

# HOW SOULS ARE BROUGHT TO CHRIST AND CARRIED TO HEAVEN

## A SERMON

Preached on Lord's Day Morning October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1859

By Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD

Volume 1 Number 50

“The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.” 2 Kings 2:12

THIS is a character given to several kinds and orders of agents which the Lord is pleased to employ in the ministration both of judgment and of mercy. Hence, the angels at Sinai, by which he ministered the law, are called “chariots;” “the chariots of God are twenty thousand; even thousands of angels; the Lord is among them, as in Sinai.” The ministers of the Word are called also chariots, as in our text; Elijah in his official character as a prophet of God, is called “the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.” And in noticing the subject spiritually, I shall explain it, as usual by different hints and suggestions which are given in the Word of God, upon the meaning of the language here employed; and in so doing, my first idea shall be that of *ingathering*; and the second, shall be that of *the glorious way in which the soul shall at last be taken to heaven*.

First. The first thing that I notice then, is the INGATHERING. We have in the chapter we were reading just now, a very beautiful description of the ingathering of souls to Christ; and perhaps we may just run through what is there said, and compare our own souls experience and state with what is there described; whether or not the chariot of Israel has reached us, for it is the chariot of Israel to gather in God's Israel, and at last to take them to that world in which they are forever to dwell.

Elijah then, setting forth as he did, the great truths of the everlasting gospel, especially in some of the circumstances I shall presently notice; he, in this official capacity as instrumentally in gathering men to God, is called “the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.” And it is said of those who are thus ingathered, that they shall worship the Lord in the mountain of Jerusalem, that is where freedom is; for “Jerusalem which is above is free.” You never can worship the Lord, or admire the Lord, or have fellowship with the Lord, or be happy with the Lord, all the time you have an idea that he has something against you. But in Christ Jesus we can worship him in perfect freedom. It is a wonderful help to us, when we are enabled to remember that the Lord looks upon us by what he has done let me explain what I mean. First, he has loved us; and he looks upon us not by what we are as sinners, but by the love wherewith he has loved us. Always in his looking upon us he connects with it the love wherewith he has loved us; his love and our souls are made by him inseparable; he unites the two. I have loved them; and therefore, I view them as the objects of my love; my heart, my affection, is set upon them; my soul is set upon them; my mind is set upon

them; it does not matter what they are; my mind is set upon them, and that is enough. He never will look upon them in any way contrary to this of his love. And then he also looks upon them as objects of his choice; he has chosen them, and having done this, he looks upon them as the objects of his choice, never looks upon them apart from this; does not look upon them in what they are in themselves, but simply as objects of his choice. He looks upon the Lamb's book; there he sees their names, and that is enough; chosen in Christ Jesus, and all their sins imputed to him; he looks upon them by the righteousness of his dear Son, with which he is well pleased; and he looks upon them, I need not say, by the atonement which Christ has made; and he looks upon them by the promises of his Word; he has in his dear Son given yea and amen promises; and having given those promises, he looks upon them as objects of his promises; and there is not anything they can need which is not contained in his promises for them. And he looks upon them also in another respect; and that is by the worth and worthiness of his dear Son. Jesus Christ is our representative; that is a truth I cannot perhaps too often name to you, that whatever Jesus Christ is, so are we; and God must find a fault in his dear Son before he can find one in us. Again, he looks upon his people by what he has for them; he connects them inseparably with the eternal inheritance and glory he has for them. Now Elijah, then, preaching this gospel, is called "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." It is said of these people that they shall go up to worship the Lord "from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another." From one new moon to another will mean from one supply to another. We get a key to this matter in the 33rd of Deuteronomy; "precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and precious things put forth by the moon." And you will recollect that Solomon's officers had to send in provision once a month. The new moon, therefore, becomes by a figure the indication of monthly supply. To worship the Lord, therefore, from one new moon to another, means to worship the Lord from one supply to another. We sometimes get very hungry, very thirsty, and very weak, our faith weak, our love weak, our desires weak; and we think we must give up our religion altogether. But by and by the Lord has a sentence for us somewhere in his book, or in a hymn, or in a sermon, somewhere or other; supplies us again, feeds us again, refreshes our souls again; and we go on again. And then from one Sabbath to another will mean from one rest to another. You accumulate burdens, and you feel the weight of this, feel the weight of that, feel the weight of the other; a great many burdens accumulate; and you wish to leave them with the Lord, but you cannot do so. But presently the Lord comes and takes all the burdens to himself; gives rest to your souls; and you wonder how it is you cannot do always as you are doing now, namely, leave the matter with the Lord, and feel that he will take care of you; and that if you have a heart to honor him, he will honor you; if you are enabled to trust him, and to commit your way to him, your thoughts shall be established, and he will bring forth your righteousness, namely, that righteousness which he has for you, as the light, and will lighten up your path, and your judgment as the noon day, acquitting you by that righteousness from all you are. But presently we get our burdens back again; or if we do not get the same back, we get others; we become burdened again, weary again, fearful again; and what a mercy for us that the Lord is not at all out of patience with us in all our weakness, and feebleness, and helplessness. But no, he rather takes occasion hereby to manifest the truth of that Scripture we noticed on Wednesday evening, "My grace is sufficient for you."

