesians 1, the church is said to be the fulness of him that "fills all in all;" it is his fulness, his delight, his possession forever. Therefore, "little ones," then, will mean those that are brought down to this poverty; so poor, so weak, so helpless, that they feel and find the whole matter lies with the Lord from first to last; dependence, entire dependence, that is the idea and nothing but this order of things to which I have referred can carry out that truth "Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of God."

Now, these are "little ones." They are great sinners in their own estimation; but they are brought down very low; all the time that you have a freewill of your own, and think that you can do something towards your own salvation, you are not a little one; you are a great one; and all the time you are talking that everlasting nonsense, about its being the duty of men generally, to believe savingly in Jesus Christ; all the time you have that lie in your right hand, all the time you have that evil in your eye, all the time you have that falsehood in your heart, you are not a little one; an experience of what we are will humble us. And hence, the Savior well knew that Satan hated such persons; those who are poor in spirit, those who feel their need of that infinite provision which the blessed God has made; and therefore, the Savior immediately said, that it was better that a millstone be hung about a man's neck, and he be drowned in the depths of the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. The word translated *offend* signifies *to scandalize, to reproach*. And so, it is; there never was an age in which the great truths of the gospel were not reproached. And hence, the sweetest morsel that our low Calvinist ministers can give to their congregations to feed upon; the sweetest word in all the sermons that they preach is the word *hyper*; if they throw out a few arrows against the *hypers*, you may see the people look up, if the congregation begin to be rather dull, and look rather heavy, just let him get up a few arrows, level them at the *hypers*, have something to say against the *hypers*, call them the dangerous *hypers*, the dreadful *hypers*, the horrible *hypers*: that will waken them up, make them very comfortable; and they say, Ah, there's a faithful, good man. Well; he is a faithful something else, only I will not say what just now. Now, therefore, the Savior says, "Better that a millstone should be hung about a man's neck, and he should be drowned in the depths of the sea, than that he should scandalize one of these little ones." Why so? Why, because in scandalizing that man, in persecuting that man, in reproaching that man, simply because that man is such a poor creature that he has no hope, but in that order of things in which Christ died, in that order of things in which God appears in a covenant, ordered in all things and sure; to reproach him on that ground is to reproach the Holy Spirit, who has made the man what he is; it is to reproach Jesus, who has constituted the man what he is before God; it is to reproach God the Father in that which is nearest to him, and dearest to his heart, namely, that covenant that is ordered in; all things and sure; therefore, better not live to see the day; better that, what is called accidental death should overtake you, than that you should die in a state of enmity against these little ones; that is, against them in that order of things by which they are saved. But

on the other hand, to receive such a one, I know not anything pertaining to brotherly love that has been a stronger hold to my soul than that in a way of evidence; "He that receives one of these little ones in my name, receives me." When I hear a poor sinner testify how he was convinced of his state; how he underwent doubts and fears; how he ran about from place to place, but could find no minister that could open up the path in which he was seeking in the words of Job, if there be an interpreter, one among a thousand, a man that knows what he is, and feels what he is; by and bye he testifies the way in which the Lord brought home some word with power, opened up to him the order of the everlasting covenant; why all the unbelief of my nature, all the infidelities of my heart, and all the rebellions of my heart, and all the troubles of the way, and all the impenetrably thick darkness under which I sometimes walk, together with all the power of Satan; cannot persuade me that I do not in my heart, in my soul, in my real and best affection, receive such persons. I have heard their testimony, I have felt it go right through my soul, it has diffused through every power of my soul the fragrance of the Savior's name; and when I have heard their testimony, perhaps they have not said a hundred words, perhaps not fifty, it has revived some of my old joys, some of my old seasons; and I have felt a oneness of soul with them and I have thought to myself, could this be, if I were not born of God? Could I go along with that man in all he has said if it were not so? There was nothing he said about soul trouble, but I felt I had been there; nothing he said about the tormenting power of error, but I felt I had been there; nothing he said about the suitability of truth, but I felt I had been there; nothing he said about the word being brought home with power, and Christ made precious to his soul, and his heart melted down in love to God, like the woman at the Savior's feet, but I have been there. Oh, there is so much difference, between real heart work, and mere natural conscience work; the one is the unclean spirit going out, and he can come back again when he pleases; the other is the Holy Ghost entering in, and planting conviction there, and carrying on that conviction; planting God's truth there, and nourishing it there; planting reigning grace there, and reconciling the soul to God in the perfection that is in Christ Jesus; and such are made to feel, and see, and know, that there is hope nowhere else. I have made these remarks for the sake of some of you that may be doubting, and fearing, and saying, Ah, I am not one. Well, come then, if you are not one yourself, can you receive one? Oh, yes, say you, I can receive such; I love such; I feel union to such. Well, but you could not do that, if you were not born of God yourself, "He that receives such in my name." Well, say you, I could not receive him in any other name? I could not receive him in a duty-faith name, nor in a free-will name but if he come in this name, not in the mere letter of it, but in the vitality of it, then I can receive him. Now, the Savior says, "He that receives one such little one receives me," and in another place, he says, "He that receives me, receives him that sent me." Here then are the Father, and the Son, and the little one, all placed together; could not be better placed.

"It is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should perish;" these little ones, converted to him in that order by which alone they can be saved; and then brought into brotherly love, to receive the little ones. "Take heed, then," the Savior says, "that you despise not one of these little ones; for their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven," I think we want no explanation of that, beyond what is given to us in Hebrews 1, where the apostle says of the angels, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" And therefore, the meaning simply is, that the Lord employs angels on their behalf. "Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones;" for in so doing, you set yourselves not only in opposition to God, but to the very angels of heaven; for the angels rejoice at the repentance of these little ones, in their conversion, humiliation, reconciliation, obedience, and

prospects; “their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” The mode of their ministrations is nowhere explained; and therefore, where the Scriptures are silent, we must be silent too; we shall have plenty to say if we dwell largely upon those things the Scriptures dwell largely upon; and it is better for us to be dwelling upon facts, revealed facts, than wasting time in mere conjecture.

These little ones, then, are persons that are converted to God’s way of saving the soul; they receive one another. They are the outcasts of the world, the world hates them; and they are made conscious that without that grace of which I have spoken, they are lost. Hence the Savior says, “The Son of Man came to save that which was lost.” Here is another characteristic of the little ones. It therefore, means a person who is conscious that as a sinner he is lost, he cannot help himself any more than the infant, as Ezekiel expresses it, cast out into the open field. I stand here before you, this morning, my hearers, as a dying man; and I feel conscious that if almighty grace had not recorded my name in the book of life, that if there be not perfection in Christ, that if my soul be not united to the blessed God after the order of the new covenant, I feel conscious that I can no more be saved than Satan himself can be saved. On the other hand, if the Lord has thus had mercy upon a poor sinner like me, then I can be no more lost than Christ can be lost, for I am one with Jesus by eternal union with him. We are learning all our days. When I was first concerned about eternal things, I felt I was a lost sinner; but I did not see it so clearly, nor in some respects feel it so deeply as I now do. Oh, my hearers, what but grace could have kept us unto this day? Look at the Christian after the flesh; what is he? Just what he was while in a state of nature. Read in the Bible the characters that shall be shut out of heaven; and then look into your own heart, and you will find you are the very man. You know the Scripture I refer to, “Without are dogs, and sorcerers,” just what we all are after the flesh; just what we all are by nature: look at the Christian there, he is lost, no hope. But take another view; look at what the Savior has done; look at faith in him, look at reconciliation through him, look at his blood being the covering, look at his righteousness being the way of justification; look at the order of his mercy; here you lose sight of all that you are after the flesh, and look at what you are after the spirit; and thus, while the flesh is everything that is wrong, the spirit is right. And that is the way you can get at the Christian; you can get at him nowhere else; it is no use to look for him where he is not; you may look for him in the old man, but you cannot find him there. People do dress up the old man and call him a Christian; but it is but old Jezebel painted still, nothing else; it is but a dead image still, dead to everything that is spiritual. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”