When the Lord was about to manifest himself, and to bring the Israelites into their right minds, he first put a negative upon false gods. You see what a state they were got into in the days of Elijah; they had placed Baal on a level with the blessed God; and others were halting between two opinions, whether Baal and God ought to be worshipped together, or whether Baal was the only

god, and there was no other. Now in order to bring the people into their right minds, the first thing was to put a negative upon the false gods; and how was that negative put upon the false gods? Why, by showing the impossibility of those gods supplying the need of the people; and so, Elijah prayed that there might be no rain nor dew for three years and six months; and this drought made the people sensible of the helplessness of their gods, and prepared them for that test to which, as we shall see a little after, they were put. And it is just the same now spiritually; when the Lord is about to bring a poor sinner to himself, he brings him spiritually into a famine; he brings him to feel that his own holiness, and righteousness, and works are all a thing of nothing; he feels he can do nothing; he cannot make the heavens give rain, he cannot bring supply, the supply of his wants; and thus to prove the uselessness of everything short of the Lord himself. Here then was the famine; and if we have not come by our religion in this way, there is something essentially deficient in it. Religion is a personal matter; there is life in the soul; soul it is God that gave it; nothing else will do. And if you ask what kind of life it is, the answer is this, that they are born of an incorruptible seed, that lives and abides forever; then if the soul be thus born, that man so born of God is concerned about his state; he sees and feels that he is a poor lost sinner, and he is soon led to see that the Lord has mercy upon whom he will have mercy. How many things such an one will try to buoy up his hope, to bear up his hope, and encourage him to hope; but everything fails. He may say prayers, he may do duties, he may distribute tracts, he may become a zealous teacher in a Sunday School, and I do not know what he may not do; he is determined now to do something for God, to do something that shall help forward, as he imagines, the kingdom of God; but this conviction of his state still remains; he says, well, after all, where am I? Here I am with a hard heart, a benighted soul; for aught I know under God's law, and under the curse. What a poor creature I am; why, I have been laboring, and striving, and toiling, and doing all this work; people tell me if I will be very diligent in distributing tracts, or in teaching, or in something else, in going round to people's houses, and reading the Bible; if I will do these things, all my doubts and fears, and troubles will depart; God will love me, and I shall be a Christian. Mind, I am not saying anything against these things; I am merely stating the fact; he tries these things, and he says, well, I do not know how it is; but my heart is still hard, my mind is still gloomy, my soul is still in fear; I know nothing of the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ in my conscience; I know not whether my name is in the book of life or not; whether I am saved or lost; I am as fearful as ever. He is restless. What does this famine in his soul do? Puts a negative upon the prescriptions and inventions of men, the doctrines and the doings of men. The man is not yet right in his understanding; but he is born of God; he has in him a living and incorruptible seed; and he wants something that will accord with that life that is in him; and when he sees that Jesus Christ is the bread of eternal life, and that he can come and feed upon that bread only by the power of the Holy Ghost; when he knows this he will say, Give me that bread, for there is none like it; when he sees that the promises of God in Christ Jesus are yea and amen; and when he sees that there is an everlasting covenant, and that all the items of that covenant are items of mercy, and that these mercies are sure and eternal mercies, then he begins to see what he must live upon, what he wants, and what will suit him; hereby then he comes personally, vitally, and experimentally, to a sight and sense of his need of the free-grace gospel of the blessed God; and being thus brought to know his need of it, he can live upon nothing else; he will do spiritually what the prodigal did literally, when a mighty famine arose in the land: and he said, "I perish with hunger;" and he could no longer stay where he was, but sought his father's house. And so, if you have thus come to the truth vitally and really nothing else will do. We see then that this famine prepared the people for the test. It is quite possible that if Elijah had made his proposition three years before, it would have