Again, these little ones are thus humbled down, conscious of their lost condition, but there is another characteristic of them very peculiar. “What think you,” said the Savior, “if a man has an hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety and nine, and seek that which has gone astray?” Well, literally, a man is not always sure he will find the sheep he is seeking; and therefore, the Savior puts an uncertainty there. But there is no uncertainty as to Christ finding his sheep, “When he finds it, he lays it on his shoulders; and he rejoices more over that sheep, than over the ninety and nine that went not astray.” Now do you understand me? Who do the ninety and nine represent? Not the people of God; certainly not, because that would make it out that they did not go astray. Who were they? Now the question is, are the ungodly ever called sheep? Yes; under two circumstances, I will mention; they are called sheep delusively, and they are called sheep in relation to their subjection to the judgments of God. First, they are called sheep delusively, “Like sheep they are laid in the grave.” How many are buried as Christians that lived

and died ignorant of, and in enmity against, the truth. There the ungodly are called sheep delusively. Then they are called sheep as objects of slaughter, "Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter." So, I understand the ninety and nine sheep here (for it is a parable, and we must try and get the meaning of it;) to mean people at large, the ungodly; and that God does them good. God has a joy in the dispersion and distribution of his providential favors. God rejoices to make the sun arise; God makes the outgoings of the morning and the evening to rejoice in behalf of the world at large as his creatures; and even amid the very nations that he suffered to walk in their own way, and winked at their ignorance, he nevertheless rejoiced to keep up some testimonies of his supremacy by giving them fruitful seasons, and filling their hearts with food and gladness; so that the Lord will rejoice in all his works; his works glorify him. That I understand by the ninety and nine. But then there is one that goes astray, and there is more rejoicing over this one that went astray than over all the others. But then have not the others gone astray, say you, as well as this one; and therefore, where is the consistency of your idea? The others have not gone astray in *their own estimation* to the extent that this one has, this little one; he is convinced he has gone astray so far that nothing but an atonement of infinite extent could reach him; so far that nothing but the long and strong arm of Omnipotence could reach him; that he has gone astray so far that nothing but the blood of Christ could bring him near; that is what I understand by his going astray; he is made conscious of it. Hence, the elder brother illustrates the point, "Why, this prodigal, what a sinner he is; I have not transgressed your commandment, and yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." But this prodigal, this hyper, that's the best way to put it, he was a hyper, this prodigal, "this prodigal, as soon as he has come, you have killed for him the fatted calf." Ay, because he came hungry and thirsty, and weary, and needy, and sick, both of the swine and their husks; and therefore, glad of all the provision of his father's house. Now then there is more rejoicing over the salvation of one sinner that repents, God has more pleasure in that, than he has in his universal providences all put together.

Second: I notice now, THE WILL OF GOD. "It is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should perish." Our text gives the will of the Lord in its negative form; I shall therefore make here a few remarks upon the will of God in the preventive form to which he here alludes, "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." What has he done to prevent it? First, he gave them to his dear Son. Was not that a good preventive? How did he give them to Christ? By choosing them, and we are told that was done before the world was that is a good preventive. Therefore, the first step in the way of prevention was to put them out of the way of being destroyed, by putting them into Christ, giving them to Christ, choosing them in Christ, adopting them in Christ, making him a surety for them, making him responsible for their souls, and bodies, and sins, and circumstances. Well, that is a good preventive. The Lord help us to thank him for it and bless him for it.

And, secondly, as the Father took that preventive step, the Savior took another step; and what was that? Why, in order that that they might not perish, he bore their sins in his own body on the tree. Isaiah, in his 53rd chapter, and last verse, gives us a four-fold view of the Savior in this matter; and there are four different prepositions used, our language is very ductile in that respect; there are four different prepositions used in one verse, to set before us the four-fold position in which the Savior is there presented, "He poured out his soul unto death;" that is one step; "he was numbered with the transgressors;" so that if they perish, he will perish with them; "he bare the sin of many;" not they bare, but he bare; "and he made intercession for transgressors;" so, when his death shall

be unavailable, when his oneness with them can be dissolved; and when it can be proved that he was not able to bear their sins eternally away, and when it can be proved that he does not intercede for transgressors, that he does not plead for poor sinners; then we may perish, but not before. We are speaking now of preventives. Then the Holy Spirit comes in with another very excellent preventive. The apostle Peter was in the secret; depend upon it, he rejoiced too as he recorded the words; as though when he was recording them, he was saying to himself, I do not know where I should be if it were not for this preventive. Well, what is it? Why, "We are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever." That is another preventive.