been despised. He said, bring your sacrifice, and call upon Baal, and let us see what Baal can do. Let us see first if he can send fire, and thereby testify his acceptance of the sacrifice; and then if he can do that, let us see if he can send some rain, and thereby show his power to bless; let us see this. I say, if Elijah had made this proposition three years and six months before, the people would have despised it, because there was no famine to drive them to it, there was no necessity, there was no distress. Just so it is now: there are plenty of people now-a-day pressed, pushed, drawn, exhorted, wooed, persuaded into a profession of religion; and they go out as fast as they come in. I should like to have a journal, if such a thing could be done, to take down every day the numbers that are giving up their profession, especially in some parts of England, and some parts of London, and especially among the Revivals; they go out just about as fast as they come in because they have come in not by the power of God, but merely by human suasion; "for if they had been of us," as one said, "they would have continued with us." Now, if Elijah had made this proposition three years and six months before, it would have been despised. So, it is now. Jesus Christ has no comeliness in the eyes of a sinner until a famine arises in the soul; but let the sinner be brought into this spiritual necessity, then he says, Ah, I am willing to listen to anything, for I cannot be worse off than I am; I am just out of hell, and that is all, and perhaps I shall not be out long; if there be anything that will put the matter to the test, and show me a way by which I may escape, then I am willing to be put to the test. And we see that Elijah put them to the test, that as the false gods could not curse, so neither could they bless. How wonderful was the power that Elijah had with God! "Now, Lord, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word." And I make no hesitation in saying, that there is not in all the Old Testament a sweeter type of the sacrificial excellency of the Lord Jesus Christ than the circumstance of Elijah's sacrifice. I have often said, and I run over the ideas with pleasure again, I do believe that the things that were connected with the sacrifice had a spiritual and an ultimate meaning, as well as the sacrifice itself. Hence, fire came from heaven, and consumed the sacrifice, and the stones. And on what ground does the Lord take away the stony heart? Because your stony heart was consumed in Christ. And the wood. And what is the wood but a figure of our sins, our burdens that we have accumulated; and which sins must have been the fuel by which the fire of God's wrath would prey upon our souls to eternity? But the fire consumed the wood. Your sins were consumed when Christ died. And the water. "And we have all drunk iniquity," error that refers to especially, "as the ox drinks in water." Some have drunk in Popery, some Church of Englandism, some free-will, some duty-faith; someone sort of iniquity, some another; but the water also was consumed; and so, all those errors that have deluded you, were on your behalf consumed when Christ died. And also consumed the dust. Is not the dust expressive of death? Hence, we read of one who said, "You has brought me to the dust of death." And so, Jesus Christ in his death, destroyed the power of death over his people. Thus, then, Elijah was called "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof," because he had such power with God, thus to stand out for the honor of God, and for the good of the people; and they might well say, "The Lord he is God! The Lord he is God!" So, my hearer, you will never be right with yourself, and you will never be right with God, you will never be right with time, with death, with eternity, until you are brought to acknowledge and to receive, and more or less to realize the excellency of that great, that glorious, that sacrificial work which the dear Savior has wrought. That is where I want to live every day, by this wondrous work; let me have that glorious gospel that brings before me every day the sacrifice of Christ; here I can live, and here I can die. I have that hard heart, my heart cares for nothing, feels nothing, has no real, living sympathy with anything that is contrary to the glorious perfection of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; that has melted my heart. Oh, when I look at what a poor creature

I am, hard-hearted, ungrateful, fearful, murmuring, rebelling, talk of being worthy of the least of God's mercies, I cannot point out a single temporal comfort I have, not one, that I can see I am in any shape or form worthy of; and yet in the face of it all, God's love by his dear Son rises above it all, drowns it all, carries it all away; and so far from those things, whose natural tendency must be to make us loathsome in the sight of God, so far from their having that effect; why, by what his dear Son has done, he takes, occasion thereby to soften our hearts. What will soften the heart more, when the man has been rebelling, when he has been almost like an incarnate devil, I was going to say; when the man feels that so far from being a Christian, he seems more like a fiend in his own heart than anything else; and then this produces its consequence: it makes him very miserable; presently in comes the Lord, and speaks to him so kindly, so sympathetically, and so endears the Savior to him, that his soul is enabled to rejoice exceedingly. Here then is the ingathering, and here is the defense, "The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof because the Lord is pleased to use it, or the ministry of the word, as the means of gathering in sinners to himself, and then sacrificially defending them.