And then, another preventative is that the blessed God has entered into an immutable oath never to leave them nor forsake them. So "it is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should perish." Before I make a few remarks, which I must before closing, upon the *positive* character of God's will, let me just remind you of the *distributive* form in which the will of God here appears, "It is not the will of your Father that one;" one is to the Lord as though that one were all, as though there were not another; and yet they are all of them as completely one in Christ as though all of them put together made no more than one. That is the position. Who has not been pleased with that Scripture? Who has not been delighted with it? Who has not blessed God for it? Where can you hardly ever visit a sick room without being reminded of it, that "not a sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father;" "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and yet not one of them is forgotten before God." So not one of these little ones, however corrupt it may be, and however error-smitten it may be, and however lame it may be, and however wayward it may be, and however dark complexioned it may be, and whatever other people may say of it, or whatever may overtake it, or whatever it may overtake, there stands the matter; "It is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should perish." The more we are acquainted with God's truth, the more we shall rejoice therein.

But now let me look at the will of God in the *positive* form; it stands thus, "This is the will (there is the positive) of him that sent me, that of all that he has given me I should lose nothing but should raise it up at the last day." And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one that sees the Son," the order of relationship again that is in our text; "it is not the will of your Father;" it is a paternal matter, you see a relationship matter, "that every one that sees the Son and believes in him shall have everlasting life." I will raise him up at the last day. "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his bands."

Now let me, in conclusion, remind you of the difference between God's will *conditionally*, and God's will *absolutely*. God's will in the garden of Eden was conditional; his will of command was that Adam was not to eat of the fruit; his will of decree was that if Adam did not eat, he should not die, and if he did eat he should die. Here the will of God is conditional. Again, when the Lord brought the Jews into Canaan his will was conditional, not absolute. "Love the Lord your God, reject all other gods;" but the Lord did not undertake to make them reject all other gods, he commanded them to do so, and to keep to him alone; but he did not undertake to make them do so; yet he would prefer their doing so, rejecting other gods, and walking with him. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? said the Lord God," Ezekiel 18; "and not that he should return from his ways and live?" Here the will of God is conditional. Walk in the order of that covenant, and you shall have its temporal advantages; go over to other gods, and you shall be

subjected to death. Thus, then, in the Edenic and the Mosaic dispensations, if I may call the former a dispensation, the will of God was not absolute, but conditional. But here in the matter of eternal salvation, the will of God is just as absolute as it was in creation. The Lord said, "Let there be light;" was the will of God conditional there? No; but absolute; it was God's imperative mood; there shall be light, "and there was light." Just after the same absolute order he commanded the light to shine; not exhorted it, not invited it; and "he who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has," after the same absolute, positive order of certainty, "shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." And did the firmament say, I won't come? No. And did the Lord say, "Let the waters be gathered together into one place," and was there a congregation of waters somewhere that agreed not to come? And did the Lord command the two great lights to shine, the one to rule the day, and the other to rule the night; and did the materials of which the sun and moon were composed say, We won't come? And did the Lord say, Let the sea and the air bring forth abundance of fish and fowl, and did the fish and the fowl say, We won't come? And did the Lord say, "Let us make man;" and did the dust say, I won't be made man? I won't have it? And the Lord by and bye have to apologize that he wanted to create a world, and could not do it? Oh, what a representation! Yet this is the way in which your duty-faith parsons represent an almighty Savior; that he tries to bring light into a sinner's heart, and cannot do it; that he tries to establish a Gospel firmament, that he might rain down showers of blessings, and cannot do it; that he tried to gather all sins together, and all God's wrath together, and roll the whole away, and could not do it; that he tried to be the Sun of Righteousness, and could not be; that he tried to give a shining moon, the Gospel, and could not do it; that he tried to form them into men, and could not do it.

So then, the will of God as manifested in the first creation, is a type of his omnipotent will in the eternal salvation of his people; and as everything followed with certainty and accuracy upon his immediate command, so it is now; when he says to the soul, live, it does live; when he says to all that holds the soul in bondage, let him go, it is so; and when he shall descend at the last great day, and all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and come forth, God will be absolute there; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the unnumbered millions of the redeemed shall appear at his right hand, and thus shall be carried out both the negative and the positive of God's will; that it is not his will they should perish, but it is his will they should be saved, possess the kingdom, and enjoy his presence for ever and ever. Amen.