I now then, in conclusion, notice the last idea; the reason why Elijah was called "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof," as a representative of that gospel by which we are defended; and the last idea is his ascension to heaven. I wish I could for a few moments, this morning, in way of conclusion, speak of his ascension to heaven; for it is intended, no doubt, as a representation of the way in which the believer's soul goes to heaven. I wish I could so speak of it for a few moments as to make you see death in a light you never saw it in before; to make you see the departure of the soul from this world to the other in a way you never saw it before. Now, first, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire; which I do not myself take literally; I myself am inclined to think that the chariot of fire, and horses of fire, were nothing more or less than the angels, only they had that appearance. Hence, the Holy Spirit appeared in form, or shape, bodily as a dove; and the Lord can send angels to appear in any form or shape he may deem proper. The chariot then came down to take Elijah to heaven; and just so, when the believer dies, there is no superstition in the idea, nothing at all fanciful, there never was a Christian died yet without his dying-room being full of angels; no, never; it is not superstition; not at all; there is a sample given; Lazarus was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom. Ah, there is the dying Christian, and there are angels, delighting to see the soul so near to the end of all its troubles and all its griefs; delighting to see the soul in its blood-washed robe of pure white; delighting to see the soul accepted in Christ's righteousness; delighting to see the soul prepared to crown the blest Redeemer Lord of all; delighting to see that the soul is not going to an unknown God, not going to an unknown Christ, not going in one sense to an unknown world; it has already had messages from that world; and messages from that God, and has had many moments of precious fellowship with that God. Here then at a believer's departure where must Satan be? At a distance. One angel has more strength than millions of devils; for sin is the weakness of man, and sin is the weakness of fallen angels; unfallen angels are said to excel in strength; so that even by the presence of one angel the Roman soldiers shall become as dead men. An angel appears; there he stands in majesty, and with his little finger rolls back the stone from the mouth of the sepulcher; why that stone was a mere piece of chaff to the mighty angel. These angels are mighty angels; we know not their strength; but if they joy over the soul when it begins to live, and rejoice in the repentance of a sinner, how much more at that glorious hour when another is added to the redeemed company on high, to help swell that eternal song that shall roll on forever. And there is no doubt that Elijah underwent in the twinkling of an eye just the same change that the people of God shall undergo at the last great day; for flesh and blood

cannot inherit the kingdom of God; corruption cannot inherit incorruption; and therefore, there is no doubt that he was changed in a moment from mortal to immortal, from corrupt to incorrupt, from the earthly to the heavenly, from the natural to the spiritual, from the weak to the mighty. Oh, what a glorious scene is the death of a believer! here are angels, like the chariot of salvation, waiting to receive the soul; "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." I like that exceedingly much; Abraham was a thorough free-grace man; and therefore, to be carried into Abraham's bosom means to be carried into heaven in that order of things in which Abraham was called, redeemed, saved, and reached eternal glory.

There is one more idea in Elijah's departure; and that is this, which to me is very beautiful. We fear death, because we look at it apart from Christ, apart from the Lord's love to us, apart from what he has done. There is one more idea; we cannot say this matter is a matter of indifference, for we shall all have to die. It does not do us any harm to understand the matter before we come to it. Elijah, it is said, went up by a whirlwind; the wind formed itself into a body as it were, took him up in its soft arms; only imagine how soft the wind is; it took him up so gently, why it would not hurt an infant, the whirlwind came, and took him up and put him into the chariot as comfortably as possible. Just so, my hearer, will it be with you; the Holy Spirit of God, when you were first made to live, came in the universality of his power; "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breath upon these slain, that they live;" so when your soul is departing, that Holy Spirit in all its softness, tenderness, kindness, will take you up upon his soft bosom, with his kind hands; lift your soul into the chariot of salvation; the Holy Spirit in that hour will be very busy with you, his work will not be done until the resurrection day, when he sees that you are, body and soul, in the likeness of the blest Redeemer, in that eternal home provided for you. A chariot of fire and horses of fire to denote the brightness of this chariot, the brightness of God's presence, and the brightness of that world into which Elijah was about to enter. The noon-day oriental sun, bright and burning as it is, could not take away the brightness of this chariot and these horses; the light from heaven that appeared to the apostle was "a light above the brightness of the sun." The believer's life is glorious, his salvation is glorious, his death is glorious. Ah, the apostle well understood this matter; he therefore, pressed forward toward this very scene, when that chariot of salvation that had brought him to God, that sacrifice that had defended him should by and by fetch him up to that eternal world where sin and sorrow shall he no more.

Now then, my hearers, if we are thus gathered into the Lord, if we are thus put to the test of sacrificial excellency, and side therewith; then if this God be our God we may well say with David, "whom shall we fear?" If the Lord keep us so near to himself, then we shall not be afraid to live, nor afraid to die; we shall not be afraid of a little trouble, nor a few losses, nor afraid to serve him, nor afraid to stand out for him; we shall be stripped of all childish fear and be made as bold as lions in all that is holy, just, and good. Amen and Amen.